

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING AT A  
SPECIAL SCHOOL: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE-APPROACH**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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January 2019

BLOEMFONTEIN


SOUTH AFRICA

## Declaration

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I, Tracey Herman, declare that this work, submitted in fulfilment of the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, is my own and that sources used have been indicated and acknowledged. I further declare that the work has not previously been submitted to the University of the Free State or to any other university/faculty for the purpose of obtaining a degree.

I hereby cede copyright of this study to the University of the Free State.



Tracey Herman

January 2019

## Dedication

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To my Mummy – an amazing woman of great faith, integrity, immense strength, love and determination – a role model to all who cross her path.

“Life is a dance...”- with this in mind, I further dedicate this study to the three main men in my life: the memory of my darling Daddy, Alfred Herman, who taught me to dance; my husband, Walter Herman, who continues to lovingly dance with me; and my dearest son, Wesley Herman, who is my world and makes this dance worthwhile.

I love you “to infinity and beyond...”

## Acknowledgements

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During this research journey, I've once again realized that the words of John Donne, "*No man is an island...*" indeed ring true. I thus acknowledge, with immense gratitude and appreciation, the following people who made this study possible:

- Our heavenly Father, for the great mercy and guidance throughout this study.
- My sincere appreciation to my astute supervisor, Professor Willy Nel. Thank you for your patience, guidance and constant motivation, without which, this study would have been impossible.
- The principal of the school in which this study was undertaken – Sir, I salute you for your dedication to the teaching profession. Your determination in constantly striving to obtain and do the best for our learners – under very trying circumstances - is admirable. A huge thank you for your support and enthusiasm for this study. You are a leader and mentor that I, and many others, look up to.
- The dedicated teachers who, amid heavy workloads, sacrificed their time to participate in the Community of Practice over a period of two years. Thank you – you made this study a reality.
- The critical monitors who so selflessly gave their time to participate in this study. Your professional input and insight have been invaluable and is hugely appreciated.
- The language editor, Dr Jabulani Sibanda, for professionally editing this dissertation.
- Dr C. Beyers for the support with the final adjustments to this thesis.

- The Mpisi brothers, Tony and Chris. Your regular encouragement and interest in this study, motivated the completion thereof. Thank you.
- A very special thank you to my husband, Wally – my rock! Thank you for your immense patience, your positive attitude and your kind and considerate nature. Thank you for believing in me and constantly insisting that I never give up!
- My son, Wes, my partner in crime! Thank you for your dedication to your studies, as that is what I often clung to when I felt like giving up. Thank you for being my inspiration.
- My Mummy, Diana and late Daddy, Alfie Herman. Thank you for your ever-present love, support and guidance throughout my life. All that I am, I owe to you.

## Abstract

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This study explored the use of a Community of Practice (CoP) approach to in-service teacher development in the domain of reading for cross-curricular learning, at a special school.

The following came to the fore in this study: the influence of a teaching philosophy on the implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning; factors that sway the establishment and maintenance of a CoP; advantages and disadvantages of a CoP approach to teachers' professional learning; and teachers' perceptions of both a CoP approach to professional learning and reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school.

Participatory Research (PR) was used for this qualitative study which was framed within the theory of Critical Community Psychology. Semi-structured focus group interviews, in the form of Community of Practice sessions, were the main form of data collection. The data gained were thematically analysed.

The findings revealed that teachers need to understand why and how a constructivist approach to teaching and learning benefits learners' growth and development within a democratic environment. If teachers experience the value of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, they may be more likely to embrace this approach to facilitate the learning process.

A CoP can become a support network to teachers as they attempt to support learners who experience barriers to learning such as reading difficulties. This bodes well for practice in inclusive education. It should be noted though, that the support of the principal is fundamental for the establishment and maintenance of a CoP.

Teacher autonomy can be strengthened, and reliance on so-called experts can be diminished, through participation in a CoP. In this study, the CoP was effective in offering context-specific,

school-based, teacher-led professional development about reading for cross-curricular learning.

**Key words:**

community of practice, teacher professional development, reading for cross-curricular learning, special school, constructivist approach to teaching and learning

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## Abbreviations/ Acronyms

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1	CoP	Community of practice
2	CoPs	Communities of practice
3	DBE	Department of Basic Education
4	DoE	Department of Education
5	DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
6	PR	Participatory Research
7	RSA	Republic of South Africa
8	LoLT	Language of teaching and learning
9	PLC	Professional learning community
10	PLCs	Professional learning communities
11	TLCs	Teacher learning communities
12	FP	Fundamental pedagogics
13	CNE	Christian National Education
14	LSSs	Learning Support Specialists
15	CPD	Continuous professional development
16	CPTD	Continuing professional teacher development
17	SACE	South African Council for Educators
18	PDP	Professional development points
19	PD	Professional development
20	IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
21	N.D.	No date
22	Q.R.	Qualitative research
23	IEU	Inclusive Education Unit

## **CHAPTER 1.      ORIENTATION**

### **1.1      INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the necessity for teachers to be able to support their learners to read for cross-curricular learning. This study questions whether a community of practice (CoP) would be an effective school-based professional learning initiative to support teachers at a special school in Kimberley, to develop learners' reading for cross-curricular learning. I then state the aim of this study, together with the research questions and objectives that guide it. A brief description of the theoretical framework is given. The research methodology and research design are followed by a discussion of the value of this research undertaking. The ethical considerations made and a chapter layout of the study are presented.

### **1.2      ORIENTATION**

Reading, the key to learning across the curriculum, is a crucial skill in need of continual development, if learners are to succeed in school and beyond (Dednam, 2011: 145; Altieri, 2011: 27; Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury, 2004: 1). Yet, in South Africa, literacy is described as being "in crisis" (Nel, 2018: 1). Many learners in South Africa experience difficulty with reading (Bharuthram, 2012: 205; Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education (RSA DBE), 2011: 33) and this presents a "potential barrier to effective learning" (RSA DBE, 2011: 3).

The emphasis shifts from learning to read, to reading to learn after the foundation phase (grades one, two and three) (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury, 2004: 7). The use of informational texts increases as content subjects are introduced (Stoughton, 2008: 95).

Learners who have difficulty reading and understanding informational texts risk becoming frustrated, less engaged in or even excluded from class activities and thus, from learning (Altieri, 2011: 28; Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood & Parkhill, 2011: 3; Richardson, Morgan & Fleener, 2006: 18; Gunning, 2002: 2).

English is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in the majority of South African schools, despite it not being the home language of the majority of learners (Nel, 2011: 169; van Staden, 2011: 11; RSA DoE, 2008: 7, 9). This further exacerbates learners' difficulty with reading to learn (Nel, 2018: 1; RSA DBE, 2010: 13; Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin, 2006: 123) and the language challenge is considered one of the reasons for the poor reading proficiency among South African learners (Jordaan, 2011: 79; Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 1-2; Sesati, Adler, Reed & Bapoo, 2002: 73).

Reading development is further impeded when it is not enhanced in class (Fletcher et al., 2011: 3). According to Baatjes (2003: 5), teachers often assume that learners are able to read effectively at the end of the foundation phase, and that further reading development is the responsibility of the language teacher. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), assess and monitor, at five year intervals, the reading literacy of grade 4 and grade 5 learners in more than 60 countries, including South Africa (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & McLeod Palane, 2017:1). Highlights reports on the 2016 PIRLS were conducted by the University of Pretoria in conjunction with the South African Department of Basic Education. The highlights reports reveal that 78% of Grade 4 learners and 49% of Grade 5 learners lack the reading skills necessary for effective 'reading for learning' to occur in the teaching and learning context (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & McLeod Palane, 2017:11; Howie, Combrinck, Tshele, Roux, McLeod Palane & Mokoena, 2017:5). The majority of teachers teaching the intermediate phase (grades four, five and six) and senior phase (grades seven, eight and nine) experience challenges in assisting learners who experience a barrier to reading (RSA DoE, 2008: 7, 8, 10).

Education in South Africa is in the process of changing from an authoritarian, medical-deficit model with a traditional transmission model of instruction (Landsberg, 2011: 75, 76) towards a socio-critical model based on a policy of inclusion (Swart & Pettipher, 2011: 19; Daniels, 2010: 635; RSA DoE, 2009: 20). A socio-critical model, which promotes a transformational model of instruction, is ideal in a democratic society and encourages social justice, critical thinking and the expression of opinions, while respecting the differences of others (Swart & Pettipher, 2011: 4, 9). There is thus, a need for in-service teachers to participate in professional learning within the socio-critical, constructivist model of teaching and learning.

In the medical-deficit model, learners who experience reading difficulties are referred to “specialists” in an attempt to “rectify” learners so they can “fit in” (Swart & Pettipher, 2011: 7, 9). Learners are expected to adapt to the expectations set for a particular age-group and grade-level (Bouwer, 2011: 56). Learners who do not read at a particular level at the specified age are often referred to as having a reading difficulty.

In a socio-critical model, learners are viewed as “developing readers” (Hall, Burns & Edwards, 2011: 9). Class teachers are regarded as the first source of support for learners’ development (RSA DoE, 2001: 18). They should implement inclusive practices to accommodate learner diversity. Currently, “most South African teachers appear to hold a traditional view of teaching and learning...” (Stears, 2009: 399). The implication is that professional development programmes that adequately equip teachers for supporting learners in developing their reading, are needed (Bharuthram, 2012: 206, 207; Swart & Pettipher, 2011: 6, 20, 22; RSA DoE, 2011: 17; Daniels, 2010: 634, 640; Baatjes, 2003: 5; Adler, 2002: 7).

As the constructivist theory of learning underpins the current South African curriculum (Stears, 2009: 397), knowledge regarding this theory of learning should be a fundamental component of teacher development programmes (Rossouw, 2009: 6, 10; RSA DBE, 2006: 20). All teachers need to understand the concept and principles of constructivism and its

implications for classroom practice (Stears, 2009: 399; Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2007:73, 84).

A whole language philosophy to reading across the curriculum is based on a constructivist perspective (Weaver, 1988: 58). Since learning should take place in all subjects, a constructivist approach to reading is not exclusively the domain of the language teacher (Meltzer & Hamann, 2006: 33). It can be implemented by all teachers to scaffold learners' development of independent, critical reading, writing and learning across the curriculum (Weaver, 1988: 59).

It is expected of teachers to continuously grow and develop professionally (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010: 121), despite the time constraints that the workload of the profession imposes on them (Rossouw, 2009: 13; Rhodes, Stokes & Hampton, 2004: 24). The need for accessible teacher development that improves classroom practice, enhances the reading development of learners (Klapwijk, 2012: 192, 193, 200; RSA DoE, 2006: 20), encourages teachers to reflect on their practice and take responsibility for their continual professional growth, is expressed in the literature (Department of Basic Education & Department of Higher Education (RSA DBE & DHET, 2011: 4, 6, 12; Mestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff: 2009: 488; RSA DoE, 2006: 5, 17, 18).

Teaching and learning is enhanced in schools where teachers, within a 'professional learning community', regularly share information and experiences on classroom practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 38). Such a community can serve as a form of support for in-service teachers (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011: 64). According to the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011 - 2025 (RSA DBE & Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2011: 3, 14, 23, 29) "subject- and issue- based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)" should be established as a form of teacher development that encourages teachers to take responsibility for their professional development. Institution-based professional development initiatives, such as Communities of Practice (CoPs) or Professional Learning

Communities (PLCs), are in their infancy in South Africa (RSA DBE, 2015: 35). There is need for further study into CoPs or PLCs in the South African context (RSA DBE, 2015: 35; Ngcoza & Southwood, 2015:2; Jita & Mokhele, 2014:3). This is confirmed by Caldwell (2008: 8) who states that, “[T]here has been surprisingly little research on the processes and outcomes of networking in education”.

Professional learning communities are also referred to as, amongst others, ‘Peer-networking’ (Rhodes et al., 2004: 14), ‘School-based Teacher Learning Communities’ (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006); teacher networks or teacher learning communities (TLCs) (Jita & Mokhele, 2014: 3) and ‘Communities of Practice’ (Kimble, Hildreth & Bourdon, 2008). In this research undertaking, I use the term Community of Practice (CoP).

A Community of Practice (CoP) can therefore, be regarded as a form of a professional learning community. A CoP is characterised as a group of teachers who voluntarily meet regularly to mutually support and learn with and from each other, by sharing and reflecting on information, knowledge and teaching experiences as they work collaboratively towards a common goal (Hildreth & Kimble, 2008: xii; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 4; Rhodes et al., 2004: 14). A CoP-approach to professional development is selected for this study as “...learning that recognizes and draws strength from the learning community is most successful, making it imperative to offer professional development in settings that build upon collaboration and fosters a sense of community” (Good & Weaver, 2003: 440).

Using a Community of Practice may be one initiative that addresses the need for accessible and collaborative teacher development in reading for cross-curricular learning.

## **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM, AIM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.3.1 Problem Statement**

In South Africa, initial teacher training during the Apartheid era, especially in Afrikaans institutions, was based on Fundamental Pedagogics – a philosophy that drove the Afrikaner apartheid system of Christian National Education (Higgs, 1998: 190; Msila, 2007: 148; Venter, 1997: 58). The teaching methods, based on the transmission model, were teacher-centred and involved the rote learning and regurgitation of facts (Msila, 2007: 149).

In-service content subject teachers, who received their teacher training within a transmission model of instruction (Landsberg, 2011: 75, 76), are unlikely to have received training in integrating reading development in content subjects. These teachers, who need to guide their learners' development in reading to learn, need support to do so.

Discussions with the three Learning Support Specialists in the Inclusive Education Unit of the Northern Cape Education Department revealed that they were required to provide support to 123 ordinary primary schools within the Francis Baard district. Limited human resources constrained the support they rendered to schools. In addition, challenges such as budgetary constraints and logistical challenges (availability of transport, for example) further impeded the Learning Support Specialists' endeavours to support teachers and learners. This is confirmed by Bantwini and Diko (2011: 230-231, 233) who state that the strain on human resources and the challenge of time constraints make it difficult for departmental officials to effectively assist and support teachers at schools. This is not limited to the Northern Cape as Lessing and de Wit (2007: 53, 54) report that "... it has been impossible to train all teachers adequately through the regular support services of the education department".

The problem seems to be that accessible, school-based forms of professional development initiatives that support teachers, especially in developing learners' reading to learn across the curriculum, are lacking.

### **1.3.2 Aim of the research**

This study investigated the use of a Community of Practice, as a school-based form of teacher development and support, exploring the use of reading strategies based on a constructivist philosophy, to develop reading for cross-curricular learning.

### **1.3.3 Research Questions**

#### **1.3.3.1 Main Question**

How can a Community of Practice develop reading for cross-curricular learning in a special school?

#### **1.3.3.2 Sub-questions**

1. How do teachers' underlying teaching philosophy influence their implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning at this special school?
2. Which factors contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP at a special school?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a CoP approach to teacher professional development at a special school?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school?

5. What are teachers' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school?

### **1.3.4 Objectives**

1. To identify the way in which teachers' underlying teaching philosophy influence their implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school.
2. To explore the factors that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP at a special school.
3. To determine the advantages and disadvantages of a CoP approach to teacher professional development at a special school.
4. To explore teachers' perceptions of a CoP approach to teacher professional development at a special school.
5. To investigate teachers' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school.

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The aim of this research undertaking was to initiate a Community of Practice which would collaboratively attempt to develop reading for cross-curricular learning within a special school. The theoretical framework underpinning a study of this nature will, by necessity, be from a communitarian understanding of how humans live and work together. I therefore, used Critical Community Psychology as an overarching theoretical framework to guide this study. Community psychology has its foundations at the Swampscott Conference in 1965 with George Albee, Robert Rieff, William Ryan, Seymour Sarason Emory Cowen, Julian Rappaport and James Kelly considered as significant contributors to the field (Kaufman & Ward, 2005: 26, 29, 36). As I discuss this theoretical framework in detail later, for this introductory chapter, it will suffice to paraphrase Critical Community

Psychology as a strain of psychology that focuses on how humans establish and sustain a community, not just for its own sake, but for the values that will improve society (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom & Siddiquee, 2011: 36).

In establishing such a community, a number of key values drive the process. These values include “collaboration and community participation”, “a psychological sense of community”, “respect for human diversity”, social justice and the influence of person and setting on each other (Nel, Lazarus & Daniels, 2010: S19; Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2007: 29-31). The power relations inherent in the school as organisation during this process of CoP establishment comes into play.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **1.5.1 Research Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was adopted, influenced by a pragmatic orientation to research which strives for a practical, “democratic, bottom-up” approach (Berardi, 2002: 848) to a teacher development initiative. The involvement of the participants was crucial to this research undertaking.

### **1.5.2 Research Design**

Durrheim (1999: 33 – 34) frames research design according to the “purpose”, “context”, “paradigm”, and “techniques” of a study. The research design, participatory research, is further discussed in chapter four (Research Methodology) of this study, but I provide a cursory discussion in this introductory chapter.

### 1.5.2.1 Participatory Research

Participatory research (PR), based on “Biggs (1989) continuum of control” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1669) or “degree of participation” (Lilja & Bellon, 2008: 482) was used for this study. This continuum identifies four levels of participation and control by participants. The continuum promotes the research ‘ideal’. According to Palailogou (2016: 46), the ideal is to “provide evidence of how the researcher is treating the relationship of power and the degree of involvement of the participants in the research process.” Drawing on Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) and Lilja and Bellon (2008), the way in which these four levels of participation relate to this study is set out in the self-designed table below.

**Table 1: Continuum of participation**

<b>Continuum of participation</b>	<b>Actions related to the continuum</b>	<b>Actions as it relates to this study</b>
Contractual	Agreements are made for participants to be involved in the researcher’s project or inquiry.	Informal pre-entry discussions with the principal, teachers and Learning Support Specialists (LSSs) before formal data collection starts.
Consultative	There are consultations between the researcher and potential participants in an attempt to better understand the problem(s) they experience in a particular setting.	Teachers at a special school were invited to participate in the research project on a voluntary basis. A focus group discussion with the participants allowed them to describe the difficulties they encountered in their particular setting regarding reading to learn across the curriculum. Dates and

Continuum of participation	Actions related to the continuum	Actions as it relates to this study
		times for the information sharing sessions were negotiated.
Collaborative	Jointly, the researcher and participants undertake the project “designed, initiated and facilitated” by the researcher.	The aim of the initial meeting was to discuss and debate the theory underlying a whole language philosophy to reading development across the curricula; and participate in demonstrations of some reading strategies in various subjects. Teachers selected the strategies they wished to explore.
Collegiate	Participants become co-researchers in seeking possible solutions to their problem(s). Researcher and participants learn from and with each other. The ideal is that the participants take control of the project.	Teachers implemented the strategies in their classrooms. The community of practice (CoP) met at least once per month during the implementation period. The purpose was to provide participants with opportunities for discussion, feedback, reflections, suggestions, motivation and support. Regular meetings were an important part of establishing a functioning CoP. These meetings were likely to fluctuate between the collaborative and collegiate levels of participation

The possibility for control, ownership of and responsibility for the project being gradually taken over by the participants (Berardi, 2002: 849; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1669) is enhanced through Participatory Research. Although the collegiate level of participation and control was the ideal the study aimed for, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1669) warn that this level can be difficult to achieve.

The informal pre-entry discussions initiated the contractual and consultative levels on the Biggs' continuum of participation. When teachers implement the strategies they selected, participation is likely to move between the consultative and collaborative levels towards the collegiate level. I suspected that movement along this continuum would not be linear. There was likely to be movement within the consultative, collaborative and collegiate levels of participation.

My hope was that a 'CoP concerned with reading for cross-curricular learning' would be initiated and sustained when the study came to an end.

### **1.5.3 Data Collection**

Qualitative data collection methods were used. A literature study on reading development across the curriculum, and on a Community of Practice-approach to professional development, was done. Informal pre-entry discussions with the principal, teachers and Learning Support Specialists (LSSs) took place before formal data collection started. Semi-structured focus group interviews, in the form of CoP sessions and teacher report backs, were recorded and transcribed. To contribute to the trustworthiness and dependability of the research process, I kept a research journal to establish an 'audit trail' that shows my reflections and decisions resulting from data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002: 27).

#### **1.5.4 Data Analysis**

The CoP sessions were recorded, transcribed and analysed for recurrent themes to identify key issues in the Thematic Analysis framework of data analysis (Fynn, 2011: 197). Feedback on the results was given to the participants for validation, and necessary adjustments to the findings were made as required by the consensus reached between the researcher and participants.

### **1.6 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH**

The research provides the potential for participants to improve classroom practice and develop reading and learning across the curriculum even after the research project is completed. It also presents an opportunity for the local district office of the education department, at least, to explore whether CoPs are a viable means for teachers to collaboratively take responsibility for their professional development at this and other education institutions.

### **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Head of the Northern Cape Education Department and the principal of the special school involved. Informed written consent for participation in the study was obtained from the interested teachers, the critical monitors and the Unit Head of the Inclusive Education Unit of the Northern Cape Department of Education. Participants were fully informed about what participation in this project entailed. In the consent-seeking document, their confidentiality and right to withdraw from the research was promised. Ethical clearance to conduct this was granted by the Faculty of Education, University of the Free State (ethical clearance number: UFS-EDU-2013-015).

## **1.8 REFERENCING TECHNIQUE**

The \*Exeter Harvard (Microsoft Word 2016) referencing technique was applied in compiling the bibliography for this study.

## **1.9 LAYOUT OF THE CHAPTERS**

The first chapter presents an overview of the necessity for teachers to support learners in developing reading for cross-curricular learning. The purpose of this study, is introduced together with the research questions, objectives and theoretical framework that guides it. The research methodology and ethical considerations are also mentioned.

Chapters two and three are literature reviews. Chapter two presents a literature review on a Community of Practice (CoP) and its correlation to the research design (participatory research) and the theoretical framework (critical community psychology). Chapter three comprises a literature review on reading for cross-curricular learning, as this is the CoP domain in this study.

Chapter four presents the research methodology and shows the way in which this study unfolded.

In chapter five, the findings on the establishment of a Community of Practice for developing reading for cross-curricular learning, are reported, while a discussion of these findings are presented in chapter six.

I draw this study to a close in chapter seven, and present my conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.10 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I provided an orientation and rationale for this study. The aim of the study and the guiding research questions, objectives, research methodology, and research design, were mentioned. The ethical considerations, the potential contribution of the study, and the layout of the chapters were identified.

In chapter two, a literature review is made on the concept of a community of practice as a process for the professional learning and development of teachers.

## **CHAPTER 2. A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE APPROACH TO TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter two, a school-based professional development initiative, in the form of a community of practice approach to continuous professional development, is discussed. A correlation is made between a community of practice approach to ongoing teacher learning, the research design - participatory action research, and the theoretical framework of the study - critical community psychology. The establishment of a community of practice at a special school is discussed.

### **2.2 TEACHER TRAINING PRE-1994**

The majority of current teachers in South Africa received their initial training under the apartheid ideology and were trained to unquestioningly comply with delivering the set curriculum via a medical deficit model of education (RSA DoE, 2007: 4; Naicker, 2006: 4; Pithouse, 2004: 72). The teacher training, especially at traditional Afrikaner institutions, was based on the philosophy of Fundamental Pedagogics (Herman, 2010: 490; Msila, 2007: 148 – 149; Higgs, 1998: 190; Venter, 1997: 58; Cross, 1986: 186). In South Africa, this philosophy was aligned to, and realized through, the implementation of the ideology of Christian National Education (Higgs, 1998: 190). Christian National Education (CNE) drove, sustained and advocated the apartheid movement in the field of education to ensure a “passive acceptance of authority” (Higgs, 1998: 192).

Fundamental pedagogics inculcated the unquestioning acceptance of authority, and suppressed the notion of critical thinking and did not encourage differing viewpoints (Higgs, 1998: 192). Fundamental Pedagogics (FP) together with the medical deficit model,

promoted “discriminatory” practices (Nel, Nel & Hugo, 2013: 9). Learners were viewed as empty vessels to be filled by an authoritarian teacher who was not to be questioned (Msila, 2007: 152). Rote learning by passive students, further served to suppress critical thinking and debate. Teachers who adhered to the philosophy of fundamental pedagogics and the medical deficit model of education were of the persuasion that one teaching method was appropriate and suitable to all learners (Venter, 1997: 57). This alienated learners with diverse learning styles and learning needs, and was counter-productive to the policy of inclusive education.

### **2.3 THE DAWN OF DEMOCRACY AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

South African education has undergone numerous policy and curriculum changes since 1994 (Moletsane, 2004: 201; Pithouse, 2004: 73; van Zyl, 1997: 58). The political change to a democratic government, necessitated a change from a transmission to a transformational model of education (Killen, 2015: 12; Swart & Pettipher, 2011: 9). The changes in the education curriculum, based on the South African Constitution (Killen, 2015:2; Msila, 2007: 151), are aimed at promoting democracy and inclusive practices in South African society (Nel, Nel & Hugo, 2013: 9). Despite the policy and curriculum changes, the impact of the traditional teacher training model is still evident and is highlighted by De Clercq (2008: 9) who states:

*When it comes to South African teachers, it can be argued that, because of the apartheid legacy of unequal education systems, most educators approach their work as workers or civil servants rather than professionals... These educators comply with the bureaucratic rules and regulations and transmit the curriculum in the only way they know. They do not see themselves as fully responsible for learners’ results...*

The transformation in the education curriculum necessitated changes not only in classroom teaching and learning, but also in teacher education and teacher professional development. When transformation occurs on society, there should be a corresponding change in the roles of teachers (Killen, 2015: 27). The changed roles of teachers add to the call for a corresponding change in pre- and in-service teacher professional development.

One of the “priority goals” set out in the Action Plan to 2019 of the Department of Education is to encourage the professional development of teachers (RSA DBE, 2015: 3, 34–36). It is essential for all teachers to develop their ability to identify and accommodate diverse learners in various teaching and learning contexts (RSA DoE, 2007: 16, 21). The professional development of pre-service and especially in-service teachers is crucial if a curriculum promoting democracy and inclusive practices, is to be implemented (RSA DoE, 2006: 17).

## **2.4 CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Professional development or professional learning can be described as a continuous process in which teachers commit to search for ways to improve their knowledge and skills in attempts to develop all learners’ learning (Ngcoza & Southwood, 2015: 3; Singh, 2011: 1626; Timperley, 2011: 25; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 2; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004: 5; Rhodes et al., 2004: 91, 120). Continuous professional development (CPD) is described in the following quote as cited in Steyn (2011: 227).

*According to Lee (2005: 47), effective CPD should create an appropriate level of challenge and support, provide activities demonstrating new ways to teach and learn, build internal capacity, use a team approach, provide reflection and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its activities.*

The support and development of learners' learning should be at the heart of teacher professional development. Teachers, especially within the context of a special school, need to continually capacitate themselves to meet the diverse needs of learners entering their classes each year.

There is a strong conviction that effective teacher professional learning positively contributes to effective quality learning among learners and that it needs to occur on a continuous basis with teachers actively involved in their own context specific professional development and learning (Stewart, 2014: 28). Continuous professional development is essential if educators are to be regarded as professionals (Van der Klink, Kools, Avissar, White & Sakata, 2017: 163).

I believe that the teachers constantly need to attend to their professional learning in order to keep abreast of the ever-changing social and political demands that influence, impact on and have implications for the profession. Addressing their professional development or professional learning needs, has to be a persistent and relentless process that spans the duration of their teaching career. CPTD should thus be part and parcel of the obligations and responsibilities of a teacher. It should not be viewed as one-off events that are intermittently added to the workload of a teacher. CPTD should rather be viewed as an integral process necessary for effective teaching and learning to materialise. CPTD should be of value to teachers in that it should address the context specific learning needs of both teachers and their learners.

## **2.5 THE CPD MODEL IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In South Africa, there is a new system to encourage on-going professional learning of in-service teachers. The Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) system was gazetted in April 2007 (RSA DoE, 2007) as The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa. Obligatory CPTD (RSA SACE, 2012: 7), breaks

with the traditional, compliance driven, in-service training model, and encourages context specific professional learning for teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2014: 7-8). CPTD aims to enhance teacher autonomy and increase teachers' responsibility for their own professional development and learning (RSA DoE, 2007: 3). The main aim of the policy is, not only to equip teachers to deliver a curriculum suited to a democratic South Africa, but to also develop strategies to encourage the professional development of teachers on a continuous basis (RSA DoE, 2007: 1). According to the National Policy on Teacher Education and Development, professional development initiatives must address, among other things, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge; the development of literacy, reading and learning; and the promotion of inclusive teaching and learning practices (RSA DoE, 2007: 21).

The South African Council for Educators (SACE) is responsible for managing the CPTD system (RSA DoE, 2017: 18). The CPTD system requires teachers to earn professional development (PD) points. Teachers should accrue at least 150 professional development (PD) points, within a three-year cycle, by engaging in various professional development activities endorsed by SACE (RSA DBE, 2017: 17-18; RSA SACE, 2015: 5). These activities are to include mandatory programmes arranged by the department of education as well as professional development activities selected by teachers themselves (RSA DBE, 2017: 18; RSA SACE, 2013: 6). Various formats of teachers' professional learning are encouraged (RSA SACE, 2013: 4).

## **2.6 DIFFERENT MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

Within the apartheid dispensation, teacher education followed a traditional model of professional development. Traditional forms of professional development embrace a "training" model (Lieberman & Miller, 2014: 3). The training model characteristically makes use of intermittent workshops that are decontextualised and unrelated to the challenges that teachers and their learners experience in specific classroom contexts (Lieberman & Miller, 2014: 7 – 8; Steyn, 2011: 217). With traditional forms of professional

development, it is unlikely that teachers select the topics that they want to learn about (Bradley, 2015: 8 – 9). These decisions are typically imposed by someone higher up in the hierarchical structure and they are strongly associated with “someone else’s desire to tell” (Timperley, 2011: 14). Teachers may experience these forms of professional learning as irrelevant to their teaching and learning contexts (Bradley, 2015: 8 – 9).

Various approaches to professional teacher development are available (Rhodes, Stokes, & Hampton, 2004: 2; Craft, 1996: 8). Yet, Eisner (2000: 355) & Jansen (1999b: 6) as cited in Pithouse (2004: 75) warn that “(t)he largely passive ‘re-training’ experiences that have been offered to in-service teachers in post-1994 South Africa do not have the dynamism to overcome our crushing history of apartheid pedagogy.” Compulsory teacher development initiatives are evident in South Africa. An example of this is the once-off workshops which are regularly used in South Africa (Moletsane, 2004: 205-206). This form of mandatory staff development sessions often does not directly address the challenges teachers experience in their classrooms and is unlikely to result in changed classroom practice (Timperley, 2011: 6; Shumar & Sarmiento, 2008: 226; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 1-2; Day & Sachs, 2004: 21 & Diaz-Maggioli, 2004: 2-5). The traditional training model, where teachers passively receive decontextualised information, fails to address teachers’, and indirectly learners’ specific learning needs (Kempen & Steyn, 2016: 32 – 33).

Professional learning should translate into and become central to addressing learners’ needs and the improvement of their learning (Timberley, 2011: 5; Rhodes, Stokes & Hampton, 2004: 91; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004: 5). Teachers need to be more involved in their own professional development (Moletsane, 2004: 203). They should take responsibility for their professional learning and instructional practices that will directly address the challenges they experience in their various classroom contexts (De Clercq, 2008: 11). Their professional learning should be directly linked to supporting the learning needs of their learners (Moletsane, 2004: 205). This calls for school-based, teacher-run professional development initiatives that aim to address the challenges and issues that the teachers bring to the fore and want to address at a specific institution (Moletsane,

2004: 206, 210). The onus is on all teachers to be responsible for addressing the learning needs of *all* learners.

An exploration of the literature reveals a shift away from the exclusive use of the traditional, isolationist, top-down approaches to the professional development of teachers towards school-based professional learning that focuses on the contextual needs of the learners at a particular institution (Harris & Jones, 2010: 175; Vo & Nguyen, 2010: 205, Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008: 80; Shumar & Sarmiento, 2008: 226; Knight, 2002: 229, Craft, 1996: 8). The way in which teacher learning occurs, is changing. “Growth in practice” models that promote collaborative professional teacher development or learning, are being encouraged (Lieberman & Miller, 2014: 3).

Professional development should afford teachers the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning and that of their learners (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 113). Teachers within a school need to take ‘collective responsibility’ (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 2) for the learning needs of all learners. They should collaborate by drawing on each other’s teaching experiences, knowledge, skills and contacts with knowledgeable others ‘outside’ of the school setup in attempts to meet the needs of their learners (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004: 9). Teachers also need the opportunity to reflect on whether or not the interventions they employed have been successful or whether further adaptations or different interventions are necessary (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 3; Rhodes et al., 2004: 6, 55, 113; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004:9).

Globally, there is the conviction that the professional learning of teachers, which encompasses continuous career-long learning, is vital to providing quality learning and scholastic success for learners (Darling-Hammond, 2017: 291). The way in which the professional learning of in-service teachers occurs is, however, changing. Internationally, there is a move away from traditional in-service teacher training to collaborative professional development where teachers are active participants in their learning (Stewart, 2017:28; Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, 2016: 130). Traditional in-service

training initiatives usually involve teachers as passive recipients of transmitted information (Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, 2016: 130), generally in the form of one-off workshops. Collaborative professional learning is ongoing and entails teachers having to adapt practices so that these are context-specific, (Garcés & Martínez Granada, 2016: 40; Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, 2016: 130). There is a move toward school-based professional development initiatives in which teachers enhance their autonomy by determining their own learning objectives and reflecting on the outcomes of these. Through reflection on and the adaptation of implemented strategies teachers can experience, over a period of time, the benefits of changed teaching practices on their learners' learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017: 7). According to (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017: 4) professional development that is context-specific, encourages active participation, collaboration and support among teachers, spans a period of time and provides for reflection is likely to be effective as a professional learning initiative. CoPs, also known as professional learning communities, is one professional learning initiative that addresses the characteristics of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017: 17). Learning communities present a means for teachers to jointly take responsibility for learners' learning.

## **2.7 LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

Literature documents that the collaborative work of teachers within professional learning communities can be an effective means of institution-based, context-specific professional learning (Hadar, & Brody, 2010: 1641,1642; Printy, 2008: 188; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008: 80, 84; Knight, 2002: 229).

These learning communities are known by variable terms (Pareja Roblin, Ormel, McKenney, Voogt & Pieters, 2014: 184; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008: 82). Some of these terms are Professional Learning Communities (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008), Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kimble, Hildreth & Bourdon, 2008), Teacher Communities (Pareja Roblin, Ormel, McKenney, Voogt & Pieters, 2014; 184), or

Critical Friends Group (Vo & Nguyen, 2010). The above sources indicate a common thread among these terms. The commonality is that these are groups or communities of professionals, working together on a common interest, problem or goal, with the aim of improving their practice, professional learning and the learning of their learners. Professional learning communities, such as communities of practice, are new ways of thinking about, and approaching professional learning compared to the traditional, formal teacher development delivered via courses or workshops (Hadar & Brody, 2010: 1642; Knight, 2001: 229).

A community of practice approach to teacher professional development is a form of social learning (Printy, 2008: 189) which falls within the social constructivist perspective (Hadar & Brody, 2010: 1641). This form of professional teacher learning is, as yet, uncommon (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 113), despite it being based on the paradigm which currently underpins South Africa's post 1994 education curriculum (Stears, 2009: 397). The focus of this study is on a Community of Practice (CoP) approach to teacher learning which focuses on cross-curricular reading and learning of intermediate and senior phase learners at a special school.

## **2.8 THE IMPLICATIONS FOR A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULA LEARNING AT A SPECIAL SCHOOL**

As the learning support teacher at the institution in which this study was conducted, I observed that many learners were referred to this special school because they experienced one or more barrier(s) to learning. They were in need of a higher level of learning support than could be provided in an ordinary school. I also noted, at this special school, teachers' rigid compliance and obsession with completing the set curriculum. In order to complete the curriculum, it was often expected of learners to adapt to the teachers' teaching style, which appeared very much to be based on the medical deficit

model. Yet, if these learners are to reach their full potential, they need a higher level of support than provided in the ordinary school. Teachers at this special school will need to adapt their instruction to accommodate and support the learning styles and learning needs of learners experiencing barriers to learning. In order for teachers to do so, they require professional learning opportunities about pedagogy that aligns to a socio constructivist philosophy which fosters democratic and inclusive educational practices. Teaching that continues to be entrenched in the philosophy of Fundamental Pedagogics and based on the medical deficit model defeats the attempts of the new dispensation in South Africa to strive towards democratic ideals.

Continuous professional teacher learning, that is not only based on, but also geared to encourage a constructivist perspective to teaching and learning – such as a CoP approach to professional teacher learning – is therefore necessary at this special school. This could support teachers in adapting their teaching so as to accommodate and support learners with unique and diverse learning needs. A CoP approach to teacher development could diminish the medical deficit belief that the learning support to be provided to learners are the exclusive domain of so called specialists.

As reading is the basis of learning in institutions of learning, I am of the opinion that a CoP that addresses reading for cross-curricular learning, could contribute to the idea of an integrated approach to learning, to shared responsibility among teachers for the development and support of all learners' learning through reading. It stands to reason that if all teachers implement reading for cross-curricular learning, it should contribute to learning support being provided to those learners who experience a barrier to reading. In this way, reading for cross-curricular learning could support the implementation of inclusive teaching and learning.

I further believe that the key to the implementation of a socio constructivist approach to education in South Africa, which encompasses the implementation of inclusive practices, lie in the class teachers' willingness to adapt their teaching so that it aligns to

a socio constructivist philosophy. Participation in a CoP for cross-curricular reading, in which research based socio constructivist reading-for-learning-strategies are explored, could be one way of promoting school-based teacher professional development that encourages inclusive teaching and learning practices. Using a CoP approach to CPTD could be a vehicle to strengthen the transition to democratic practices in both teacher learning and subsequently learners' learning in South Africa. In my view, a CoP approach to CPTD - which is based on democratic ideals – could enhance teachers' critical autonomy. Within a CoP, teachers give voice to their own professional learning needs and take responsibility for achieving the professional learning goals that they set for themselves. I hope that a CoP approach to teachers' implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning, will encourage participants to develop as independent 'doers' with regard to learning support to learners and not unquestioningly rush through content in order to comply with completing a set curriculum.

## **2.9 A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.9.1 A community of practice**

A community of practice is described as a group of people, with varied perspectives and expertise who voluntarily work together in efforts to address shared concerns, problems or goals (Barragán-Ocaña, Quijano-Solís, Vega-Díaz & Sánchez-Lara, 2012: 742; Lave & Wenger,1991: 98). The group meets regularly to increase and share their learning regarding an area of joint concern, interest or goal.

In the context of education, the goal is to enhance learners' learning by addressing classroom practice (Harris & Jones,2010: 173; Printy, 2008: 190). CoPs, as professional learning communities, should thus, concentrate more on how learners learn, than on how teachers teach (DuFour, 2004: 6). Teachers' professional learning within a CoP should benefit learners' learning.

In the following quote, McLaughlin & Talbert (2006: 113) encapsulate the essence of a community of practice.

*School-based learning communities are both the site and source of learning – they generate and use knowledge in ways not possible in other settings because learning starts with particular goals for particular students. School-based communities of practice are essential to creating the norms of collective responsibility and continual learning required of the teaching profession. They form the core of a new professionalism because they afford opportunities for teachers to take responsibility for their learning and that of their students.*

The concept of a community of practice (CoP) is attributed to Lave and Wenger (1998) (Bowl, 2011: ii84; Viskovic, 2006: 326). A community of practice is based on social learning (Viskovic, 2006: 326) that describes how learning takes place through the social interactions between individuals within a work environment. It is an informal way of learning about different solutions to common challenges within a social setting, such as a work environment (Barragán-Ocaña, Quijano-Solís, Vega-Díaz & Sánchez-Lara, 2012: 742). People are able to learn with, and from each other through their interaction with, and inter-dependence on, one another (Knight, 2002: 229). Learning occurs through participation within the work place (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 95). A community of practice approach to professional development is described as having a format conducive to adult learning with the added advantage of being “relatively low-cost” (Bowl, 2011: ii84).

Despite its potential as an effective form of professional learning, a school-based community of practice is a form of professional development that is absent in many schools (Shumar & Sarmiento, 2008: 227; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; 11). The reason for this might be that communities of practice are not easy to establish and sustain. CoPs “... are not born in their final state (but need to be) nurtured and sustained by the value their members derive from them” (Rhodes et al., 2004: 115).

The importance of CoPs or professional learning communities (PLCs) is highlighted in the Action Plan to 2019 Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030: Taking forward South Africa's National Development Plan 2030 as it is stated that "It should be made clear that contributing towards PLCs will influence a teacher's IQMS rating. The National Teacher Awards should include the setting up and development of PLCs as an award criterion." (RSA DBE, 2015: 35). In South Africa, the use of "teacher-initiated professional development activities" (RSA DBE, 2015: 35) and specifically the use of communities of practice, also referred to as professional learning communities, is thus, encouraged.

### **2.9.1.1 The characteristics of a community of practice**

In the literature (Bowl, 2011: ii84; Hadar & Brody, 2010: 1641, 1642; Harris & Jones 2010: 174, 179; Printy, 2008: 190; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008: 81; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004: 9; Knight 2002: 229) a community of practice is characterised by:

- a correlation between teacher development and learner learning;
- regular collegial interaction and collaboration;
- symbiotic professional learning;
- an environment in which respect, trust and a support-base are established among colleagues;
- members who commit to sharing their knowledge and skills to effect continuous learning within the group;
- support from the school's senior management team;
- joint leadership, goal setting, decision making and responsibility for all learners' learning; and
- members who continuously reflect on and evaluate the outcomes of teaching and learning as they strive for continuous improvement.

The professional learning that the teacher gains from participating in a CoP, should contribute to improved teaching practices that positively influences the learning of learners.

CoPs should meet regularly. Regular meetings in which respect is maintained and an atmosphere of trust is built can contribute to a sense of belonging. In such an atmosphere, participants more easily engage and interact with each other and are more likely to then share their resources, implicit knowledge, teaching practices and experience with each other. The CoP should become a safe environment in which participants feel secure enough to share their learning needs with each other. They should also feel confident enough to articulate their own potential solutions to challenges that fellow CoP participants share.

An effective CoP reflects democratic principles. It is necessary that all participants be seen as equals. Participants must be presented with the opportunity to, at various times, lead the CoP sessions, participate in decision making and goal setting. All CoP participants should be mutually responsible for developing the learning of all learners. There must be equity among all participants, irrespective of post levels, perceived status or perceived hierarchical power. No CoP member should be made to feel inferior to any other CoP member. Each CoP participant should feel valued as a member who is able contribute to the collective learning of the CoP .

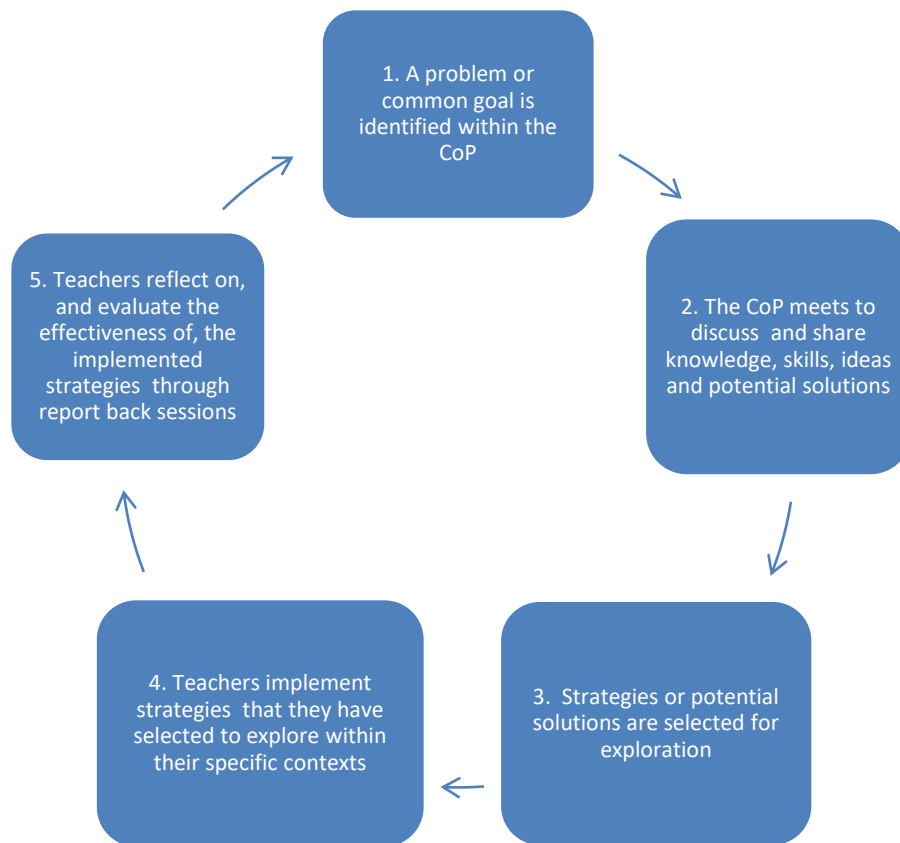
Reflective learning is integral to the CoP process. A CoP should be a platform for participants to engage in self-reflection and self-assessment of the teaching strategies that they implement in their classrooms. The CoP should allow for participants to contemplate the influence of the teaching strategies on their learners' participation and learning.

In addition to these characteristics, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2013: 2) note three elements necessary for a group to be recognised as a community of practice. The first is the “domain”. This refers to a common interest, goal or concern that the group would like to address. The second feature is the “community” – a group of practitioners collaboratively working to share information, expertise and experiences on a selected topic. The third feature is the “practice”. The “practice” is sharing a repertoire of strategies or interventions which the community of practitioners can draw on in an attempt to address a problem or achieve a goal.

In this study, the group of teachers at a special school (community) are interested in learning more about enhancing the cross-curricular reading and learning of their learners (domain). A “cross-curricular reading and learning CoP” (practice) needed to be established and the outcomes of the reading strategies on learners’ learning explored.

### **2.9.2 Community of practice and continuous teacher learning**

A CoP-approach to development can be a cyclical learning process (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 100). The continuous and cyclical nature of this social learning process is illustrated in the Figure 1. The figure is based on the cyclical Lewinian approach to action research which promotes planning, implementing, observing, and assessing the plan (McTaggart, 1997: 27).



**Figure 1: A CoP learning process based on the Lewinian approach**

Human knowledge and understanding is not static. It keeps growing and developing as people encounter different experiences. For this reason, professional learning is represented as a continuous cycle. This cycle can be initiated by identifying learning goals (Moletsane, 2004: 206). Teachers then need to determine whether or not they are able to meet the learners' learning goals. If they are unable to do so, teachers need to identify the learning goals needed to capacitate them in order to meet their learners' learning goals. The first step is thus, the identification of both learners' and teachers' learning needs.

In the diagram, step two represents the collaboration among members of the community of practice. This is the stage where the issue to be addressed is discussed. Ideas based on research based strategies, personal experience, and knowledge, are discussed and shared as potential solutions to a problem. The power of choice comes into play when

teachers select the strategy or strategies that, theoretically, appear to be the most appropriate for their specific context.

Step three involves the implementation and exploration of the selected strategies in the classroom situation. Steps three and four overlap. Teachers make (and preferably record) observations regarding the influence of the strategies on learners' responses to the learning process.

In practice, steps three and four are not separated or compartmentalized as the diagram and explanation suggests. Step four involves the teachers' reflections on the outcomes of the strategies implemented. It is important for teachers to note which strategies or interventions work for a particular learner or group of learners, and which do not. In addition, it should be noted how strategies have been or can possibly be tweaked or adapted to better suit the learner.

Step five focuses on reflection and sharing. Teachers share with the group, their reflections on the outcomes and adaptations to the interventions. Adapted strategies or interventions could contribute to new knowledge by presenting a new way of doing something. Step five is also the stage during which the group or individuals within the group identify the next issue or topic to be addressed. This is where the cyclical nature of this continuous learning process starts again.

Downey (2001), cited in Rhodes et al. (2004: 65), explains the To GROW method as a means of encouraging a team to progress.

- To*     *Topic for the session*
- G*     *Goal for the session*
- R*     *Reality of the contextual issues surrounding the topic*
- O*     *Options for a way forward with the topic*
- W*     *Wrap up the session with the agreement about the next steps*

The 'To GROW' method was introduced as a means of working through the action research of the CoP sessions mentioned above. Participants were then asked about their views concerning this approach to the CoP sessions. The 'To GROW' method would be adopted if all members were in favour of this format of conducting CoP sessions. An alternative format would be requested from members if all were not in favour of the 'To GROW' method being implemented.

### **2.9.3 A community of practice approach to learning and participatory research**

Participatory research (PR) focuses on the importance of people investigating and taking ownership of investigations into their own practice, with the aim to improve practice (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 56; McTaggart, 1997: 26). There is a move away from "researchers ... doing research on others" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 56; McTaggart, 1997: 29).

Participatory research can be initiated when a group of people with a common problem explore ways of learning how to address the problem together (McTaggart, 1997: 27). This is closely linked to the collaborative nature of a community of practice approach to learning. Kurt Lewin's continuous action research cycle involving "planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action" (McTaggart, 1997: 27) can be an effective format for participants to use within a community of practice, when reflecting on their own attempts to learn about ways of addressing a problem and improving their practice.

The participation of community members, as they continuously seek to learn with and from each other within the contexts of their specific situations, is highly esteemed in a CoP approach to learning. The participation of group members as they research their own practices and ways to improve them, is important in PR (McTaggart, 1997: 26, 27,

29). The PR and CoP approach to learning both require participants to engage actively in the learning and research processes. PR is, therefore, a means of research compatible with a community of practice approach to professional learning.

#### **2.9.4 A community of practice approach and its link to critical community psychology**

A community of practice is a vehicle for a community, with a shared interest to learn with and from each other. Participants can pool and share their resources, perspectives and knowledge; develop relationships; and collaboratively work towards a common goal (Kagan et al., 2011: 210, 213).

In school settings, there is a hierarchy of power. The status of some is elevated by positions such as being a senior teacher or head of department. A community of practice strives to diminish this hierarchy of power. This is attempted by valuing all participants' contributions, and creating opportunities for each member to be in a leadership position at various times of the groups' interaction and learning. A community of practice approach to learning and a critical community psychology perspective are related as "both approaches emphasise the 'de-expertising' of knowledge" and view learning as a social act (Lawthom, 2011: 157). The social process of learning is important to both communities of practice and community psychology. The core principles of community psychology - sense of community; citizen participation; collaboration and community strengths; respect for human diversity; and social justice - relate to CoPs.

A sense of community is described as individuals experiencing a sense of belonging (Kagan et al., 2011: 76) – being part of a group who share and work towards a common goal. Within a CoP, there is interdependence among members (Dalton et al., 2007: 24) as they share ideas, experiences and reflections, and assist each other towards their common goal. A sense of community is built when individuals start influencing the group

and the group influences the individuals. There is mutual benefit to both individual and the group.

The CoP, as a school based support network and self-help group for teacher learning, needs to develop a sense of community to function optimally. Dalton et al., (2007: 25) describes a sense of community as “a basis for community and social action as well as for social support and clinical work.” A sense of community is likely to be established when CoP members assist and support each other through the sharing of ideas, frustrations and possible solutions to problems. “The idea that communities should participate in defining the problems or issues that affect them, and in deciding how to resolve them, is fundamental to the community psychology perspective” (Dalton et al., 2001: 17). The teachers within the CoP rely on each other’s experiences and knowledge to address their challenges, rather than relying exclusively on an ‘outside expert’ (Dalton et al., 2001: 17). Each member’s teaching experience, unique abilities, participation in collective problem solving, and their contributions to the functioning of the CoP is valued and drawn upon. The functioning of the CoP depends on the participation and commitment of all members. Through collaboration - such as the pooling of individual strengths, resources, knowledge, experience and skills - members can jointly strive towards achieving their goals. Within the CoP, there is collaboration between the co-ordinator and members regarding goal setting and decision making (Dalton et al., 2001: 18).

For collaboration to succeed, it is imperative that members respect each other’s differences. Recognising and respecting that there are differences between members’ background, culture, race and religion is necessary. We need to realise that we relate to situations and events differently, as we have different frames of reference.

To promote social justice, learners’ diversity should be recognised and accommodated so as to encourage the inclusion of all learners in class and learning activities (Dalton et al., 2007: 27). In a class situation, learners who experience difficulty reading independently, may experience exclusion (Kagan et al., 2011: 85) when class activities

involve independent reading. Examples of these activities are independent reading and discussions on the reading, or answering questions posed via question papers. Attempts must be made to ensure that all learners are given opportunities to participate and succeed.

An aim of the CoP is for teachers to equip themselves with knowledge about reading strategies that could improve learners' access to learning. The social justice aspect of this project attempts to prevent learners from being excluded from the schooling system because of reading and learning backlogs and because of a shortage of 'specialist' teachers to provide the scholastic support they need. Teachers within the CoP strive to capacitate themselves to provide the support learners would previously have received from remedial teachers (where available). Teachers, working within the constructivist perspective of the new curriculum in South Africa, should strive to provide an inclusive classroom to all learners. This includes learners who experience barriers to reading.

## **2.10 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AT A SPECIAL SCHOOL**

### **2.10.1 Establishing a CoP**

At the school concerned, a community of practice (CoP) can be described as a group of educators who meet in order to address a common problem which impedes the learning of learners. The common problem identified at this special school is that many learners experience reading as a barrier to learning. The aim is for teachers to share strategies to enhance learners' reading and therefore their cross-curricular learning. In addition, the CoP aims to act as a support network for teachers as they attempt to improve their learners' cross-curricular reading and learning.

The CoP, initiated and co-ordinated by the support teacher (and the researcher), runs the risk of creating the assumption that the co-ordinator is the expert, thus; establishing a

hierarchy of power (Dalton et al., 2001: 18). Leadership is relative and can, at various times, be assumed by different people in different ways (Kagan et al., 2011: 53). Members were asked to share their ideas and classroom practices and present reading strategies to the CoP. This was done to create among members, an awareness of their knowledge, experiences and expertise and to encourage not only collaboration, but also shared or “distributed leadership” (Harris & Jones, 2010: 173,174). The aim was for autonomy and leadership to be shared among group members in an attempt to diffuse the hierarchy of power.

Each member of the CoP had the opportunity to influence the group, teach and learn from group members by sharing knowledge with others. In doing so, the interplay between individuals influencing this community of teachers became apparent. This influence of the individual and the community on each other is a principle of community psychology. Community psychology places a strong emphasis on context. In the socio-constructivist approaches to reading and learning, context is also highly valued. Learners’ backgrounds, way of life, and previous experiences are taken into account. A holistic approach to learning and teaching is considered.

Community psychology as well as PR emphasises collaborative participation, not mere attendance, by members (Mc Taggart, 1997: 28, 29). A CoP strives for this as well. A CoP can be said to be grounded in a community psychology perspective. The CoP aims to create a “sense of community” through focusing on a common goal; sharing frustrations, problems, ideas for potential solutions; and providing a support network where members are comfortable sharing their explorations and reflections as they move towards their common goal – improved learner achievement.

## **2.11 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, a means for professional teacher learning within a school-based learning community, a community of practice (CoP), was discussed. The link between a community of practice, a PR method, and a critical community psychology perspective was mentioned. The establishment of a CoP, concerned with the development of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school was briefly considered.

Chapter three, comprising a literature review on reading for cross-curricular learning, is discussed next.

## **CHAPTER 3. READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The literature review in the previous chapter discussed the value of a CoP as a practice that contributes to teachers' continuous professional learning. The domain of the CoP at the special school for this study was that of reading for learning across the curriculum. Chapter three therefore, undertakes a literature review on reading for cross-curricular learning.

### **3.2 READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING**

Reading is a crucial part of learning in every subject (Bharuthram, 2012: 205). Reading for cross-curricular learning involves the use of literacy strategies to develop learners' processing and understanding of subject content knowledge (Altieri, 2011: 4; Hurst, 2001: 692). Literacy skills, such as reading and writing, traditionally regarded as the responsibility of the language teacher (Klapwijk, 2015: 3), merge to serve as learning skills in content subjects (Altieri, 2011: 10 – 11).

Language is a tool used to construct meaning in all subjects (van Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009: 371). Learning and communication in content subjects takes place through speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing and presenting. Reading for cross-curricular learning therefore, integrates and jointly fosters literacy development and subject knowledge across all disciplines (Greenleaf, Litman, Hanson, Rosen, Boscardin, Herman, Schneider, Madden & Jones, 2011: 652).

### **3.3 THE RATIONALE BEHIND READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING**

Reading is intended to progress from learning to read to reading to learn (Mullis et al., 2004: 7) and is an essential requirement for scholastic attainment (Scott & Saalman, 2016: 1). Yet, learners who can successfully decode and pronounce most words correctly are not guaranteed to automatically process, understand and learn from informational text (Bharuthram, 2012: 205; Greenleaf, et al., 2011: 654). Poor understanding of informational texts adversely affects learners' academic achievement (Bharuthram, 2012: 205; van Staden & Bosker, 2014: 11).

In South Africa, the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) of the majority of learners is not their home language (van Staden, 2011: 11). The LoLT for most learners needs to be developed to enhance their chances of academic success (Lundgren, Scheckle & Zinn, 2015: 2; Klapwijk, 2012: 200; Meltzer & Hamann, 2006: 33).

Literacy achievement, which includes learners' comprehension of texts, is in crisis in South Africa (Bharuthram, 2012: 205; Klapwijk, 2012: 199; Green, Condy & Chigona, 2012: 319, 320; Nathanson, 2014: 127, 128; van Staden, 2011: 10; Kruizinga & Nathanson, 2010: 67; Condy, 2008: 610). Inadequate comprehension of informational text; the use of a language other than the learners' LoLT; teachers' inflexible teaching methods; and an obsession with the completion of the set curriculum, are likely contributors that impede learning. The learning process can, however, be enhanced when teachers adapt and/ or vary their teaching approaches by implementing various literacy strategies (van Staden, 2011: 18) or "comprehension instructional frameworks" (Klapwijk, 2012: 192). Comprehension instructional frameworks are strategies, such as the K-W-L strategy, ReQuest, or anticipation guides (Hurst, 2001: 692, 693) that help to facilitate the development of reading comprehension strategies that can support learners in better understanding written texts.

Discipline specific literacy involves understanding the specific jargon or academic vocabulary specific to certain subjects or disciplines and can differ in meaning to day-to-day language that is commonly used (Chandler-Olcott, 2017: 147). Discipline specific literacy can develop when reading strategies are integrated in all subjects. This occurs when teachers model reading strategies and support, guide or scaffold (van Staden & Bosker, 2014: 15) learners in developing these strategies, to meet the various literacy demands of each subject. This should be an on-going process, as the complexity, type and volume of texts learners need to contend with increases as they advance from the foundation to the intermediate and senior phases (Klapwijk, 2015: 3; van Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009: 272).

Learning within content subjects demands that learners engage in independent reading for learning and implement discipline specific literacy to do so. Learners are expected to learn from the discipline specific texts they read. Within the context of this special school, many learners experience reading as a barrier to learning. Subsequently, they experience reading as a barrier to independent learning in content subjects. I am of the opinion that if teachers implement reading strategies when engaging in the teaching of content subjects, it could stimulate learners' reading development and contribute to enhancing learners' learning in the particular subject.

Literacy development and reading comprehension strategies benefit learning in all subjects (Bharuthram, 2012: 205, 206; Klapwijk, 2012: 192). All teachers, not only the language teacher, should therefore, take responsibility for learners' reading and learning across the curriculum (Klapwijk, 2015: 3, 7; Meltzer & Hamann, 2006: 33). Teachers can promote cross-curricular learning by implementing reading strategies that ultimately became learning strategies in content subjects. In this study, the K-W-L strategy, the use of anticipation guides and the use of graphic organisers were but some of the reading strategies that were discussed in the CoP sessions.

Reading comprehension strategy instruction helps improve learners' understanding of texts, yet it is seldom implemented in the classrooms (Klapwijk, 2015: 1, 2; Klapwijk, 2012: 192). One reason could be that, as Klapwijk (2015: 3) explains, "[T]eachers do not seem to know how to teach comprehension". There is thus, a need for professional teacher development regarding reading for cross-curricular learning (Klapwijk, 2012: 200; Bharuthram, 2012: 212; Greenleaf et al., 2011: 649).

### **3.4 PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

Professional teacher development relates to "how teachers learn" (Korthagen, 2017: 387) with regard to enhancing their professional know-how about various matters concerned with teaching and learning. World-wide, there is the conviction that the implementation of continuous professional learning of all teachers, is essential to learners' scholastic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017: 291, 292).

The way in which teacher professional development is implemented, is changing. There is a movement from once-off training sessions to continuous, collaborative, institution-based learning, such as CoPs (Stewart, 2014: 28). In one-off training sessions, teachers are often the passive recipients of information that is often unrelated to their teaching contexts (Bradley, 2015: 8 – 9) and in which teachers' autonomy is not respected (Trust, Krutka & Carpenter, 2016: 16). In collaborative learning initiatives, teachers select their learning objectives, thereby enhancing their autonomy (Stewart, 2014: 28). The aim of professional teacher learner, that occurs on a continuous basis, is for teacher learning to lead to effective, quality teaching and as a result, to effective learner learning. One of the ways to contribute to improved teacher learning and teaching, as applied in Singapore, Australia, Canada and Finland, is to create opportunities for "teachers to learn with and from one another, both within and across schools and universities" (Darling-Hammond, 2017: 307).

Through my experience as a learning support teacher at a special school, I can identify with Brownell, Kiely, Haager, Boardman, Corbett, Aligina, Dingle and Urbach (2017: 143) who state that the majority of learners who experience a learning impairment, experience marked barriers to reading and writing, which disadvantages their academic achievement. These learners need support in developing their reading in order to understand and learn from the texts they encounter in the various subjects (Brownell et al., 2017: 143).

Teachers therefore, need to participate in collaborative professional development initiatives in order to “implement research-based instruction” (Brownell et al., 2017: 146 – 144) such as reading strategies or tools (Fisher & Frey, 2015: 524) to enhance reading for cross-curricular learning. Professional teacher learning is especially necessary in the context of a special school in which many learners experience reading as a barrier to learning. There is, however, a need for more studies on the professional development opportunities for teachers to learn more about reading for cross-curricular learning (Lundgren, Scheckle & Zinn, 2015: 2; Concannon-Gibney & McCarthy, 2012: 73, 74; Bharuthram, 2012: 209- 210; Klapwijk, 2012: 192; Greenleaf et al., 2011: 622; van Staden, 2011: 15; Meltzer & Hamann, 2006: 33).

Literacy development, that supports the transformational, constructivist perspective of the South African curriculum; focusing on developing learners’ understanding and critical thinking, should be an integral part of teaching in all subjects (van Staden & Bosker, 2014: 1; Bharuthram, 2012: 205; Greenleaf et al., 2011: 649). In this way, there is a greater chance for reading to translate into learning – for reading to equal learning. Teachers become key to learners’ success in this regard (Meltzer & Hamman, 2006: 33). Teacher professional development that addresses reading for cross-curricular learning, and is in line with the constructivist perspective of the South African curriculum, is needed.

### **3.5 THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING**

In South Africa, the change in government in 1994 heralded a move to a democratic society (Bharuthram, 2012: 206). This move also necessitated a change in the ideology on which education was previously based (van Staden & Bosker, 2011: 1). There was change from an education system that entrenched the apartheid ideology, to one that embraces democracy. Critical thinking skills are necessary in a democratic society. Although there have been various adaptations to the curriculum, it continues to foster democratic principles (RSA DoBE, 2011: 3 - 5) and a socio-constructivist perspective (Nel & Nel, 2013: 29; van Staden & Bosker, 2011: 1) to learning. The Department of Education implemented a balanced language programme (Kruizinga & Nathanson, 2010: 67) advocating text-based and communicative approaches to language development (RSA DoBE, 2011: 13). A description of these approaches show them to be based on the principles of a socio-constructivist perspective to education. It is a philosophy that enables the development of reading and learning across the curriculum (Weaver, 1994: 341).

Learners should thus, be encouraged to voice their thinking, to listen to and debate alternative opinions; within an atmosphere that respects diverse race, ability and culture (RSA DoBE: 2011: 4-5). It stands to reason that teaching and learning strategies used in South African classrooms, should support the socio-constructivist perspective that promotes the democratic ideology of the country. A whole language philosophy to learning encompasses such a perspective.

#### **3.5.1 A socio-constructivist philosophy: whole language**

In reviewing the literature, I found that the term 'whole language' was mainly used in the 1980's and early 1990's. When reading Weaver (1994), it is clear that it is a philosophy

that encourages the infusion of literacy development and content subject knowledge, and has much in common with the socio-constructivist philosophy. I found that understanding the move to the whole language approach provides a means of applying the socio-constructivist philosophy when developing reading for cross-curricular learning. For this reason, literature on the whole language approach, which is mainly from the 1980's and early 1990's, is referred to in this study.

There are different definitions of the whole language approach. It is described as “a grass-roots movement” (Goodman, 1989: 115; Pearson, 1989: 235; Watson, 1989: 128) that is constantly evolving (Watson, 1989: 131), becoming, not only a theory of language, but also a theory of learning (Harste, 1989: 244, 246). The whole language approach is viewed as a philosophy based on the constructivist perspective that integrates and promotes reading and learning across the curriculum (Bergeron, 1990: 301 – 302; McCaslin, 1989: 226; Weaver, 1994: 58). The following description of whole language by Bergeson (1990: 319) is favoured and equated to a socio-constructivist perspective in this study:

*Whole language is a concept that embodies both a philosophy of language development as well as the instructional approaches embedded within, and supportive of, that philosophy. This concept includes the use of real literature and writing in the context of meaningful, functional, and cooperative experiences in order to develop within students' motivation and interest in the process of learning.*

Goodman (1989: 114); Harste (1989: 245; 246; 248) and Weaver (1994: 59) describe whole language as a learner-centred philosophy. Learners' active participation in the learning experience and process is fostered. Learning is a social process which is developed and promoted through interaction with others in the learning community.

Teachers who employ a socio-constructivist philosophy, regard learners as being in the process of continually and progressively developing their learning. Learners are not expected to perform certain tasks at a set age or grade level (Weaver, 1994: 88). Teachers focus on what learners are able to do and support and guide them to build on that. This

philosophy, which advocates the transformational model of education (Weaver, 1994: 92), integrates the sub-skills of a language such as “listening and speaking; reading and viewing; writing and presenting; and language structures and conventions” (RSA DoE, 2011: 13). Reading and writing are mechanisms for cross-curricular learning (Harste, 1989: 244, 245; Pearson, 1989: 236) and can be developed in all interactions with learners. In socio-constructivist classrooms, each class of learners and their teacher can be regarded as a learning community in which teachers and learners learn through the process of collaboration (Goodman, 1989: 114; Harste, 1989: 247). The whole language philosophy encapsulates the principles of the constructivist perspective to teaching and learning (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002: 107 – 117) and supports democracy (Harste, 1989: 245, 246, 248).

Within a socio-constructivist philosophy, literacy is developed across the curriculum in contrast to ‘teaching reading’ as a separate sub-skill. Weaver (1994: 86-87) describes the difference between the teaching of reading and the development of reading as follows:

*[T]here is a vast difference between those who advocate traditional instruction in reading skills and those who advocate teaching designed to further children’s emergent literacy, regardless of where they are in their reading development or what their grade placement might be. Those who adopt the emergent literacy perspective frequently think of themselves as whole language educators [socio-constructivist educators].*

“Whole language educators think...about...guiding and supporting students in developing as independent readers, writers and learners” (Weaver, 1994: 59). Therefore, teachers who apply the constructivist perspective are of the opinion that they should guide learners in developing as independent readers, writers and learners. Reading is not regarded as a once-off process that is completed at the end of the foundation phase. The curriculum outcomes of the behaviourist, transmission model of teaching reading differ

from those of the constructivist, transformational model of developing learners' reading (or more encompassing, literacy) and learning.

In South Africa, the school day is divided into separate periods of time, with each period being allocated to a specific subject. A subject such as English, is further sub-divided into the components Reading, Comprehension, Writing, Spelling and Speaking, with a strong emphasis on rote learning (Condy, 2008: 611). These compartmentalised sub-divisions are commonly regarded to be the exclusive domain of the language teacher (Klapwijk, 2015: 1, 3). Reading instruction is based on the belief that phonics instruction is a method of reading instruction and not one of many cueing systems to reading (Weaver, 1998: 302, 309). Phonics, as a means of reading instruction, involves: the teaching and repetitive drilling of isolated "letter/sound correspondences"; placing a high value on decoding; the accurate pronunciation of words; and the belief that learners will automatically derive meaning from the individual words when these are correctly pronounced and strung together (Weaver, 1994: 50–52; Condy, 2008: 611). Learners are regarded as 'good readers' when they pronounce words correctly and fluently. Comprehension is regarded as separate to reading, thus, removing the main purpose of reading, which is to make meaning.

Traditionally, it is expected that the language teacher is responsible for the components of a language such as reading and writing (Klapwijk, 2015: 1, 3). It is assumed that once these skills are learnt, they will automatically transfer to other content subjects. Content subject teachers are therefore, only responsible for delivering the content within subjects.

Schooling in South Africa spans a period of thirteen years which is divided into four phases, namely the foundation phase, intermediate phase, senior phase and further education and training phase. The first four years (grades R – 3) are referred to as the foundation phase; years five to seven (grades 4 – 6) as the intermediate phase, years eight to ten (grade 7 – 9) as the senior phase and years 11 – 13 as the further education

and training phase. In the intermediate and senior phases, the content subjects are often presented by different teachers. In the senior phase especially, each teacher is regarded as an 'expert' in a particular discipline. Traditionally, teaching, or dispensing of the content as laid out in the curriculum (Weaver, 1998: 298), is the role of the content subject teachers. Rote learning is encouraged when high marks are assigned to learners who reproduce, practically verbatim, the content that was given to them to "learn". Marks are, in fact, given for good memory (Weaver, 1998: 298) and not necessarily because the learners have learnt something. Learners are expected to passively regurgitate what they were told. The focus is not on critical thinking or encouraging learners to think about or debate what they are exposed to. In South Africa, this would have suited the political situation of the past. The political status quo and inequality was entrenched more easily in this way (Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee, 2007: 368).

In the traditional model, each teacher focuses exclusively on their subject. The language teacher is responsible for language only, the mathematics teacher for mathematics only and so on. Language is not used to simultaneously promote the learning of content and the development of a language. Condy (2008: 611) states that in this scenario, "[T]he role of language in learning and language development had never been considered."

### **3.5.2 A socio-constructivist philosophy, a community of practice and a critical community psychology perspective**

In socio-constructivist classrooms, teachers do not regard themselves as the experts and ultimate authority figures. Teachers and learners learn with and from each other (Goodman, 1989: 114; Harste, 1989: 247), and no single person within the group is regarded as an expert or specialist having superior knowledge to others (Harste, 1989: 249). This resonates with what characteristically occurs in a CoP and within a community psychology perspective. Therefore, a CoP, driven by a critical community psychology perspective, encompasses a constructivist perspective to education. Teachers in the CoP can explore reading and learning strategies based on a socio-constructivist perspective.

The CoP has the potential to enact a socio-constructivist and critical community psychology perspective. This is because its aim is to provide “professional development” through “collegial support” (Goodman, 1989: 122).

The values of community psychology, of the constructivist philosophy, and of an effective CoP, are intertwined. The following diagram illustrates that respect; collaboration; shared leadership; giving people a voice; ownership of shared, context specific learning; and a sense of community, are commonly valued in critical community psychology, in a community of practice, and in a socio-constructivist philosophy.

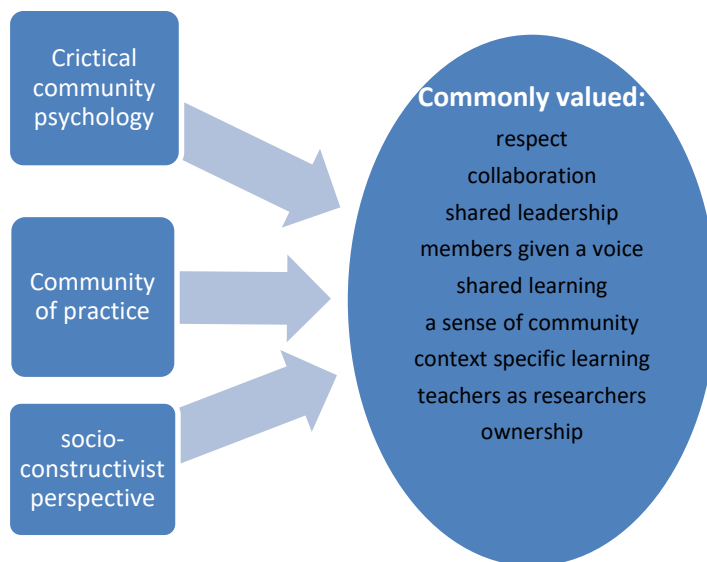


Figure 2: The correlation between a CoP, a socio-constructivist perspective and critical community psychology

The diagram illustrates the link and compatibility between this study’s theoretical perspective (critical community psychology) and a CoP that addresses the use of a socio-constructivist strategies to promote reading for cross-curricular learning. The values illustrated in this diagram are necessary when teachers rally to provide learners with the necessary level of learning support they require within a special school.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

A literature review related to reading for cross-curricular learning was made in chapter three. The need for developing learners' reading for cross-curricular learning was mentioned. The link between reading strategies based on a socio-constructivist perspective; a CoP and the values of critical community psychology was shown.

Chapter four explains the design of this research undertaking. It provides a reminder of the research problem and the aim of the study. The context in which the study was conducted is provided. The research methodology, research method, ontology and epistemology, theoretical framework and the research process is explained.

## CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Research design pertains to the way in which the research is to be carried out and provides information on the theoretical basis of the research, the participants, data collection and data analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 175; Nieuwenhuis, 2016: 72). Durrheim (1993: 33 – 34) depicts research design as a framework that includes the “purpose”; “context”; “paradigm” and “techniques” of a study. I selected to base my research design on Durrheim’s framework of research design as it provides a structured layout with which to explain the way in which the study was conducted. I thus discuss the research design in terms of the four aspects of Durrheim’s framework.

The first aspect, purpose, relates to the aim of the research. In this study, the aim was to explore the use of a CoP as a means of teacher professional learning in relation to reading for cross-curricular learning. The second aspect refers to the context, pertains to the institution in which the study occurred and the research participants. Under the aspect, paradigm, I discuss qualitative research as the research methodology, participatory and action research as the research method, the ontology and epistemology of the study, and critical community psychology as the theoretical framework guiding this study. The last aspect, techniques, alludes to the way in which the research unfolded, the way in which the data was collected and the way in which the data was analysed.

I selected to use Durrheim’s framework research design as I found it a suitable means to coherently structure and report on the way in which I conducted the research. Durrheim’s framework (1999: 33-34) and the way in which it relates to this study, is illustrated in figure 3.

Table 2: Outline of the research design

<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>The research problem and the aim of the study.</p>	<p><b>Context</b></p> <p>The school in which the research was conducted.</p> <p>The participants.</p> <p>Myself, the researcher as participant.</p>
<p><b>Paradigm</b></p> <p>Research methodology: qualitative research.</p> <p>Research Method: An adaptation of participatory and action research.</p> <p>Ontology and epistemology.</p> <p>Theoretical framework: critical community psychology</p>	<p><b>Techniques</b></p> <p>Research process.</p> <p>Data collection techniques.</p> <p>Data analysis techniques.</p>

## 4.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND THE AIM OF THE STUDY

When I embarked on this study, I had been working at the special school, as the learning support teacher in the intermediate phase, for a period of nine years. The research problem and questions arose from the context in which I was teaching.

Beyond the foundation phase, learners are expected to use reading as a means of learning in all subjects (Mullis et al., 2004:7). Intermediate and senior phase teachers regularly requested that I assist their learners who were experiencing difficulties with reading independently. Instead of working directly with the learners, my rationale was that, possibly, more learners could be engaged in the learning process if their teachers integrated reading for cross-curricular learning in all subjects. The challenge was thus, finding a way for teachers to support learners in developing reading for cross-curricular learning. My position as a learning support teacher at a special school, thus, influenced my choice of research site as well as the topic for this study. I chose to explore the use of

a community of practice approach for teachers' professional learning about reading for cross-curricular learning.

The purpose of this study was thus, to explore the use of a Community of Practice, as a school-based form of teacher professional learning and support, and the use of constructivist reading strategies for cross-curricular learning at a special school. This relates to the identified problem, namely; the lack of accessible, school-based forms of professional development initiatives that support teachers in specifically developing learners' reading for cross-curricular learning. The aim of the CoP was for teachers to share strategies to enhance learners' reading for cross-curricular learning, and to provide a school-based support network for teachers attempting to improve their learners' reading and learning.

### **4.3 CONTEXT**

The history and context of the study site and the participants are imperative in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016: 266). Knowledge of the school context has the potential to promote understanding of particular situations and responses within the situations (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999: 124 – 125). Contextual factors, such as the history of the institution in which the research is conducted, where participants received their initial teacher training, and the researcher's early teaching career is included in the description of the context.

#### **4.3.1 The school context**

The special school in which this research was conducted, originally catered only for white learners who experienced mainly physical disabilities. A number of learners experiencing learning difficulties were also catered for. The school was then well-resourced with a staffed sick-bay, a doctor, nursing sisters, physiotherapists, occupational therapists,

speech therapists, psychologists, remedial teachers and 'regular, mainstream' teachers. The classroom instruction would be the same as it would be in a mainstream school.

Learners who experienced any challenges in learning, were referred to remedial teachers. The class teacher was thus not responsible for providing learning support to these learners. This was the task of the "expert". The medical-deficit model was fully functional. According to law, all teachers, therapists and medical staff employed, were white. Teachers initial teacher training were likely to have been in white tertiary institutions which based teacher training on Fundamental Pedagogics (Msila, 1997: 148; Venter, 1997: 58).

Post 1994 saw changes within South African schools. The school was open to learners of all races. Gradually, learners experiencing various barriers to learning, were admitted to the school. The number of "specialists", like remedial teachers were reduced. With the movement from the medical –deficit model to a socio-constructivist model, class teachers should be the first level of support for learners. However, it does not appear as if the necessary professional learning for teachers accompanied this move. The result was that some teachers at the school, still expected an 'expert', from outside the school, to 'fix' learners (Swart & Pettipher, 2016: 6-7) who experience learning difficulties.

At the time of this study, the school catered for learners experiencing various barriers to learning such as physical impairments, learning impairments, and health impairments. The staff complement had changed. Teachers from different races, including myself, were employed at the school. The position of principal has been held by people of diverse race.

I was the learning support teacher working in the intermediate phase. The number of learners who require support in literacy and/or numeracy development far out-weigh the number of learners who receive the individual or small group support. A pull-out

system is currently in place, where individual or small groups (up to four learners) are withdrawn from their regular class to attend the learning support class. As a result, those whose literacy and/or numeracy support needs are met, are restricted to the time slots available on the timetable of the support teacher. Largely, the expectation is still that the learning support teacher should be responsible for the learning support needs of learners experiencing challenges in literacy and numeracy.

Currently, the majority of learners who attend this school, experience learning difficulties (conversation with school principal). It will be necessary for teachers to make various adaptations to instruction in order to facilitate all learners' learning. Continuous professional development is essential in this scenario.

### **4.3.2 Participants**

Teachers from the school, the critical monitors and myself were the participants in this study. Six teachers – one from the Further Education and Training and Senior Phases and five from the Intermediate Phase - chose to be involved in the study. Participants responded to an invitation, extended to all staff members from myself, to voluntarily join a CoP on reading for learning. The teachers who became participants in this research undertaking, selected to do so on a voluntary basis. As the teachers were fellow colleagues working within the same institution, the sampling method can be described as convenience sampling (Maree & Pietersen, 2016: 197).

During discussions with teachers during the pre-entry phase of this research, teachers were unanimous that learners struggled to use reading as a vehicle to learning at school.

For me, it was important that the strategies selected for discussion and experimentation, be consistent with our new curriculum. The new curriculum has as its philosophical foundation, a constructivist perspective based on a democratic ideology (Killen, 2015: 2).

The reading and learning strategies and instructional approaches explored, were to be based on a constructivist perspective.

I requested that participants provide information about their initial teacher training and development. This was done to get a sense of the theoretical perspective their initial teacher training would likely have been grounded in. The table below indicates the information gathered with regards to the participants' initial teacher training. It looks at the institutions they attended, the year in which their initial training was completed, their areas of specialisation, their total number of years in the teaching profession, their experience teaching at an ordinary and special school, and whether they received any training in special education. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identify of the participants.

**Table 3: Participant information on initial teacher training**

Participant	Initial teacher training	initial training completed	Specialised in	Total years teaching	Teaching experience at special school	Teaching experience at ordinary school	Formal training in special needs/inclusive / support/remedial
Liena	Onderwyskollege Bloemfontein	1978	Special Class, Afrikaans, Drama	38	19	19 (special class)	Diploma
Wllemien	Paarl training college	1972	Art, Geography	43	28	15	No
Victoria	Wellington Onderwyskollege	1978	Music, History	34	29	5	No
Beatrice	University of Western Cape	1994	Language, psychology	22	18	4	No
Sarah	Wellington Onderwyskollege	1978	Afrikaans, Geography	29	21	8	Yes certificate in special needs
Carol	Onderwyskollege Pretoria	1983	Skool-biblioteekwese	33	25	8	No

Except for one, all participants received their initial teacher training at Afrikaans institutions during the 1970s and early 1980s in South Africa. It is therefore, likely that their initial teacher training was entrenched in fundamental pedagogics and Christian National Education (Venter, 1997: 58; Higgs, 1998: 190; Cross, 1986: 186).

### 4.3.3 Critical monitors as participants

The school principal, a learning support specialist from the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU), and a lecturer from the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE), were approached to be critical monitors in this study. The principal of the special school in which the study was conducted, was asked to be a critical monitor as he had shown an enthusiastic interest in the study from the time that I had requested permission to conduct the study. As the principal of the school, he also had an in-depth knowledge of the contextual factors that influenced both learners' learning and teachers' professional learning at the school. The learning support specialist was assigned to this special school as the member of the IEU. She had vast experience in providing learning support to both learners and teachers. I felt that her inputs would be valuable with regard to the usefulness of a CoP as a means of providing professional learning to teachers on the topic of reading across the curriculum. The critical monitor from the NIHE/SPU has vast experience in teaching and also with the development of pre-service teachers. His inputs with regard to a CoP as a means of teacher professional learning would be of value.

Critical monitors are described as a validation group (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005: 16), whose role is to provide critical and constructive feedback on their experience of the CoP sessions as a means of professional teacher learning. Their task was to participate in the CoP sessions, providing their inputs and opinions. They were also to participate in a meeting at the end of the research. In this meeting they would provide their views on the functioning of the CoP as a means of professional development, on the use of strategies to promote reading for cross-curricular reading, and to discuss the findings of the research.

#### **4.3.4 Researcher as participant**

I had the role of researcher, CoP co-ordinator and most importantly, that of a self-reflective learner (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011:124; Lichtman, 2006: 18) in this qualitative study. I did not regard myself as an “objective observer” (Vargo-Dobai, 2012: 2), but as a co-participant in the research undertaking. As such, I voiced my views and was influenced by the perspectives voiced by fellow participants or “co-researchers” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 47; Miles & Huberman, 1994: 8).

##### **4.3.4.1 Personal History**

I was oppressed by the autonomous top down structure within the school set-up at the beginning of my teaching career. The principal used the ‘power’ of his position to humiliate teachers who were new-comers to the profession – possibly yearning for the perceived status that comes with being a school principal and/or reflective of the principal’s need to show his authority in a system in which he was made to feel inferior by those in leadership positions in an apartheid system. I developed a deep resentment for the unfair treatment that I, along with other young teachers at the start of our teaching career, had to endure for the time that this principal ‘reigned’. I developed a disdain for the perceived status that was implied by positions of leadership – positions in which people acted as if respect was owed to them due to the post they held; disdain for people in leadership positions who did not lead and serve others, but expected to be served by those they viewed as inferior to them; disdain for those in leadership positions who wanted others to simply follow directives, even when those directives were clearly wrong. Negative experiences like these, instilled in me the belief that, within the school context, all teachers’ views, ideas, and experiences should be listened to and valued. I therefore, shy away from the notion of an all knowing expert on a particular topic or subject. I believe that we can learn from each other, and welcome the view of collaboratively working towards solutions to challenges. I believe that this collaboration

should occur within an environment in which democratic principles are upheld, and power relations are not wielded in a way that makes others feel inferior or unworthy.

My beliefs and world view are constructed from factors such as my up-bringing and past experiences – which have influenced the “philosophical assumptions” (Cresswell & Poth, 2018: 17 – 19) that I bring to this study. My humanness thus, did not allow me to be objective and bias-free (Creswell, 2014: 37). My subjectivity inevitably influenced my selection of the approach to this research. I chose to conduct this qualitative study within the theoretical framework of critical community psychology, and to apply the principles of Participatory Research and aspects of Action Research as the research method.

#### **4.4 PARADIGM**

Post-modernism is the research paradigm concerned with critical theory and the issues of power and politics which focuses on diminishing unequal power relations and dismantling oppressive practices (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 51; McGregor & Murnane, 2010: 4; Macloed, 2009; Henning, 2004: 22). The core values of critical community psychology align to the principles of inclusion and inclusive education – such as social justice, respect for diversity, collaborative participation of community members who use their strengths to find solutions to challenges (Hart & Akhurst, 2016: 4; Nel, Lazarus & Daniels, 2010: S18-S19). Critical community psychology, as the theoretical framework of this study, is thus commensurate with the post-modernism paradigm. I selected a qualitative research approach because it is well suited to trying to understand the interactions between people and their social settings (Niewenhuis, 2016: 53; Niewenhuis, 2007: 51). Participatory research calls for the engagement of participants in the research process and encourages participants to research their own practices (cf. 2.6.3). Participatory research emphasizes research conducted *with* and not *on* people (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018:56). The exploration of the use of a CoP for teachers to learn about reading for cross- curricular learning, is dependent on participants’ engagement in CoP sessions. Participatory research is thus a suited research method in

this study. There is a strong link between the characteristics of CoPs and the tenets of critical community psychology (Lawthom, 2011: 156 – 157). This qualitative research underpinned by critical community psychology and utilizing participatory research, is located within critical theory and the research paradigm of post-modernism.

#### **4.4.1 Methodology: Qualitative research**

Qualitative research (Q.R.) is the methodology used in this research undertaking. Qualitative research is “value laden” and subjective in nature (Lichtman, 2006: 17; Miles & Huberman, 1994: 2). It is a method of inquiry that aims to promote the understanding of participants’ perspectives related to daily happenings and their lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 3, 9, 11; Flick, von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004: 3). It is constructed from the participants’ experiences, perceptions, interpretations and understandings of their world (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:5; Lichtman, 2006: 8, 11,16; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 134 - 135). Q.R. is therefore, a “process of inquiry” that makes use of participants’ subjective perspectives on a topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 21). In this study, participants participated in the process of inquiring into reading strategies to develop learners’ cross-curricular reading and learning. The use of a CoP as a vehicle for driving this inquiry process, was also explored. It was hoped that, through the use of the CoP sessions in focus group interviews, this research project would be practical, useful, reflective and action-directed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 21).

Participants were regarded as co-participants in this research undertaking. Qualitative research was likely to take the form of “reflexivity” as “the research remain[ed] in an asking or questioning stance” (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 8). The reason for this was that, the research occurred through a series of CoP sessions. During the CoPs, participants reflected on their use of strategies to develop reading for cross-curricular learning. This was likely to result in a dynamic cyclical and reflexive process as different or new challenges would be encountered in the context of teaching and learning. The research method utilised principles of participatory research.

## 4.4.2 Method: Participatory Research

### 4.4.2.1 Participatory Research (PR)

Participatory research (PR), used in this study, is a form of inquiry that encourages participants to do research into their own practice, and promotes research with and not on, participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 3, 21). I therefore, did not regard myself as the “expert” in the group (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 47), but as a co-participant learning from fellow participants. I adopted participatory research for this study as I hoped that the process would be practical and useful to participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 21) and contribute towards enhancing learners’ reading for learning in all subjects. According to Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011: 117), participants take “action” and then reflect on the “outcome of the inquiry process”. In this study, participants selected the reading strategies they would explore (“action”), and reflected on their usefulness in their practice (“outcomes of the inquiry process”). The CoP attempted to create an atmosphere in which the sharing of knowledge depended on all participants - both me, as the researcher, and fellow participants.

Brown and Tandon (1983: 279, 281) describe PR as research that is situated within a particular community, where community members are co-researchers who seek “useful knowledge” as possible solutions to problems. Participatory research thus, involves developing a partnership with the community within which the research is to be conducted and engaging members in addressing the challenges they experience (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 47; Bowd, Özerdem & Kassa, 2010: 2, 4). There are various forms of participatory research. The commonality though, is that community members should gain from their involvement in the research (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1667, 1669). “The most important distinctions (between participatory and conventional research) centre on how and by whom is the research question formulated and by and for whom are research findings used” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1668).

In participatory research, the research questions are usually posed by the research participants. In this research undertaking, however, I formulated the research questions as this undertaking is a thesis for a PhD study. It thus, differs from orthodox participatory research in this regard. The main research question, however, relates to a problem commonly experienced by the participants. During discussions with teachers during the pre-entry phase of this research, teachers were unanimous that learners struggled to use reading as a vehicle for learning at school. Implementing reading strategies would contribute to developing learners' reading for cross-curricular learning.

Participatory research (PR) complements the principles of critical community psychology, social justice and the democratisation of professional learning among teachers.

#### **4.4.3 Ontology and Epistemology**

This research is subjective as it is influenced by the “philosophical assumptions” that participants and I brought to the study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018: 17 – 19). Therefore, as the researcher, my view of reality (ontology) and how I come to know reality (epistemology) influenced the procedures or methodology that I selected to use in this study. I acknowledge that my subjectivity and the influences of my past experiences and beliefs (my biases) inevitably influenced my interactions with members of the CoP, the methods of data collection, as well as the methods of data analysis (Cresswell & Poth, 2018: 33). Saldana (2011: 82) describes epistemology as “a theory of knowledge construction based on the researcher’s worldview – how his or her lens on the world and of knowing it filter the perception and interpretation of it.”

My belief is that, for inclusive education practices to materialise, class teachers should provide the first level of support to learners experiencing barriers to learning. Reading, especially beyond the foundation phase, influences learning in all subjects. In a context

in which learners experience reading as a barrier to learning, class teachers should use in-class support strategies to develop learners' reading for cross-curricular learning.

I believe that learners' learning can benefit if their teachers are able to assist them in developing reading strategies that can positively influence their learning. This study therefore, included a practical aspect which participants would find useful to implement in their teaching and learning contexts. This should allow participants to take action in supporting learners' reading for cross-curricular learning.

The study's epistemology is based on the constructivist philosophy. The study incorporated participation of, and action from, participants. This fed into the research method which involved the principles of participatory and action research. It also reflected the theoretical framework of community psychology. Participants were meant to learn with and from each other. Knowledge was thus, built through the influences of interacting with fellow colleagues within the CoP. The backgrounds and past experiences of participants contributed to and influenced the various perspectives that each participant brought.

#### **4.4.4 Theoretical Framework**

Participatory research, within the framework of community psychology, is research in which community members are involved; benefit from their involvement into the inquiry; are not regarded as subjects on which research is conducted; judge the effectiveness of an intervention or programme; and also provide their views on how the programme can be adapted to be more effective (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2007: 9).

Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007: 10 – 11) stress that it is essential to consider context when conducting research within the framework of community psychology. The

reason is that there is a constant interplay between people and the context of a situation, with each influencing the other.

Dalton et al. (2007: 15; 17) describe a community as a group of people who meet in order to work towards a common objective. The group of teachers who meet on a regular basis with the aim of developing learners' reading for cross-curricular learning can therefore, be considered a community. Dalton et al. (2007: 15) define community psychology as follows:

*Community psychology concerns the relationships of individuals with communities and societies. By integrating research with action, it seeks to understand and enhance quality of life for individuals, communities, and societies. Community psychology is guided by its core values of individual and family wellness, sense of community, respect for human diversity, social justice, citizen participation, collaboration and community strengths, and empirical grounding. These core values relate strongly to the principles of inclusive education.*

This research undertaking was meant to be pragmatic and useful to the participants. It is meant to provide participants with a choice of practical options from which to select and explore ways in which to develop their learners' reading for cross-curricular learning.

The CoP aims to adopt a "bottom-up" approach to professional teacher learning which provides participants with a say in matters that affect them – with a say in the way in which participants attempt to achieve their aim of developing learners' reading for learning (Dalton et al., 2007: 52). This approach diminishes the need for "someone else to tell" (Timperley, 2011: 14), and enhances participants' decision making 'power'. The "strengths of the community" are acknowledged through a bottom-up approach to professional learning (Dalton et al., 2007: 52). The researcher and co-participants are

jointly involved when they “control”, “plan and implement research” (Dalton et al., 2007: 53; 57).

## **4.5 THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

I arranged a meeting with the principal to request permission to conduct the study at the school. I informed him about the topic I wished to research, and provided him with written information about CoPs. After an enthusiastic response from the principal, I obtained the necessary written consent from the Department of Education and the principal of the school. The principal then introduced the idea of the CoP to the staff during a staff meeting. I set a date for interested participants to attend an information session about the project.

During this information session, potential participants were informed about the reason for the research, the intended research plan, and conditions for participation. These conditions included ethical issues, such as giving written consent for voluntary participation, the right to confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Teachers who wished to participate in this study signed written consent forms. Two workshop sessions were held to discuss and explain the theoretical background regarding a constructivist approach to inclusive teaching and learning, and to introduce a few reading strategies for cross-curricular learning.

The CoP sessions were to take place at least once per quarter. The ‘To GROW’ technique (Downey, 2000, as cited in Rhodes, et al., 2004: 5) was used as a means of working through the sessions. During each CoP session, participants who experimented with a particular strategy, would report back to the CoP members. Participants would reflect on the outcomes of the strategies during CoP sessions. If the outcome was not ideal, the CoP member could inquire whether other members could provide alternatives or modifications to the strategy. The teacher then selected the adapted or alternative

strategy they wished to implement and monitored the outcome. In this way, teachers would be performing inquiry “into their own practice” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 45). This cycle was to continue for the duration of the research period, which was two years.

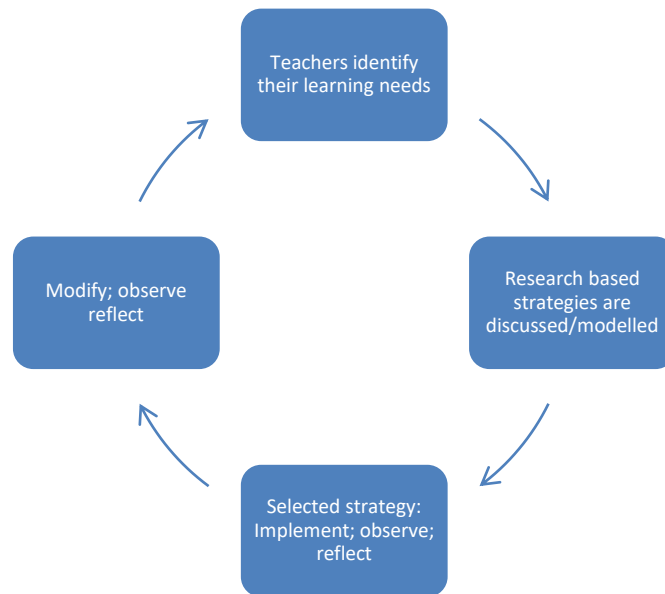


Figure 3: The CoP process over a two-year period

#### 4.5.1 Data collection

In qualitative research, data is generally obtained from interviews so as to gain direct responses and views from participants (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011: 123; Lichtman, 2006: 16, 21; Miles & Huberman, 1994: 9) so as to “build explanations ...based on what is discovered” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:5). Information gained from participants’ perceptions and understandings of a topic via interviews, can be a useful source of data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 146). A questionnaire with open-ended questions is another suitable means of gathering personal viewpoints from a small group of participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 474 - 475), such as in this study.

The data was collected through a series of six CoP sessions which also served as focus group discussions. Participants reflected and provided feedback on their use of strategies

to develop reading for cross-curricular learning during the CoP sessions and by completing an open-ended questionnaire (Annexure I). They also voiced their concerns about difficulties encountered in their teaching and learning contexts. Their views and reflections on their exploration of reading strategies for cross-curricular learning, and the use of a CoP-approach to teacher learning, were captured using the CoP sessions as focus group discussions. The series of CoP sessions resulted in a dynamic, cyclical and reflexive process as different or new challenges were encountered by participants in their teaching and learning contexts. These were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the permission of the participants. In this way, the focus group, as a means of data collection, complemented the CoP sessions as they both strove for transformation through democratic principles (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011: 546).

A seventh focus group discussion was held with the critical monitors. During the previous CoP sessions, the critical monitors observed the proceedings and added to the conversations and discussions. During these sessions, they did not, however, critique the outcomes of the CoP sessions. The specific aim of the focus group with the critical monitors was for them to voice their views on the outcome of the CoP-approach to professional teacher development. This focus group discussion was also digitally recorded with the consent of the critical monitors.

All recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, in order to “maintain fidelity to the participants’ experiences, words, and genuine articulation of their experiences” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016: 241). I checked the transcripts against the audio recordings for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88). The transcripts were repeatedly read in order to familiarise with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 84, 87). Thoughts, ideas and possible themes that occurred to me during the re-reading, were handwritten on the transcripts. In this way, initial themes were identified within the data.

The “block and file approach” (Grbich, 2013: 62-63) was then used to record responses in tabular form, so as not to fragment the responses or data at this stage. This approach

entailed some practical steps. The tables were labelled using themes distilled during the readings of the transcripts. Excerpts from the transcripts were then placed in the table under the appropriate theme. The block and file approach was applied to each transcript. A series of themes and sub-themes thus, emerged. The themes were then arranged into categories (Dey, 1993: 99).

In addition to the focus group discussions, data was also collected using the researcher's journal, and from open-ended questions (Annexure I) related to participants' experiences of the CoP sessions.

#### **4.5.2 Data Analysis**

Data analysis comprises the interaction and inter-relatedness of reducing, displaying and drawing conclusions from the collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 10). Thematic Analysis was the method of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 78) used in this research undertaking. After making verbatim transcriptions of the focus group discussions, I checked the accuracy of the transcriptions against the audio recordings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016: 241; Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88). I repeatedly read the transcriptions to familiarise myself with the data in order to interpret and develop initial codes and then possible themes from the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87). The initial codes were handwritten on the transcriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87).

I used the "block and file approach" (Grbich, 2013: 62-63) to record and display participants' responses in tabular form, without fragmenting their responses. This approach entailed the following practical steps: the initial themes, derived from the readings of the transcripts, were used as headings in tabular form; the table of themes, distilled from the transcripts, formed a graphic display of the data; and excerpts from the transcripts were placed in the table under the appropriate themes. The block and file approach was applied to the transcript of each focus group interview. A series of themes

and sub-themes emerged. The themes were arranged into various categories (Dey, 1993: 99) which facilitated the drawing of “preliminary conclusions” (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 12) from the collected data. As described by Miles and Huberman (1994: 12), there was a continuous interplay and movement between data collection, data reduction, data display, and the drawing of conclusions – all of which contributed to the analysis of the data.

Marshall and Rossman (2016: 4,5) refer to the “do-ability” of the research project. This refers to whether or not the project is feasible. Three factors in particular contributed to the feasibility of this study. Firstly, as the researcher, and a support teacher at the institution, I not only had access to the setting, but was also privy to participants’ calls for assistance in developing intermediate and senior phase learners’ competence in independent reading and learning. Secondly, the project had the backing of the principal from the beginning. The most important factor though, was that a group of teachers were willing to participate in the project, despite their taxing individual workloads.

## **4.6 CONCLUSION**

In chapter four, the layout of the research was provided. This layout was structured according to Durrheim’s research design framework that incorporates the “purpose”; “context”; “paradigm” and “techniques” (Durrheim 1999: 33-34). The discussion in this chapter thus, addressed: the research problem and aim of the study (purpose); contextual factors related to the institution where the research was conducted; the participants (including the critical monitors and myself as researcher); the research methodology; research method; theoretical framework; ontology and epistemology; and the way in which the research unfolded over a period of two years. Techniques for data collection and data analysis were also discussed. The findings, based on the analysed data, are reported in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5. REPORT OF FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The CoP had run for a period of two years. Data were gathered from the following sources: my research journal in which observations and reflections were recorded; open ended questionnaires at the end of some of the initial information sessions; background information about participants' pre-service training; and the transcriptions of CoP sessions which served as focus group discussions. The aim of this chapter is to report on the findings. These findings are based on the data which were thematically analysed.

Themes were distilled from the data, analysed, interpreted and reported on, in an attempt to respond to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016: 221; Braun & Clarke, 2006: 89). These research questions guided the thematic analysis:

1. How do teachers' underlying teaching philosophy influence their implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school?
2. Which factors contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP at a special school?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school?
5. What are teachers' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school?

The thematic analysis led to the formulation of four categories of themes. These were CoP, Professional Learning Needs, Strategy Implementation and Underlying Philosophy. The themes were then linked to the research questions to which they related (Ravitch & Carl, 2016: 221). The categories, themes, sub-themes and the research questions they related to, are listed in the table below and are subsequently reported on.

**Table 4: Categories, themes, sub-themes and the research questions**

CATEGORIES	CoP	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS	STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION	UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY
THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	<p><b>Establish CoP</b></p> <p>Support of principal Introducing project Naming CoP Part of a study/benefit to teachers/school Attitude to transformation</p> <p><b>Sustain CoP</b></p> <p>Time Recognition: Professional Development Participant attitude</p>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Independent reading Learning from reading Interpreting questions</p>	<p><b>Strategies Shared:</b> Research based: Suggested, Demonstrated, discussed (listed in separate table) Teachers' own strategies shared (ownership)</p>	<p><b>Behaviourist medical-deficit theory</b></p> <p>Pre-service teacher training (fundamental pedagogics) View of reading Teaching methods Compartmentalised teaching View of learner Responsibility: support provision Terminology used</p>
	<p><b>Value and advantages of the CoP</b></p> <p>Teachers' learning needs Levels of participation Emotions/attitude Collaboration Sharing Reflection Collegiality</p>	<p><b>Writing</b></p> <p>Creative writing Descriptions, explanations, paragraphs or essays – Content Subjects Answering questions</p>		

CATEGORIES	CoP	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS	STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION	UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY
	<p>Learner responses</p> <p>Ownership</p> <p>Shared responsibility</p> <p>Change in perception</p> <p>Extend CoP (call to)</p> <p><b>In process of change Constructivist theory</b></p> <p>Integrated approach</p> <p>Responsibility: support provision</p> <p>Learner-centred approach</p>			
	<p><b>Teachers' perceptions: CoP as CPD</b></p> <p>Learning</p> <p>Responsibility for learner support</p> <p>Resource to others</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Convenience</p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>Support network</p> <p>Learner support</p> <p>Specific to needs of teachers/institution</p> <p>Value teachers' experience and knowledge</p>	<p><b>Speaking</b></p> <p>Functional language</p> <p>Prepared speech</p> <p>Unprepared speech</p> <p>Answering questions</p> <p>Working independently</p>	<p><b>Strategies Implemented &amp; explored</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cross-curricular</li> </ul>	
		<p>Teachers' learning needs</p>	<p><b>Teachers' responses to strategies</b></p> <p>Positive</p> <p>Negative</p>	

CATEGORIES	CoP	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS	STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION	UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY
	<p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <p>Reaching rest of staff</p> <p>Negativity easily spread</p> <p>Time consuming</p>		<p><b>Factors influencing implementation</b></p> <p>Teacher's philosophy</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Governmentality</p>	
	<b>Research Questions</b>			
	<p>2. Which factors contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP?</p> <p>3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development?</p> <p>4. What are teachers' perceptions of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school?</p>	<p>5. What are participants' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular learning?</p>		<p>1. How do teachers' underlying philosophy influence their implementation of literacy for cross-curricular learning?</p>

## 5.2 THE PHILOSOPHY UNDERPINNING TEACHING AND LEARNING

The interest in the teachers' underlying philosophies arose as a result of participants' comments during the project. These were related to their views on reading, their attitude towards learners who experience barriers to learning, the teaching methods they commonly employed, comments on the way in which participants were taught at school, and the terminology participants used.

### 5.2.1 Initial teacher training

Information was gathered about participants' pre-service training. All participants, except for one, received their initial teacher training at White Afrikaans institutions during the 1970s and early 1980s in South Africa. It was therefore, likely that their initial teacher training was entrenched in Fundamental Pedagogics and Christian National Education, which was characteristic of teacher training then (Msila, 2007: 148 – 149; Higgs, 2003: 5).

### 5.2.2 Views on reading

Participants were asked to provide a definition of reading at an initial CoP gathering. The responses showed that, except for two, participants had a “parts to whole approach” to reading, with an emphatic emphasis on correctly sounding out and pronouncing words. Only two teachers linked reading to a means of obtaining information and meaning from the text.

*Carol: 'n Manier om inligting te versamel. (A way to assemble information)*

*Liena: Is lees nie woordherkenning nie? (Isn't reading word recognition?)*

*Willemien: Om woorde te verbaliseer. (To verbalise words). Dit is herkenning van 'n klank...So dis klank van woorde... om woorde te klank en te sê. (It's recognising a sound...So it's the sounding out of words...to sound out and say words)*

*Beatrice: You get learners who can read well but they can't tell you what they read.*

Most participants viewed reading as correctly sounding out and pronouncing words. Their views of reading aligned with the behaviourist perspective that is grounded in the medical-deficit theory. This finding was deduced from participants' definitions of reading,

their focus on reading levels, their view of teaching instead of developing reading, and references to the way in which they were taught to read

During discussions, it became clear that participants focused on learners' reading levels, possibly believing that all learners in the same grade should be at the same level of development at the same time. This presented a problem to teachers when learners in the same grade were at different stages of their reading development.

*Willemien: Ja, maar sien, nou is omtrent nie een in die klas op dieselfde vlak.*  
(Yes, but you must understand – none in the class are on the same level)

*Victoria: Ek dink, veral omdat hulle op sulke verskillende vlakke is - weet jy wat gebeur? Nou sit jy heel tyd met hierdie een wat niks kan doen nie, maar eintlik die een wat iets kan doen verwaarloos jy.*

(I think, because they are on such different levels – do you know what happens? Now you attend to the one who can't do anything, but you actually neglect the one who can do something.)

The idea of reading as a developmental process was not evident. Teachers referred to reading instruction and the teaching of reading, giving the impression that reading is a once-off task. The way in which they taught reading was grounded in a 'phonics approach' in which phonics was used as a method of reading instruction and not as one means of decoding text. Round-robin reading, followed by a set of questions, presumably to test comprehension, appeared to be how reading lessons were structured. The assumption seemed to be that learners would understand a text if each word is decoded and correctly pronounced.

*Victoria: Ons doen beurtles en dan vra ek vir hulle vrae. (We do round robin reading and then I ask them questions.)*

*Liena: Ek het begin met die onderste klanke, jy weet, die enkel klanke en daarop gebou. Ons het net geklank. (I started with the single sounds and built up from there. We just sounded words.)*

*Victoria: Ja maar hy moet eers die woord kan sê voor hy eintlik 'n sin kan lees. (Yes, but he must first be able to say the word before he can actually read a sentence.)*

There was also the opinion that reading instruction should have been completed in the foundation phase. This aligned with what was reported by Baatjes (2003: 5), that there is an assumption among teachers that learners are able to read effectively by the time they enter grade four.

*Willemien (angrily): Ons het WRAGTIG (emphasising and drawing out the word) nie meer die tyd om in graad 5 'n kind te leer lees nie... En daarom sê ek hier by die kleintjies is iewers iets verkeerd want ek laat my nie vertel nie dat soveel kinders nie kan lees nie.*

(We REALLY [emphasising and drawing out the word] don't have time to teach a child to read in grade 5...And that's why I say, here with the little ones, something is wrong because you not going to tell me that so many children can't read.)

*Willemien: iets wat ek altyd op klem lê, ons kinders wat so swak lees, ons kan nie vir hulle die boeke gee nie – hulle kan nie self lees nie of die boeke gebruik nie.*

(Something that I always emphasise; our children who read so poorly. We can't give them the books – they can't read them or use them)

The need for learners to develop their skill in reading informational text beyond the foundation phase was unlikely to be accommodated when the above view was adopted by teachers. An unwillingness to take responsibility for supporting the current needs of learners reverberates in the above statements. The comment on not teaching grade-5

learners to read was concerning. This insinuated that teaching reading was the responsibility of someone else, and that inclusive practices were not occurring.

Throughout the CoP sessions, two participants consistently defended the traditional means of teaching reading. By the end of the CoP sessions, the concept of developing reading in the intermediate and senior phases, had not taken root among these two participants. They reflected a yearning for rote learning, memorisation and a preference for the use of phonics as an approach to reading instruction. The fact that these participants consistently referred to 'teaching reading' instead of 'developing reading' indicated a mind-set that continued to be focused on the medical-deficit model.

As a result, the need for learners to develop their skills in reading informational text was unlikely to be accommodated by teachers with this mind-set. There was an unwillingness to take responsibility for supporting the current needs of learners.

Initially, reference to reading as a means of constructing, interpreting, understanding, or communicating a message was limited to two participants. Fortunately, by the time the CoP sessions ended with this group of teachers, two more participants started showing an open-mindedness towards reading and learning strategies underpinned by the socio-constructivist perspective.

### **5.2.3 Nostalgia**

Participants regularly made reference to the way in which they were taught to read. The tone of these statements reflected a yearning for rote learning and a preference for the use of phonics as an approach to reading instruction.

*Liena: Ja, soos ons. Dis nie meer die Kyk en Sê. Dis klank – so – en dis die manier waarop ons leer lees het.*

(Yes, like we did. It's no longer the Look and Say. It's sounding out – so – and that's the way we were taught to read.)

*Willemien: Ja, maar die groot ding is Liena, toe ONS (emphasis on 'ons') graad 1 uit is, toe kon jy lees! ... en dan lees jy alles.*

(Yes, but the big thing is, Liena, when WE [emphasis on 'we']– when we left grade 1, you could read!... and then you read everything.)

*Liena: Jy't nie 'n kans gehad om te sê, "Ek kan dit nie lees nie", want jy moes dit sit en leer. En dit sal 'n kind se lees vermoë ook ontwikkel.*

(You never had a chance to say, "I can't read this", because you just had to sit and learn it. And that will also develop a child's reading ability.)

These statements confirmed that these participants believed that reading is the recognition and correct pronunciation of words. There was no reference to reading being aimed at understanding, interpreting or communicating a message.

#### **5.2.4 Approach to teaching**

Participants shared the general teaching methods that they employed. Many of these were indicative of a behaviourist perspective to teaching. The impression created was that learning is regarded as a once off opportunity and not as a developmental process. They expected to transmit information to learners only once, employing the transmission model of teaching. Learners were expected to immediately grasp and remember information. An integrated approach to teaching and learning was not favoured by some teachers. They strongly favoured the rote learning of decontextualised lists of words.

*Liena: Ek sê nie ons moet pappegaai werk doen nie, maar OBE het die kinders ontnem van baie dinge – byvoorbeeld, ons het op skool lyste afkortings geleer. Ek voel dis 'n leemte –die kinders is arm aan taal omdat daai ding uitgeskakel is en hierdie ding wat hulle so rond en bond - hier 'n bietjie afkortings, volgende kwartaal 'n bietjie - Jy doen al die afkortings en klaar. Ons moet terug gaan na die ding waar ons lyste en lyste leer.*

(I'm not saying we must do work parrot-fashion, but OBE deprived our children of many things – for example, at school we learnt lists of abbreviations. I feel that's a void – children's language is poorer because that has been eradicated and now they jump around – a few abbreviations this quarter, and a few the next – you do all the abbreviations and that's it.)

*Sarah: Ek gee vir die kinders lyste om te leer, want hoe anders moet jy vir die kinders dit aanleer?*

(I give the children lists to learn, because how else must you teach it to the children?)

*Victoria: ...pappegaai leer, het ek ondervind is partykeer net die manier om eers te gebruik en dan pas hy ('n leerder) dit toe (kennis).*

(In my experience, I have found that, at times, learning parrot-fashion is necessary before [a learner]) can apply it [knowledge].)

The various aspects of a language (listening and speaking, reading and viewing, writing and presenting) were taught as separate unrelated units. There were separate and set periods per week for each aspect of a language. Language was not contextualised and developed in an integrated manner. It was taught in a sequenced way, with a strong emphasis on the teaching and learning of rules.

*Beatrice: How many reading periods per week do we have for reading? I introduced another one on a Wednesday. I used to have only one on a Friday.*

*Victoria: Ek doen twee keer 'n week lees. (I do reading twice a week.)*

*Victoria: Maar onthou, ons vraestel, of myne, is nou volgens taal - ek leer mos nou eers die kort klanke, dubbel medeklinkers, en selfs by die taal is dit so. So ek kan nie dadelik...want hy kan nie lees nie. Ek moet eers daai reëls vir hom aanleer... Hy moet eers die woord kan lees voordat hy die sin lees. Dis hoekom ons eers in woorde ...en nie soos in die gewone skool in lees konteks kan werk nie.*

(But remember, our question paper, or mine, is according to language – I first teach them the short sounds, then diagraphs, and it's the same with the language. So I can't immediately... because he can't read. I must first teach him all the rules... He must first read the word before he can read the sentence. That's why we learn words first – and we don't work within a reading context as they do in an ordinary school.)

At the start of the CoP sessions, only one teacher acknowledged that reading is integrated into language and learning.

*Carol: Well, they have reading homework everyday actually – because it's so integrated.*

### **5.2.5 Responsibility for learner support**

Two of the teachers, who were close to the age of retirement, displayed a negative attitude towards learners in need of learning support. Learners were labelled in a derogatory manner. These teachers did not believe in the perspective that all learners can learn. Intervention was regarded as a waste of the teacher's time. There was a strong focus on the teacher – the effort on the part of the teacher, as well as the inconvenience to the teacher. A possible reason could be the likelihood that their teacher training was grounded in Fundamental Pedagogics.

*Willemein (addressing critical monitor 2): Ek wil jou nou nog iets vra – Die eerste wat altyd gesê word is intervensie en intervensie – besef julle, of is dit net ek wat so dink, dat daar kinders is, jy kan hom intervensie gee soveel soos jy wil, jy kan hom al wat ‘n strategie probeer..., maar jy sal dit nie in sy kop kry.*

(I want to ask you another thing – The first thing we get told is intervention and intervention – do you realise, or am I the only one who thinks that, there are children who, despite all the intervention and strategies you teach.... But you won't get it into his head.)

*Sarah: Ja, jou middae om spandeer – dit help niks. Daar is geen use om te sit en sukkel heel middag. En hy is al so moeg teen die tyd wat dit 2uur is, jy kry niks uit hom uit nie. Dis ‘n useless oefening.*

(Yes, you spend your entire afternoon – it doesn't help. There is no use in struggling all afternoon. And he is very tired by two o'clock, you get nothing out of him. It's a useless exercise.)

One of the disadvantages of providing separate intervention sessions after regular school hours, is that learners would be tired. Another is that it deprives the learner who has to attend these classes from participating in other extra-mural activities that occur at the same time. The learner, who is experiencing difficulty with a particular subject and probably not enjoying it, is forced to give up on an extra-mural activity and be subjected to more academic misery. This reflects the need for in-class inclusive teaching practices which provide learning support through effective strategy implementation during the teaching and learning process. Teachers should know which strategies to apply when presenting the learning experience to learners. Talking about one learner, Sarah expressed the following:

*Sarah: Hy kom uit ‘n gewone skool met presies dieselfde leerplan – as hy nie daar kan cope nie, hoe kan hy hier cope? Ons het dan nie terapeute nie.*

(He comes from an ordinary school with exactly the same curriculum – if he can't cope there, how can he cope here? We don't have therapists.)

*Willemien: Hoe kan dit verwag word dat hy hier cope? Omdat wat hier anders is?*

(How can it be expected that he'll cope here? What is different here?)

*Willemien: Mens mag dit seker nie sê nie, maar daar is tog so 'n ding soos 'n dom kind.*

(One probably shouldn't say it, but there is such a thing as a stupid child.)

*Liena: Ek weet nie wie van julle luister RSG op 'n Sondag middag nie. Hulle't gister middag nogal gepraat oor wat is die problem in die onderwys. To'et 'n professor van Universiteit van Pretoria, gepraat. Hy sê die grootse probleem – hy sê hulle sit met studente wat nie die vaardigheid... - hulle kan nie 'soeklees' om 'n ding te kry nie...en toe sê hy iewers, sal die owerhede – moet gaan kyk – iewers ontstaan die probleem.*

(I don't know who of you listens to RSG [an Afrikaans radio station] on a Sunday afternoon. Yesterday afternoon, they actually spoke about the problem in education. A professor from the University of Pretoria spoke. He says the biggest problem – he says they have students that don't have the skills... they can't 'scan' to find something...and then he said somewhere, the authorities will have to find out where the problem originates.)

Despite this being a special school, some teachers did not regard themselves as the first level of learning support for learners experiencing barriers to learning. Although participants acknowledged that many learners needed learning support, the expectation was that someone other than the class teacher must provide it. This alludes to the expectation that a 'specialist' should provide the support that learners require. These

attitudes reflect remnants of the medical-deficit model and place the ideology of inclusion in jeopardy.

### 5.2.6 Terminology

The terminology used by participants suggested their underlying teaching philosophy. The disability was mentioned first (e.g. dyslexic children), indicating a medical-deficit model. The term 'remedial teaching', as in the medical-deficit framework, was still used (Bouwer, 2016: 77). The expectation was still that it is the responsibility of the 'remedial teacher' or other 'expert' to 'fix' or 'rectify' the problem that is within the child (Bouwer, 2016: 78; Nel, Nel & Hugo, 2013: 9). It is possible that no in-service teacher development, that clearly spells out the politically motivated ideologies of the past and current curricular, has occurred successfully.

*Willemien: Nou't ons ook dyslexic kinders. (Now we also have dyslexic children.)*

*Victoria: Is daar nie meer kinders wat remedierende onderrig moet kry nie? Maar ons kan nie by almal uitkom nie.*

(Aren't there more children who must receive remedial teaching? But we can't get to everyone.)

*Willemien: Ja, kyk hoeveel is daar nou by ons wat remediering moet kry, maar... (Yes, just look at how many learners at this school need remedial teaching)*

*Sarah: Hy kom uit 'n gewone skool met presies dieselfde leerplan – as hy nie daar kan cope nie, hoe kan hy hier cope? Ons het dan nie terapeute nie.*

(He comes from an ordinary school with exactly the same curriculum – if he can't cope there, how can he cope here? We don't have therapists.)

The teachers acknowledge that many learners need learning support. The individualistic medical-deficit model does not allow all learners to receive the needed support. The human resources needed for such an undertaking is expensive and impractical. The statements above provide evidence for the need for class teachers, especially at a special school, to incorporate in-class learning support in all teaching and learning experiences. One way of doing this is through applying various reading and learning support strategies when facilitating lessons. This once again points to the likelihood that some teachers' underlying philosophy of teaching, is based on a behaviourist, medical-deficit model.

### **5.3 THE COP**

The category, CoP, was developed from the following research questions:

1. Which factors contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school?

The themes and sub-themes within that category were inferred from the data responding to the questions. The process of generating the categories, themes and sub-themes was a combination of inductive and deductive coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016: 249; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014: 81).

The following themes were derived from the sub-themes identified within the data: establishing a CoP, sustaining a CoP, the value and advantages of the CoP, and the disadvantages of the CoP.

### **5.3.1 Establishing the CoP**

Literature observes that CoPs are difficult to establish and sustain (Rhodes et al., 2004: 115; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1669). Therefore, it should first be ascertained whether a CoP had indeed been formed. Based on the characteristics of a CoP, I can claim that a CoP was indeed established at this special school. A number of factors affected the establishment of the CoP at this school. These were the support of the school principal, the introduction of the project to the staff, staff attitude, and the CoP being related to my own professional learning.

The way in which the project was introduced to the staff, including the name assigned to this CoP, played a role in its establishment. The fact that this project was a research undertaking related to my private studies also influenced the number of participants willing to become members of the CoP. The CoP, as a means of professional teacher learning, was new to participants. Resistance to change and to doing things differently played a role in establishing a CoP.

A factor contributing to establishing and sustaining a CoP, is the support of the principal, as indicated by Kempen and Steyn (2016: 38). Fortunately, immense support for this research undertaking was received from the principal. He was in favour of the project from the outset.

*Principal: When I heard what it entails, to me it was- we must actually approach it as a staff development where we involve the whole staff.*

The principal and I debated whether attendance for staff members should be compulsory or voluntary. He felt strongly that the sharing of the learning strategies should form part of the compulsory teacher development programme at school.

*Principal: Ek het op 'n tyd gevoel ons moet dit professional development...op elke Dinsdag een keer 'n maand, waar onderwysers moet by wees. Ek het dit oorweeg.*

(There was a time I felt we should make it professional development...every Tuesday once a month, that teachers must attend. I considered that.)

The compulsory nature of the professional development, however, went against the ethical aspect of this study which requires that participation be voluntary. It also defied the principles embodied in critical community psychology, which is the theoretical framework guiding this study; and the definition of a CoP which refers to voluntary membership; and my belief that participants would engage more in the process if it was something that was not forced on them. The principal agreed that the CoP could be introduced to the staff and that participation in it would be voluntary.

In hindsight, I realise that the way in which a research undertaking and project is introduced to the staff is of importance. It needs to be launched in such a way that potential participants identify the value it can hold for themselves and their learners.

Firstly, the name assigned to the CoP (“A CoP for reading across the curriculum”) appeared to deter some potential participants. This was revealed when speaking to a Biology teacher. When asked which course he would more likely attend - one called “developing learners’ reading in content subjects” or “developing learners’ learning in content subjects” - the Biology teacher’s response was as follows:

*In terms of my subject, the second one (developing learners' learning in content subjects) – because it would improve the child's performance in my subject and also their ability to read.*

A name for the CoP, focusing on learning and not on reading was also suggested by two of the participants, when we discussed ways of encouraging more staff involvement.

*Victoria: Ek wonder of die feit dat ons praat van 'Reading CoP' dink die ouens dis net vir die taal juffrou. I wonder if others think it's only for the language teacher because we speak about the 'Reading CoP'.*

*Carol: Saying 'Learning' will be good ja.*

All the CoP participants taught a language. The name: “CoP for reading across the curriculum”, could have attracted them to participate in this project. Teachers teaching only content subjects would not have seen the relevance of participating in this forum. This is because reading development is traditionally associated with the language teacher (Klapwijk, 2015: 3; Baatjes, 2003: 5). More teachers would have participated if the focus of the CoP was stated as learning across the curriculum.

The fact that the initiation of the CoP related to my studies, also influenced the number of potential participants. In the focus group discussion with the critical monitors, the principal indicated that some staff members were reluctant to participate because this was a research undertaking for my private studies. It is likely that some staff members viewed this undertaking as being beneficial only to myself.

*Principal: But, the other problem is, it's a 'Mrs Herman thing'. 'Ons gaan nie hier kom om vir haar te help met haar studies nie,' sien jy? Ek weet nie of ek dit vir jou genoem het nie – die feit dat Juffrou dit doen. Sien, sy's met studies besig. Hulle sien dit nie as iets wat die skool gaan benefit. Dis vir Juffrou wat dit gedoen word. En dit op selfsig kan 'n probleem wees.*

(‘We not going to come here to help her with her studies, you see? I don’t know if I mentioned it to you – the fact that you doing it. You see, she’s busy with studies. They don’t see it as something that will benefit the school. It’s for you that it’s being done. And that in itself can be a problem.)

The focus group discussion with the critical monitors brought to light that; teachers’ attitudes to change, a sense of complacency, and cultural differences, also affected the establishment of the CoP. Providing professional development for teachers by teachers was a new idea at this institution. It required being open-minded to a different form of professional development. A CoP approach to professional development does not rely on workshops or short courses presented by authority figures such as officials from the Education Department. It depends on teachers’ willingness to take responsibility for their own learning.

*Critical Monitor 1: And I think to convince others – you know, sometimes, when we’ve been in a profession for a while, we think we’ve arrived and we know everything - and especially in the teaching fraternity. I’ve experienced this. When you come up with a new idea, without people listening to you, they say it won’t work. “...because I’ve been here for 30 years...”*

*Principal: Here (at this institution) we sit with people – we sit with cultural issues. We sit with former Model C and those from the other side of the railway. You sit with those kinds of issues.... You see, that in itself, at this institution, is of the bigger challenges. ‘This is how it was done here. Who are you to come do this?’ And that is my thing – after everything there must be reflection. When you say that, it’s a matter of you saying new things, but – dis die werklikhede (that’s the reality).*

### 5.3.2 Sustaining the CoP

Dedicated teachers and the realisation that the CoP is a continuous cyclical process is needed if the CoP is to be sustained (Shangase, 2013: 31). Teachers who attended the CoP sessions were very dedicated indeed. They sacrificed their time to participate in the project, despite their heavy workloads.

The time factor greatly influences whether a CoP can be sustained. I found that the absence of pre-determined times for the CoP to meet regularly, made it difficult to sustain the process.

*Critical monitor 1: It's time consuming. And teachers are already over-burdened with teaching activities, administrative work and extra-mural duties. It becomes very cumbersome to attend meetings such as this, because it is totally voluntary.*

*Carol: We race through everything that needs to be done. I mean while we are here I'm thinking about what has to be done now when I get home, so – die druk is geweldig... we feel sometimes, No I don't have time for this...*

As noted, participating in a CoP is time consuming. For this reason, it was vital that the participants benefit from this form of professional development.

*Carol: And I must be quite honest. If I didn't attend the meeting, most probably I wouldn't have learnt anything.*

Participants' openness and willingness to question and reflect on their own practices is necessary if an effective CoP is to be sustained. A positive attitude towards learners who experience barriers to learning is imperative. Teachers need to believe and experience

that, through adapting teaching methods, they can make a positive difference in the learning experiences of learners. Reflective practice and a positive attitude towards adapting learning experiences to suit the needs of learners, is essential for the functioning of the CoP. If these are absent, it is unlikely that teachers will implement inclusive practices to accommodate learners with barriers to learning. The following statements reflect the way in which inclusive practises are hindered when teachers do not believe that they can make a positive difference in the learners' learning. Two of the teachers at the special school, did not believe that they could accommodate learners with barriers to learning. They were convinced that these learners were dependent on "experts" other than themselves.

*Sarah: Hy kom uit 'n gewone skool met presies dieselfde leerplan – as hy nie daar kan cope nie, hoe kan hy hier cope (at this special school)?*

(He comes from an ordinary school with exactly the same curriculum – if he can't cope there, how can he cope here?)

*Willemien: Hoe kan dit verwag word dat hy hier cope? Omdat wat hier anders is? (How can he be expected to cope here? What is different here (at this special school)?*

*Sarah: Ons het dan nie terapeute nie. (We don't have therapists.)*

This alludes to the expectation that someone other than the class teacher, a 'specialist' or 'expert' must provide the support that the learners require. A mind-set based on the medical deficit model, prevalent in fundamental pedagogics, continued to show its presence.

*Willemien: En ek wil julle nog 'n ding sê - hulle kan maar vir my sê wat hulle wil - jy kan soveel strategieë hê soos jy wil, jy kan probeer wat jy wil, party kinders - en hulle is nie net party nie, hulle is deesdae baie - het net nie die vermoë. Mens mag dit seker nie sê nie, maar daar is tog so 'n ding soos 'n dom kind.*

(And I want to tell you another thing – they can tell me what they like – you can have as many strategies as you like, you can try what you like, but some children – and not just some, these days there are many – they just don't have the ability. One probably shouldn't say it, but there is something like a stupid child.)

### 5.3.3 The Value of the CoP

The second theme within the category CoP, was the value of the CoP.

The value of the CoP is that a sense of community was created among participants. This occurred during the processes of sharing their problems or learning needs. A sense of community was also encouraged when participants shared suggestions and information.

#### 5.3.3.1 A support network

Participants viewed the CoP as a platform where they could share the difficulties they faced in class and collaborate with each other to find possible solutions to these. As a result of the CoP, some participants were thinking differently about their teaching approaches.

*Victoria: Sê nou ek het 'n probleem, en ek bring dit en vra hoe dink julle moet 'n mens nou – miskien sien iemand anders net iets meer. Ja, dis nou soos ek jou nou die ander dag gesê het dit (die CoP) moet tog net nie ophou nie. Al kom jy nie elke dag by dit uit nie... as jy nou regtig begin dink, dink jy nou: "Wag, hier is mos iets wat ek anders kan doen."*

(If I have a problem and I bring it [to the CoP] and ask others what they think – perhaps someone else sees something more... Yes, like I said to you the other day, this [the CoP] must please not end. Even if you don't get to it every day...if

you really start thinking...then you think “Wait, there is another way I can do this.”)

Teachers who implemented the strategies reported a positive change in their learners’ participation and responses in class. They also reported that participating in the CoP influenced their own frame of mind and teaching practice in a positive way. It served as a form of motivation for some participants. Participants engaged in reflective practice when reporting on the outcome of the strategies they explored in their classes. They became researchers of their own practice as they experimented with, and reported on, the outcomes of various reading strategies. Although it was not labelled as such, participants performed individual acts of Action Research. In this way, the CoP contributed to participants’ professional learning, and had a positive effect on teacher morale.

*Carol: It makes you think about all the strategies ...I’ve become more enthusiastic again. You sort of look at all the problems all of the time and you lose a bit of your enthusiasm – but now you’ve got new skills and new tools that you can use. I think even my learners became more involved... I learnt lots of things. It was like a refresher course to me. And I must be quite honest, if I didn’t have to attend the meeting, most probably I won’t have learnt anything... So the effort, coming to the CoP and getting more information, getting myself more positive has really helped me. The results were... I was actually quite surprised in the end.*

*Beatrice: So I would say it’s really a positive influence in my work that I done physically, on the learners and on myself. I’m using the opportunity for language development in all my subjects.*

### 5.3.3.2 Participant Participation and Control

Participation fluctuated between the consultative, collaborative and collegiate levels of Biggs continuum of participation and control (Lilja & Bellon, 2008: 482; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1669) when using the CoP-approach to professional development. The table below illustrates the way in which the various levels of participation and control were reached.

Table 5: Teacher participation according to Biggs continuum

Level of participation	Comments by participants Actions by participants	Criteria indicating the level of participation
<b>Contractual</b>	Participants provided written consent to participate in the research undertaking.	Participants agreed to take part in the research project.
<b>Consultative</b>	<i>Beatrice: I am very positive and we could share this year again our problems and look at the solutions, especially sharing here in a group... helped a lot.</i> <i>I'm very fond of it.</i> <i>Victoria: Ja dis nou soos ek jou nou die ander dag gesê het, dit moet tog net nie ophou nie. (Yes, like I said to you the other day, this [the CoP] must please not end.)</i>	There were consultations between the researcher and participants in an attempt to better understand the problem(s) they experienced in a particular setting.
<b>Collaborative</b>	<i>Victoria: Al kom jy nie elke dag by dit uit nie - as jy nou regtig begin dink, dink jy nou "Wag, hier is mos iests wat ek anders kan doen" (Even if you don't get to it every day -</i>	Jointly, the researcher and participants undertook the project "designed, initiated and facilitated" by the researcher.

Level of participation	Comments by participants Actions by participants	Criteria indicating the level of participation
	<p><i>if you really start thinking then you think “Wait, there is another way I can do this”)</i></p> <p><i>Victoria: Ja, ek het definitief ook geleer want dit is nou amper, op ‘n mooi manier gesê, jy word half gedwing om daai goed te doen omdat ons nou daaroor praat – dan wonder jy mos maar, dit waaroor ons gepraat het, gaan dit werk? (Yes, I also definitely learnt because it’s almost as if, in a polite way, you are half forced to do those things that we spoke about – because you wonder - those things we spoke about, are they going to work? Many times now I realize that I am applying a specific strategy.)</i></p>	
<b>Collegiate</b>	<p><i>Carol: I initiated the Woman’s Day reading project because of what we learnt by getting together like this.</i></p> <p><i>Willemien: Shared idea on ‘scanning’ using advertisement column in newspaper</i></p>	<p>Participants become co-researchers in seeking possible solutions to their problem(s). Researcher and participants learn from and with each other. The ideal is that the participants take control of the project.</p>

Participants were asked to present and share strategies they implemented in their classes. The reasons for this were to encourage participant ownership of the CoP process and project, and for teachers to value each other as support resources. Teachers pooled

their experience and knowledge to generate solutions to problems. The idea and realisation that participants were not dependent on so called 'experts' from outside the school, was planted.

These are some examples of information that participants shared during CoP sessions:

Sarah: Demonstrated how to create a listening activity using columns and words. (Learners find and delete words that are read out aloud. They are then left with specific words that form a message at the end of the activity.)

Carol: Shared information about a spelling competition and discussed how the idea could be adapted to suit specific classes or grades within this school.

One participant described how she shared information with the parents of her learners. These parents wanted to know how to assist their children at home.

*Willemien: Die eintlike ding was vir die ouer wat sy kind by die huis wil help. Ek wys vir hulle hoe ek my hele taalontwikkeling gaan toepas uit een enkele artikel.*

(It was actually for the parent who wanted to help the child at home. I show them how I apply all the language development to one article.)

The principal, during a staff meeting, encouraged the staff to attend the CoP sessions. At the next CoP sessions, a group of foundation phase teachers attended. Visiting teachers felt safe and comfortable enough to voice the problems they encountered in class. CoP members took the lead in sharing ideas and possible solutions, which were shared in previous CoPs, with visiting participants.

Table 6: Concern voiced and suggested strategy

Visitor to CoP Concern voiced	CoP member Suggested strategy
<p><i>Anna: Jy weet ons met ons kleintjies – sukkel dat hulle moet nuus skryf. Maar miskien kan ons vir hulle begin en sê “Vrydag - wat het ons gedoen?” - laat jy net eers ‘n prentjie het met hulle.</i></p> <p>(You know we work with the little ones – struggle to get them to write news. But perhaps we can start it for them and say “Friday - what did we do?” - so you form a picture with them.)</p>	<p><i>Willemien: Gebruik die vraagieswoorde: wie? waar? wanneer? Jy weet - Vir ‘n nuus berig. (Use question words: who? where? when? You know – for the news report.)</i></p>

As a result of participating in the CoP, one participant successfully ran a reading and writing project that involved all grades at the school (Gr. R – Gr. 12).

*Carol: I initiated the Women’s Day reading project because of what we learnt by getting together like this.*

The project ran for a period of one school term and culminated in a Women’s Day Reading and Writing Festival. Learners’ writing, in the form of poems, short stories and book reviews, that were developed over the period of a quarter, were read and displayed. Reading strategies that parents could implement at home, were demonstrated.

*Carol: The Women’s Day Reading and Writing Project was a success because we made reading and writing important. They, the learners, got the message that ‘my own writing and what I say is important enough for grown-ups to read’. So that really did help boost their writing and reading.*

Members were in the process of taking ownership of the CoP.

### 5.3.3.3 Changing Perspectives

A change in participants' perspectives was evident. As a result of the interaction, discussions and debates within the CoP, a gradual change in most teachers' perspectives on the teaching and learning process was observed. One indication of this change was the increased use of an integrated approach to teaching and learning. Literacy was being developed in content subjects and not restricted to the teaching of a language. There was a realisation that language and learning can be integrated and developed in all subjects.

*Beatrice: We also apply the language structures – a sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop; where the one sentence ends, another one starts. So, learners have that knowledge now and I re-apply it in my NST. The other thing that I'm conscious of is the fact that every content subject is a language subject now. That, I also used to blame the teacher you know, but now... I'm using the opportunity for language development in all my subjects.*

Another indication of a change in perspective was the acknowledgement that all teachers should be responsible for developing reading for cross curricula learning. This participant believed that learners would start applying the strategies if she continued to implement and draw learners' attention to it. She viewed it as her responsibility to continue exposing learners to the strategies.

*Carol: Ek dink die kinders is meer bewus daarvan (strategieë) as voorheen – want ek lê meer klem daarop as voorheen. Ek kan sê ek het dit gedoen voorheen, maar ek het nie so baie erg klem gelê daaraan.... So op die ou einde glo ek hulle sal begin dit toepas, as ons net aanhou.*

(I think the learners are more aware [of the strategies] than before – because I emphasise them more than I did before. I can say that I applied it before, but I did not place as much emphasis on it...So, in the end, I believe they will start applying it if we just continue.)

It appeared as if a change in perspective was strongly related to personal experience.

One participant acknowledged that some children could benefit, not only from a 'phonic approach', but also from the 'look and say' approach to word recognition. This was a result of personal experience. She had personal experience of her own child, learning through the integration of the Look and Say method and the early exposure to a phonics approach. She was of the opinion that more than one approach to learning to read was possible. She was, as a result, be more open minded to various methods, approaches or strategies in the teaching and learning situation.

*Victoria: Weet julle, party kinders leer met Kyk en Lees? My kind het net so 'geclick' met Kyk en Lees. Maar, sy't nou die voordeel gehad toe haar boeta geklank het in Sub A, toe't... sy'd dit nou opgetel. So, daar moet meer as een metode wees - veral voel dit vir my...'n tweedetaal kind wat in Afrikaans klank – dit maak nie vir hom sin nie.*

(Do you know, some children learn using the Look and Read. My child clicked just like that with Look and Read. But she had the advantage of her brother sounding out words in Sub A, then she picked it up. So, there must be more than one method – especially with a second language child that has to sound out words in Afrikaans – it (sounding out of words) does not make sense to him.)

At the start of the CoP process, another teacher was adamant that the rote learning of one aspect of language at a time, was the most effective when teaching a language.

*Liena: Ek sê nie ons moet pappegaai werk doen nie, maar OBE het die kinders ontnem van baie dinge – byvoorbeeld, ons het op skool lyste afkortings geleer. Ek voel dis 'n leemte –die kinders is arm aan taal omdat daai ding uitgeskakel is en hierdie ding wat hulle so rond en bond - hier 'n bietjie afkortings, volgende kwartaal 'n bietjie - Jy doen al die afkortings en klaar. Ons moet terug gaan na die ding waar ons lyste en lyste leer.*

(I'm not saying we must do work parrot-fashion, but OBE deprived our children of many things – for example, at school we learnt lists of abbreviations. I feel that's a void (referring to the discontinuation of word list instruction in the current curriculum) – children's language is poorer because that has been eradicated and now they jump around – a few abbreviations this quarter, and a few the next – you do all the abbreviations and that's it.)

The respondent was now more open to the idea of addressing language structures within the context of a written text. This too was a result of personal experience. Her daughter was in the class of a teacher who was also a member of the CoP, and who employed an integrated approach to language development. This teacher integrated reading, writing, speaking and the language structures. Language structures were addressed as they emerged in the text being dealt with.

The table below captures the change in her perspective with regards to the teaching and learning of a language. There was a gradual move towards applying constructivist approaches to teaching. Personal experience seemed to be key in transforming perspectives.

Table 7: A change in perspective

May 2013	October 2014
<p>Liena: <i>Ek sê nie ons moet pappegaai werk doen nie, maar OBE het die kinders ontnem van baie dinge – byvoorbeeld, ons het op skool lyste afkortings geleer. Ek voel dis ‘n leemte – die kinders is arm aan taal omdat daai ding uitgeskakel is en hierdie ding wat hulle so rond en bond - hier ‘n bietjie afkortings, volgende kwartaal ‘n bietjie - Jy doen al die afkortings en klaar. Ons moet terug gaan na die ding waar ons lyste en lyste leer.</i></p> <p>(I’m not saying we must do work parrot-fashion, but OBE deprived our children of many things – for example, at school we learnt lists of abbreviations. I feel that’s a void – children’s language is poorer because that has been eradicated and now they jump around – a few abbreviations this quarter, and a few the next – you do all the abbreviations and that’s it.)</p>	<p>Liena: <i>Ek het nou gesien met Carol (a teacher who is also a member of the CoP and who employs an integrated approach to language development), die Afrikaans wat sy nou doen, dis vir my interessant. Drie kwart van daai handboek van Linda het leesstukke en dan kom die taalvrae uit die leesstuk. Net die toepassing van reëls.</i></p> <p>(I have seen with Carol, the Afrikaans that she does, I find it interesting. Three quarters of the textbook she uses has reading passages, and then all the language questions come from the reading passage. Just the application of the rules.)</p>

The change in perspective could possibly be attributed to a combination of teachers’ participation in the CoP and to personal experience.

### 5.3.3.4 Reading for cross-curricular learning

The biggest break-through in helping participants grasp the significance of reading for cross-curricula learning, was the use of a grade 6 English question paper (Annexure H). This question paper served as a useful tool in making the value of reading for cross curricula learning transparent. The question paper contained text usually found in the subject Natural Science. A debate about the question paper helped participants see the value of reading for cross curricula learning. The importance of supporting learners in exploring strategies suitable to various text types and not restricting certain strategies to

particular subjects became clear. This discussion reinforced the idea that all teachers should be responsible for developing various reading and learning strategies and in applying strategies that are applicable to the text type being dealt with.

*Sarah: Al die vreemde goed in een vraestel en ek dink dit was toe wat die eintlikke skok was op die ou einde. Want, ek dink tog 'n mens in NW (Natuur Wetenskappe) en daai plekke kan sê 'Compare nou die twee goed met mekaar', soos jy met jou 'kragte' né. Daar kom 'n bietjie van die comparisons al in, maar al daai tipe goed wat daar in was - dis glad nie in ons taal- in my CAPS dokument nie. Niks van daaigoed nie! Nie by my taal nie!*

(All those strange things were in one question paper and that was the shock in the end. Because, I think someone in NS (Natural Science) and those subjects can say 'Compare two things to each other', like when teaching 'forces'. There, a bit of comparison comes in, but all those things that were there – that's not in the language – not in my CAPS document. None of those things! Not with languages!)

*Beatrice: Nee, die manier van hoe hulle dit vrae is my NWT (Natuur Wetenskap en Tegnologie) – daar sal hulle hom nou – hulle's (leerlinge) gewoon aan dit, maar dit is nou by SW (Sosiale Wetenskappe).*

(No, the way in which they asked the questions is like my NST [Natural Sciences and Technology] – there they'll fit – they're [learners] used to it, but that's in SS [Social Sciences])

*Willemien: Selfs Wiskunde – hulle is gewoon om met tabelle te werk en grafieke en daai tipe goed.*

(Even Mathematics – they are used to working with tables and graphs and the like.)

*Beatrice: But maybe, just maybe, they can just take something from the NST and the mathematics and - So, ons het miskien 'n plig om dit 'n bietjie anders om te swaai. Ons moet ook onse koppe swaai. (Perhaps, we have a duty to change it a bit. We need to make a mind-shift).*

*Sarah: Ja, maar nou moet ons net vir hulle (leerders) atent maak op (byvoorbeeld): "Onthou nou jy sal nie net 'n grafiek kry by Wiskunde..." hulle (die leerders) beseef dit nie altyd nie - die kind gedink: 'Oo, maar dis dan NW!' (Yes, but now we must draw their [learners'] attention to it, [for example]: "Remember, you won't only encounter graphs in Mathematics". They [the learners] don't always realise this – the child thinks 'Oh, but this is NS)*

*Beatrice: Dis mos wat ek sê. Dis ons plig om dit nou te doen met hulle. (That's what I'm saying. It's our duty to do this with them). They (learners) think you must only answer something in a specific way in a specific subject.*

Participants acknowledged their role and responsibility in encouraging and promoting cross-curricular reading and learning.

### **5.3.3.5 Convenience**

The CoP afforded teachers the opportunity to learn with and from each other. The site of learning was institution-based, thus; eliminating the need to travel to an off-site venue. The CoP sessions took place after school. It did not infringe on teaching time. This CoP offered a low cost, accessible and convenient form of professional learning.

### **5.3.3.6 Professional Development Points**

Teachers can acquire ten (10) professional development (PD) points (RSA SACE: 2012: 5) by participating in the CoP. CoP participants shared journal articles, interesting magazine articles related to reading, and extracts from books on cross-curricular reading and learning strategies. Reading these sources, which count as 'Type 1' or 'Teacher –initiated professional development activities', can earn a teacher up to 10 points per year.

### **5.3.3.7 Action Research**

The participants who implemented the strategies that they selected, reported back to the group in the subsequent CoP session. They reported on the effectiveness of their selected strategy as they experienced it in the context of their classrooms. Teachers who experienced a strategy as ineffective, either opted to attempt a different strategy or to adapt the strategy and re-implement it. Teachers who found a strategy to be effective, made the decision to continue using it. At various stages during the two-year period, they also explored different strategies to suit different challenges encountered in their classrooms.

Participants thus, implemented and experimented with, reflected on, modified, re-implemented and monitored the, outcomes of the reading strategies. This became a cyclical, reflective process that participants engaged in while exploring the use of various reading strategies for cross-curricular learning via the CoP. This cyclical process (Armstrong & Moore, 2004: 12) of planning, implementing, reflecting on, and modifying an action plan (Kember, 2000: 25) is described as Action Research. Those individuals who were involved in this reflective, cyclical process, were in fact practicing action research.

Action research is considered an ideal way for 'teacher-researchers' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005: vii) to explore and take 'ownership' (Howes, Davies & Fox, 2009: 92; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 231) of practical solutions to classroom challenges that

they would like to address (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002: 159; Verma & Mallick, 1999:182). For this reason, it was seen as an advantage that participation in this CoP, resulted in teachers undertaking action research.

#### **5.3.4 The disadvantages of the CoP**

Membership to the CoP had its own challenges. Participation in the CoP was voluntary. As a result, one disadvantage of the CoP was that the strategies were only shared with those who attended the CoP sessions. Another disadvantage was that negativity could just as easily be spread as positivity within the CoP. I noticed a trend that when one negative comment was made, it was immediately followed by more negative comments. Fortunately, the same was also true for positive comments. There was a danger of limited perspectives on issues if the viewpoints of those other than CoP members were not encouraged from time to time. Attending and preparing for CoP sessions was time consuming. It was necessary to have a dedicated time set aside for quarterly CoP sessions.

#### **5.3.5 Teachers' perceptions of the CoP**

Participants viewed the CoP as a supportive space in which they could learn and grow professionally.

##### **5.3.5.1 A support network**

The CoP was able to serve as a support network to teachers. Teachers' problems, knowledge, innovative ideas and experiences were shared, acknowledged and valued within the CoP. This CoP became a support group in which participants could learn and

become more motivated. This, in turn, positively influenced their learners' progress. Participants also found being a member of the CoP uplifting, encouraging and motivating.

*Carol: Coming to the CoP and just hearing all the problems and how people handle them and tackle them. So the effort, coming to the CoP and getting more information, getting myself more positive has really helped me. I've become more enthusiastic again. I think even my learners became more involved. The results were...well, I was actually quite surprised in the end.*

Through the CoP, participants were encouraged to think differently about addressing the challenges they encountered in class. The following comment also indicates that a sense of trust was established among CoP members.

*Victoria: Sê nou ek het 'n probleem, en ek bring dit en vra hoe dink julle moet 'n mens nou – miskien sien iemand anders net iets meer. Ja, dis nou soos ek jou nou die ander dag gesê het dit (die CoP) moet tog net nie ophou nie. Al kom jy nie elke dag by dit uit nie... as jy nou regtig begin dink, dink jy nou: "Wag, hier is mos iets wat ek anders kan doen."*

(If I have a problem and I bring it [to the CoP] and ask others what they think – perhaps, someone else sees something more... Yes, like I said to you the other day, this [the CoP] must please not end. Even if you don't get to it every day...if you really start thinking...then you think "Wait, there is another way I can do this.")

*Beatrice: I can also say it helped me a lot in class and, especially sharing here in a group helped a lot.... and I am very positive and we could share this year again our problems and look at the solutions, I'm very fond of it as it helps a lot.*

### 5.3.5.2 Professional development

Participants acknowledged that their attendance of the CoP contributed to their professional learning and growth. The CoP appeared to have created a sense of curiosity that led to the exploration of, and reflection on, the strategies discussed. The reflective nature of the CoP process encouraged the development of teachers as researchers into their own practice.

*Victoria: Ja, ek het defnitief ook geleer want dit is nou amper, op 'n mooi manier gesê, jy word half gedwing om daai goed te doen omdat ons nou daaroor praat – dan wonder jy mos maar, dit waaroor ons gepraat het, gaan dit werk?*

(Yes, I also definitely learnt because it's almost as if, in a polite way, you are half forced to do those things that we spoke about – because you wonder - those things we spoke about, are they going to work? Many times now I realise that I am applying a specific strategy.)

*Carol: I learnt from it for sure. I've become more enthusiastic again. You sort of look at all the problems all of the time and you lose a bit of your enthusiasm – but now you've got new skills and new tools that you can use.*

*Beatrice: Tracey het nou al 'n hele tydjie al begin met haar vak, SS (Social Sciences), het sy al begin met mind-maps. Toe wou ek dit probeer met my kindertjies.*

(Tracey started a while back, using mind-maps in the subject SS [Social Sciences]. I wanted to try it with my learners.)

The CoP approach encourages context specific professional development. The teachers identified the topics to be discussed. The strategies discussed were specifically aimed at supporting learners who experience barriers to learning as identified by teachers. The

strategies shared were thus aimed at supporting teachers in supporting learners through in-class intervention. The topics addressed in the CoP were thus, specific to the learning needs of both the teachers and their learners.

## 5.4 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

The CoP was a platform for teachers to voice their frustrations or problems experienced in the learning and teaching situation. In so doing, participants identified some of the learning barriers that learners encountered in class. They expressed the challenges they faced when teaching learners who experienced these barriers. The following are some of the quotes that reveal the frustrations and difficulties experienced in the learning and teaching situation. These mainly involved the aspects of language and literacy development namely; reading, writing, speaking and working independently.

**Table 8: Language development**

Language Development			
<p><i>Sarah: Dis wat vir my so moedeloos maak met die taal - dit voel jy veg die heel tyd – dit voel vir jou hulle bou nie op iets nie. Dis almal net sulke gaps.</i></p> <p>(This is what makes me despondent with the language - it feels like you're fighting all the time- you don't build on anything. There are just these gaps.</p> <p><i>Carol: They have difficulty with cloze – even in the FET phase. Hulle het nie 'n taal aanvoeling.</i></p>			
Reading	Writing	Speaking/Listening	Working independently
<p><i>Carol: Self die Graad 11's kry twee uit twintig. Hulle is te lui om die inligting te soek. Hulle</i></p>	<p><i>Willemien: ons kinders kan nie eers spel nie, hy kan nie skryf nie, hy kan skaars 'n sin maak. Hoe</i></p>	<p><i>Sarah: Nou moet jy heel tyd moet jy karing om hulle iets te laat sê. Soos Ettie sê dis 'n geveg – dis die Afrikaans eerste taal. Met die</i></p>	<p><i>Critical Monitor 2: Ek het agtergekom, as hy moet gaan sit met die vraagies op sy eie, die kinders</i></p>

<p><i>bestudeer nie die vraag in detail nie. Ek het hulle gewaarsku – ‘Daar’s tricks in die vraestel.’ Hulle lees nie spesifiek wat daar staan, hulle gaan net. How do you teach them how to interpret the question? (Even the Grade 11s score two out of twenty. They are too lazy to look for information. They don’t study the question in detail. I warned them – ‘There’s tricks in the question paper.’ They do not read what is written. They just go ahead. How do you teach them how to interpret the question?)</i></p>	<p><i>moet ons nou sê sy kreatiewe skryfwerk is vaardig? Hulle kan nie paragrawe skryf nie.</i></p> <p><i>(Our children can’t even spell, he can’t write, he can hardly construct a sentence. How can we say his creative writing is skilful? They can’t write paragraphs.)</i></p>	<p><i>engelse klas sal jy nog meer sukkel. Hulle sit en kyk jou net!</i></p> <p><i>(You have to constantly nag them to get them to say something. It’s like E.T says, it’s a fight - that’s with the Afrikaans first language. With the English class, it’s a bigger struggle. They just sit and stare at you!)</i></p>	<p><i>weet nie wat gevra word nie, hulle verstaan nie die vrae. Maar by alle vakke – die vraagwoord: motiveer, redeneer - daai tipe goed sal ons moet ons na kyk. Die betekenis van die vrae.)</i></p> <p><i>(I realised, when they sit with the questions on their own, they don’t understand the questions. But this is all subjects – the question words: motivate, debate – we’ll need to look at that. The meaning of the questions.)</i></p>
<p><i>Willemien: Nou’t ons ook dyslexic</i></p>	<p><i>Anna: Jy weet ons moet ons kleinjies –</i></p>	<p><i>Liena: Onthou hy praat Sotho en die ma praat Tswana</i></p>	<p><i>Carol: They just read the question and</i></p>

<p><i>kinders. (Now we have dyslexic children as well.)</i></p> <p><i>lets wat ek altyd op klem lê, ons kinders wat so swak lees - ons kan nie vir hulle die boeke gee nie, - hulle kan nie self lees nie of die boeke gebruik nie.</i></p> <p>(Something I always emphasise is our children's poor reading – we can't give them the books – they can't read it themselves or use the books.)</p>	<p><i>sukkel dat hulle moet nuus skryf.</i></p> <p>(You know our little ones struggle to write news.)</p>	<p><i>en dan het hy Engels as sy LoLT (Language of Learning and Teaching).</i></p> <p>(Remember he speaks Sotho and the mother speaks Tswana and he has English as his LoLT [Language of Learning and Teaching]).</p>	<p><i>they write down anything ... Unfortunately, when they write a test, it's just the same old story again.</i></p>
<p><i>Liena: Ons kinders lees nie.</i></p> <p>(Our children don't read.)</p>	<p><i>Sarah: Ja, hulle's baie swak (whistling exasperated).</i></p> <p><i>Dis vir my 'n groot kopseer - skryfstukke.</i></p> <p><i>Ons kinders het nie woordeskat nie</i></p> <p>(Yes, they're very weak [whistling exasperated]. That's my big headache – the</p>	<p><i>Willemien: Julle weet, hulle 'try' nie eers nie. Wat 'n mens mos nou kan doen is jy kan vir hulle 'n onderwerp gee en dan probeer jy uit die hele klas nou mooi, oulike woorde kry. Jy kry verdom niks uit hulle - nie 'n bladdy woord uit nie!</i></p> <p>(You know; they don't even try. What one can do is</p>	<p><i>Victoria: Die ander probleem wat ek het, hoe leer jy 'n kind om 'n antwoord te skryf in sy eie woorde?</i></p> <p>(The other problem that I have, how do I teach a child to write an answer in his own words?)</p>

	written work. Our children don't have the vocabulary.)	to give them a topic and then you try to get good vocabulary from the entire class. You get nothing out of them – not one bloody word!	
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These barriers are depicted in the diagram below.

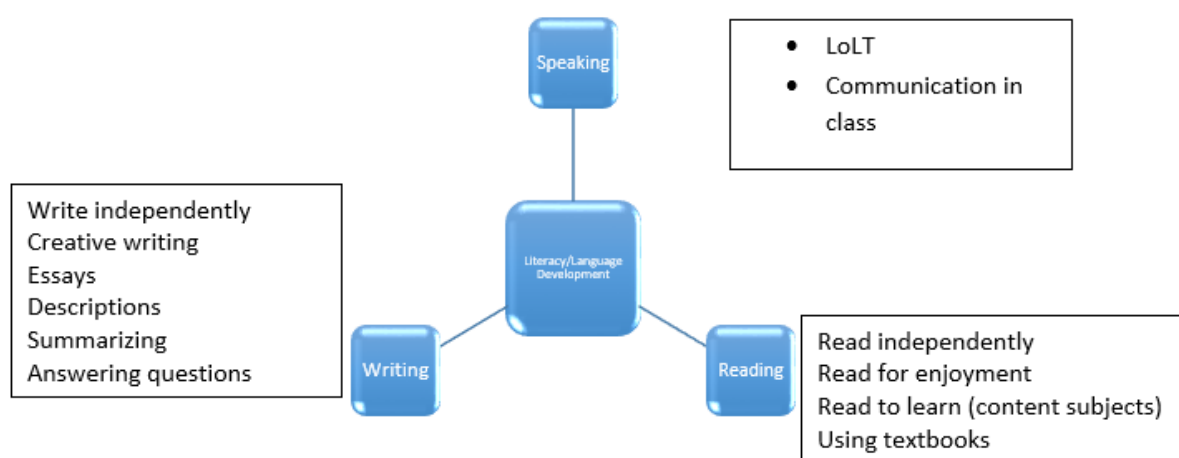


Figure 4: Barriers to learning as identified by teachers

Participants experienced difficulty in providing support to learners whom they identified as experiencing barriers to learning. In identifying the barriers to learning that they were unable to address, participants in essence identified their own learning needs.

The aim of the CoP was to support teachers in supporting the learning needs of learners. In doing so, reading and learning strategies to enhance cross-curricular learning, were shared during the CoP sessions. This leads to the next category, Strategies for cross-curricular reading and learning, which is reported on next.

## 5.5 STRATEGIES FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR READING AND LEARNING

The following themes were identified within this category: strategies shared; strategies implemented and explored; and factors influencing the implementation of strategies.

### 5.5.1 Strategies shared

The strategies discussed were in response to the challenges in the teaching and learning situation that were voiced by the teachers. The strategies were aimed at encouraging and supporting teachers to support learners in the learning process. The following table presents a summary of the various barriers to learning, as identified by teachers, and the strategies discussed as possible solutions. These strategies were discussed and demonstrated over a period of two years. The table presents a list of possible strategies aimed at supporting teachers in supporting learners' learning needs.

Table 9: Strategies shared with teachers

<b>Barrier identified by teacher</b> <b>Learners need support with:</b>	<b>Teachers' learning needs:</b> <b>Strategies/approaches discussed as possible solutions</b>
Reading independently Reading for information	Using Guided and Shared Reading - scaffolding Using Paired Reading Developing reading in content subjects; comprehension strategies; before, during and after reading activities
Writing independently	Using Guided Writing – scaffolding and modelling Using the Language Experience Approach

<b>Barrier identified by teacher</b> <b>Learners need support with:</b>	<b>Teachers' learning needs:</b> <b>Strategies/approaches discussed as possible solutions</b>
<p>Understanding what was read</p> <p>Answering questions independently</p> <p>Answering questions in own words</p> <p>Answering question papers</p>	<p>Pre-, during and after reading phases to lessons</p> <p>Activating prior knowledge</p> <p>Providing background knowledge</p> <p>Using Visual over verbal – using graphics</p> <p>Applying Comprehension Strategy Instruction</p> <p>Applying the Cloze Procedure</p> <p>Formulating questions</p> <p>Using various question types in class – expose learners to various question types</p> <p>Using various mind-maps</p> <p>Summarising</p> <p>Understanding text structures</p> <p>Becoming awareness of textbook format</p>
<p>Interpreting and understanding questions</p>	<p>Chunking – deal with one question type/format per week during the teaching and learning process.</p> <p>Exposing learners to different levels of questions</p> <p>Encouraging the formulation of questions;</p> <p>Encouraging an awareness of the Question and Answer Relationship (QAR)</p>
<p>Summarising</p>	<p>Using Key words plotted on Mind-maps</p>
<p>Identifying key-words and concepts in informational text</p>	<p>Modeling and scaffolding</p>
<p>Listening and Speaking</p> <p>Using a language</p> <p>Using poor vocabulary</p>	<p>Developing language through:</p> <p>Language Experience Approach</p> <p>(re)telling stories</p> <p>SMS strategy</p>

Barrier identified by teacher Learners need support with:	Teachers' learning needs: Strategies/approaches discussed as possible solutions
	Reading book in form of a sequel Promoting discussion Reading / guided reading Providing graphics

Most teachers implemented some of the strategies discussed.

### 5.5.2 Strategies implemented and explored

Subsequent CoP sessions revealed that all teachers, except for one, implemented, explored, and reflected on the strategies shared during previous CoP sessions. The table lists some of the strategies and the outcomes of those strategies that teachers reported on.

Table 10: Implemented Reading Strategies

<u>Strategies teachers implemented</u>	<u>Comments</u>	
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
<b>Prediction as a pre-reading strategy</b>		
Sarah: Ek het 'n begripslees oefening gevat en toe het ek nou daaruit die vooraf lees gedoen - vuglees. As jy na die opskrif kyk, waaroor dink jy gaan dit? – die prediction.  (I took a comprehension passage and did a pre-reading activity – scanning. If you look at the title, what do you think	Sarah: So, hulle het toe nou heel oulike antwoorde gegee sodat dit gelyk asof hulle almal half deel van die ding was – baie het saamgepraat, waar hulle andersins as jy byvoorbeeld net 'n ding voorlees, het hulle net so gesit en kyk. Maar toe ek hierdie probeer het (the prediction), het hulle darem nou so 'n bietjie respond – so dit was nogal vir my so bietjie positief.  (Then they gave good answers and it appeared as if they were all part of it – many participated in the discussion,	Sarah: Maar die ding kom by as hy moet gaan sit met die vraagies op sy eie, dan vergeet hy daai vra wat ek netnou al gelees het.  (But when they have to answer the questions on their own, then they forget the

<u>Strategies teachers implemented</u>	<u>Comments</u>	
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
the passage is about? – the prediction.	where they would otherwise just sit and look at you if you read the passage to them. But when I tried this [the prediction], they at least responded a bit – so that was a bit positive.)	<p>questions that I read.)</p> <p>Sarah: <i>Ons doen van die goed, maar ons kan dit nie so direk implementer nie – ons gaan nooit klaar kry met ons werk nie – veral ek met die Gr.6'e wat 'n departementele eksamen skryf. Ek moet absoluut bly by die boek.</i></p> <p>(We do some of the things, but we can implement it directly – We will never complete our work – especially me with the grade 6's who have to write a departmental exam. I must absolutely stick to the book.</p>
<b>Activate prior knowledge</b>		
Beatrice: <i>My aim was to activate prior knowledge through predicting.</i>	<p>Beatrice: <i>En jy sal verbaas wees hoe hulle jou stukkies and brokkies kan vertel van a food chain</i></p> <p>(And you will be surprised about the bits of information on the food chain that they can tell you.)</p>	
<b>Visualisation</b>		
Beatrice: <i>The strategies I used were questioning and visualization</i>	Beatrice: <i>The visualization especially helped – hulle kon die konsepte beter verstaan (they could understand the concepts much better)</i>	Beatrice: <i>Maar, ek moet sê - die tyd. (But I must say – the time.) We need</i>

<u>Strategies teachers implemented</u>	<u>Comments</u>	
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
	<p>Beatrice: <i>Die kinders het hulle antwoorde binne in die handbook gekry en met visualising sal ek sê die meeste, 80% verstaan. Hulle het dit baie positief ervaar.</i></p> <p>(The children found the answers in their textbooks and with visualising I'll say most of them, 80%, understood the work. They experienced it (visualising) as very positive.</p>	<p><i>more time to implement the strategies in these subjects – want, in die einde moet jou kurrikulum klaar wees. Jy wil so graag meer doen, maar die werk moet klaar kom.</i></p> <p>(At the end, you must complete your curriculum. You very much want to do more, but the work must be completed.)</p>
<b>Use of text books: Text book structure</b>		
<p><i>Beatrice: The information on the structure of the text books was good. My children didn't know the different parts of the textbook.</i></p>	<p><i>Beatrice: Showing them the headings, sub-headings, key-words, and like the captions – what a caption is – helped them (learners) to work with the textbook better than before. They now know how to use the index too. They seem more interested in what's in the textbook now.</i></p>	<p><i>Willemien: Iets wat ek altyd op klem lê, ons kinders wat so swak lees, ons kan nie vir hulle die boeke gee nie – hulle kan nie self lees nie of die boeke gebruik nie. (Something that I always emphasise, our children who read so poorly, we can't give them the book – they can't read it or use it)</i></p>
<b>Questioning</b>		
<p><i>Carol: Making them aware of the different questions was helpful.</i></p>	<p><i>Carol: ...and doing the questioning as we discussed, taking a certain kind of question and doing it throughout, and next week take another kind of question</i></p>	

<u>Strategies teachers implemented</u>	<u>Comments</u>	
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
	<p>– that has also made them think a little more about the questioning – because they just read the question and they write down anything – they are a bit more aware of the questioning.</p>	
<p><b>Encouraging speaking in additional language</b></p> <p><b>Use of graphics</b></p> <p><b>Prediction</b></p> <p><b>Visualization</b></p>		
<p>Use of prediction and visualisation to stimulate writing.</p>	<p>Victoria: <i>Want ek het nou nogal prentjies gebruik, veral in die tweede taal – dan kyk ons na die prentjies en dan sê hulle eers net die woord en dan voorspel hulle – ons het byvoorbeeld eers die prentjies gekyk, toe ‘n storie gebou. En dit het nogal gehelp - met dit kom daar nogal baie uit – want om daai’s (leerders) te kry om te praat in Afrikaans! Met die prentjies was dit goed, maar as hulle sommer net so moet praat... dan kan hulle glad nie dink aan iets.</i></p> <p>(I made use of pictures, especially in the second language. We look at the pictures, name them and then make predictions – for example, we first looked at the pictures and then used them to build a story. And that helped quite a lot because to get those learners to speak in Afrikaans! Using the pictures was effective, but if they have to just speak... then they can’t think of anything.</p>	
<p><b>Integration into content subjects</b></p>		
<p>Integrating and stimulating written work in a content subject.</p>	<p>Victoria: <i>En dan het ek die dele by die S.W. as daar prentjies is, dit (visualsing) nogal toegepas. So dit maak dit onmiddelik vir die kind ‘n bietjie duideliker. En, die gr.4’s sukkel mos verskriklik om sinne te skryf en nou skryf hulle dit darem ook by die inhoudsvak -</i></p>	

<u>Strategies teachers implemented</u>	<u>Comments</u>	
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
	<p><i>en ek dink dit verbreed ook sy taal ontwikkeling.</i></p> <p>(And parts of the S.S (Social Sciences) where there are pictures, I also implemented it (visualisation). It immediately makes (content) a bit clearer for the child. And the grade 4s struggle terribly to write sentences and now at least they are also writing in the content subject – and I think this enhances their language development.</p>	

Only one participant admitted to not implementing any of the strategies:

*Willemien: Nee, ek kan nie al daai pre-reading en al daai goed doen nie want ek het op hierdie stadium nou nog nie handboeke nie.... Ek kan nie daai paired reading doen nie, veral nou praat ek van die tweede taal kinders- Afrikaans addisionele taal want elkeen sit omtrent op 'n ander vlak – hulle lees is swak – jy weet self.*

(No, I can't do all that pre-reading and those things because, at this stage, I do not have textbooks. I can't do that paired reading with the second language learners – Afrikaans additional language because each one in on a different level – their reading is weak – you know this yourself.)

It is interesting to note that, although she did not apply the strategies in class, this teacher shared the integrated approach to language development with parents of learners in her class. She, however, emphasised that this integrated approach was a means for parents

to assist their children at home. It was not necessarily the way in which she encouraged language development in class.

*Willemien: Ek wys vir hulle hoe ek my hele taalontwikkeling gaan toepas uit een enkele artikel. Die eintlike ding was vir die ouer wat sy kind by die huis wil help... maar ek sê nou hierdie was nou hoofsaaklik vir ouers wat my gevra het vir hulp.*

(I show them how I apply all of the language development to one article. This was for the parent who wanted to help the child at home...but this was mainly for the parents who asked me for help.)

### **5.5.3 Responses to the strategies**

Most teachers were positive about the outcome of the strategies they implemented. They reported that they and their learners were more aware of the strategies that they were implementing in class.

*Victoria: Baie keer dan beseft ek nou, maar ek pas 'n spesifieke strategie toe, sonder dat ek dit nou formeel – nie doelbewus, maar jy doen dit.*

(Many a time, I realise that I am applying a specific strategy, without formally and consciously doing it, but you do it.)

*Beatrice: Nou's ons bewus daarvan – dat ons eintlik baie van die strategieë toepas.*

(Now, we are more aware of it – that we are actually applying many of the strategies.)

*Carol: Ek dink die kinders is meer bewus daarvan (strategieë) as wat – want ek lê meer klem daarop as voorheen. Want hulle (leerders) begin nou dink oor wat ek vra. Ek kan sê ek het dit gedoen voorheen, maar jy het nie so baie erg klem gelê daaraan.*

(I think the children are more aware of it (the strategies) because I emphasise it more than I did before. Because they (learners) are now starting to think about what I ask. I can say that I did it before, but without as much emphasis.)

#### **5.5.4 Factors influencing the implementation of strategies**

A number of factors appeared to influence the use of the strategies. These included concerns about completing the curriculum; viewing the strategies as additional to the content to be covered; and a negative attitude towards learners with barriers to learning. All of these can be linked to the participants' underlying philosophy of teaching and learning.

##### **5.5.4.1 Completion of the curriculum**

The comments noted under “negative responses” in the table 10, indicate that strict compliance to completing the work set out in the curriculum is a factor that influences the implementation of strategies. Teachers felt that the implementation of strategies restricted the time available to complete the curriculum.

Teachers viewed the reading and learning strategies as something additional to the teaching of the subject content. It was not regarded as a means of sharing information and simultaneously guiding learners' reasoning, thinking and understanding of a text. Strategies were not seen as an asset to the teaching and learning process, but as an additional burden to this process.

*Beatrice: Maar, ek moet sê - die tyd. (But I must say, the time.) We need more time to implement the strategies in these subjects – want, in die einde moet jou kurrikulum klaar wees. Jy wil so graag meer doen, maar die werk moet klaar kom. (At the end, you must complete your curriculum. You very much want to do more, but the work must be completed.)*

*Sarah: Ons doen van die goed, maar ons kan dit nie so direk implementeer nie – ons gaan nooit klaar kry met ons werk nie – veral ek met die Gr.6'e wat 'n departementele eksamen skryf. Ek moet absoluut bly by die boek.*

*(We do some of the things, but we can implement them directly – We will never complete our work – especially me with the grade 6's who have to write a departmental exam. I must absolutely stick to the book.*

*Willemien: Jou leerplan is klaar so vol van dit wat jy moet doen. (One's curriculum is already so packed with all the work that one must do.)*

#### **5.5.4.2 Negative attitude towards learners with barriers to learning**

Two participants had a negative attitude towards learners who experienced barriers to learning. They displayed an aversion to inclusive practices and were unlikely to have used any of the strategies discussed. Snippets from their conversations bear witness to this.

*Willemien:*

*... jy kan probeer wat jy wil, party kinders - en hulle is nie net party nie, hulle is deesdae baie - het net nie die vermoë.*

*(...you can try what you like, some children - and it's not just some, there are many – they just don't have the ability.)*

*Hierdie goed (reading strategies) is vir my wonderlik as jy kan voltyds remedierend werk met daai kinders. Dis 'n ander storie as wat jy met 'n klas deur 'n kurrikulum moet werk.*

(These things [reading strategies] they are wonderful if you can do remedial work full time with those children. It's a different story if you have a class and a curriculum to work through.)

*...beseef julle, of is dit net ek wat so dink, dat daar kinders is, jy kan hom intervensie gee soveel soos jy wil, jy kan hom al wat 'n strategie probeer, maar jy sal dit nie in sy kop kry!*

(...do you realise, or am I the only one who thinks this - there are children who, despite all the intervention and strategies you try, you won't get it into their head!)

*Mens mag dit seker nie sê nie, maar daar is tog so 'n ding soos 'n dom kind. (One probably mustn't say it, but there is something like a stupid child.)*

*Sarah:*

*Daar is geen use om te sit en sukkel heel middag - jou middag om spandeer, dit help niks.*

(It's useless struggling [with a learner] all afternoon and it doesn't help.)

These participants appear to blame the learners for experiencing a barrier to learning, which is characteristic of deficit thinking (Dalton et al., 2007: 51). These negative attitudes are likely related to the first category that I have identified; the underlying philosophical beliefs about teaching and learning. The above comments were from teachers whose initial teacher training was in Afrikaans Colleges of Education during the 1970s.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I reported on the findings of the research. The findings were reported according to the themes distilled from the thematic analysis of the data. The themes were: The teaching and learning philosophy; The CoP; Teachers' Professional Learning Needs; and Reading Strategies. A discussion of the main findings follows in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to explore the use of a CoP-approach to professional teacher development. The CoP was established at a special school and focused on reading for cross-curricular learning.

This qualitative study, based on participatory research (PR), and embracing Biggs' (1989) four-level continuum of control and participation (Lilja & Bellon, 2008: 482; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1669), was guided by the theoretical framework of Critical Community Psychology (Nel, Lazarus & Daniels, 2010: S19; Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2007: 29-31). Data was drawn from focus group interviews which were thematically analysed. The findings were related to the literature reviews on communities of practice and cross-curricular reading, and also to the research questions. The discussion of the findings is related to:

1. the way in which teachers' philosophy of education influences their implementation of cross-curricular reading and learning;
2. the factors that contributed to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP for cross-curricular reading and learning;
3. the advantage and disadvantages of CoP as an approach to teacher development;
4. teachers' perceptions of a CoP approach to teacher development; and
5. teachers' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular learning.

Interestingly, most findings can be attributed to participants' philosophical beliefs on teaching and learning. This was particularly evident in the establishment of the CoP and participants' views and implementation of cross-curricular reading and learning. This highlighted for me, the need for all teacher professional development programmes – both Initial Professional Teacher Development and Continuous Professional Teacher Development - to address the theoretical and philosophical basis of the previous and current education curriculum.

## 6.2 ESTABLISHING A COP

A CoP had indeed been established. This claim was made by comparing the characteristics of a CoP (RSA DBE, 2015: 5-6; Bowl, 2011: ii84; Hadar & Brody, 2010: 1641, 1642; Harris & Jones 2010: 174, 179; Printy, 2008: 190; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008: 81; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004: 9; Knight 2002: 229) to what transpired through our CoP sessions at this special school.

Table 11: Domain, community and practice of a CoP

Characteristics of a CoP	Findings regarding participants' responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a correlation between teacher development and learner learning.</li> </ul>	Teachers who implemented the strategies reported a positive change in their learners' participation and responses in class. (cf. 5.3.3.1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>regular collegial interaction and collaboration.</li> </ul>	Participants viewed the CoP as a platform where they could share difficulties they faced in class and collaborate with each other in attempts to find possible solutions to these. (cf. 5.3.3.1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>symbiotic professional learning.</li> </ul>	Teachers became researchers into their own practices. (cf. 5.3.3.1)

Characteristics of a CoP	Findings regarding participants' responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an environment in which respect, trust and a support-base are established among colleagues.</li> </ul>	<p>An atmosphere of trust was established as participants shared the difficulties they faced in certain aspects of their teaching. The CoP was able to serve as a support network to teachers (cf. 5.3.5.1).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• members who commit to sharing their knowledge and skills to effect continuous learning within the group.</li> </ul>	<p>Participants suggested that the sharing within the group continues and that the CoP should continue (cf. 5.3.3.2). Participants shared journal articles, interesting magazine articles related to reading and extracts from books on cross-curricular reading and learning strategies (cf. 5.3.3.6).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support from the school's senior management team.</li> </ul>	<p>...immense support for this research undertaking was received from the principal. (cf. 5.3.1)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• joint leadership, goal setting, decision making and responsibility for all learners' learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Participants presented and shared the teaching and learning strategies that they used in their classrooms with the group. (cf. 5.3.3.2)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• members who continuously reflect on and evaluate the outcomes of teaching and learning as they strive for continuous improvement.</li> </ul>	<p>Participants acknowledged that their attendance of the CoP contributed to their professional learning and growth (cf.5.3.5.2)</p>

In addition to the characteristics being present within the group, the three elements of a CoP according to Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015: 2) (domain, community and practice) were also present. The 'domain' refers to a common concern which participants experience. In this study, the common concern of the participants was the learners' difficulty regarding independent reading and learning. A 'community' was created as a group of teachers shared, not only their difficulties and frustrations, but also their experiences, expertise and information relevant to developing reading for cross-curricular learning. The 'practice' was the act of coming together to share, explore and reflect on various strategies to promote learners' reading for cross-curricular learning.

The factors that contributed to the establishment of the CoP at this institution, and which are now discussed are: participants' philosophy of teaching and learning; the support of the principal; and the introduction of the CoP to the staff.

### **6.2.1 The support of the principal**

The support of the principal in establishing the CoP at this special school, proved invaluable. The importance of this support in professional development initiatives among teachers, is confirmed in the literature (Antinluola, Ilomäki, Lahti-Nuuttila & Toom, 2018: 78; Kempen & Steyn, 2016: 38; Schechter & Feldman, 2013: 789). I suspect that participants felt validated in their participation in the CoP because the principal supported this project. As head of the school, teachers generally look to the principal for guidance. The principal possesses a certain amount of power with regards to having the "ability to influence the behaviour of others" (van Deventer, 2016: 177). The 'power' that his position as principal affords him, lends credibility to the project in the eyes of potential participants. So, despite the CoP being based on democratic principles, and having as one of its aims, participants taking ownership thereof, the support of a member of the SMT facilitated the establishment of a CoP at this special school. This, possibly because the participants, most of whom were trained in the medical-deficit perspective, still saw the principal as having the ultimate authority at school level. This was evident when one CoP session was visited by a number of teachers, after the principal had requested that they do so. Even though this was a once-off visit from these teachers, valuable observations were made.

The visitation to the CoP served as an opportunity for me to observe how the regular CoP participants had taken ownership of some of the reading strategies that were shared in previous CoP sessions. Visitors voiced some of the challenges they faced in class. CoP participants made suggestions to visitors on the use and value of some strategies in attempting to address the challenges mentioned. Participants shared how implementing and experimenting with selected strategies had supported the learning of some learners.

Taking the lead in sharing strategies with visitors also served as a reflective exercise for participants. Sharing their experiences revealed to me that the CoP sessions had indeed contributed to participants' professional learning. It is important for participants to have the opportunity to share their learning with others.

Visitors expressed relief and delight in the prospect of possible solutions to the challenges they mentioned. The suggestions and contributions of the CoP participants were clearly valued by the visitors. This form of taking a leadership role in the sharing of the possible solutions could promote the continued interest in the participation in a learning community such as a CoP, thus; creating opportunities for participants to share their knowledge and skills with others could be valuable in sustaining a CoP. The self-esteem of participants could be boosted when their contributions to potential solutions, are valued. It could be a step in helping participants realise that they, and not necessarily a "specialist" from outside of the school, could assist both their learners and fellow colleagues. Participating in a CoP could thus, contribute to the idea that the teacher can indeed provide the first level of learning support to learners (RSA DoE, 2001: 18).

Participants shared their findings and experiences of the reading for learning strategies. This provided an opportunity for the visitors to realise the value of participating in the CoP. Sharing their experiences helped CoP participants in taking ownership of their professional learning (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 113). Creating opportunities for participants to share their learning with potential new participants, should thus, be incorporated into CoPs.

The idea of teachers supporting teachers in supporting learners, who experience some barrier(s) to learning, is possible through a functional CoP. Functional CoPs could therefore, reduce the pressure on departmental officials (Bantwini & Diko, 2011: 230-231, 233; Lessing & de Wit, 2007: 53, 54), such as an understaffed Inclusive Education Unit, to support learners requiring low levels of support.

## **6.2.2 Introducing a CoP**

It is important for potential participants to envision what the advantage and value of participating in the CoP will be for them. In a focus group interview, the principal revealed that a negative aspect with regards to this research undertaking, was the fact that it was an undertaking towards my Ph.D. As a result, some potential participants saw this as an exercise in which they would have to invest time and effort which would ultimately benefit me and not them.

The idea may still be held that only workshops arranged, presented and endorsed by officials from the Education Department were legitimate forms of professional development. It is important for participants to buy into the idea of taking responsibility for their own professional development. It is therefore, necessary for the Department of Education to propagate for forms of school-based professional learning initiatives. Participants need to see a CoP as a legitimate, acceptable and effective form of professional learning. The fact that participation in, and co-ordinating a, CoP at school level can earn participants Professional Development Points (RSA SACE, 2013: 5), may contribute to building the idea that a CoP is a credible form of professional development. All the advantages of a CoP need to be made clear to potential participants when introducing this form of professional learning.

## **6.3 SUSTAINING THE COP**

### **6.3.1 A coordinator**

A dedicated coordinator is needed if the CoP is to be sustained.

I had been the coordinator of the CoP for a period of two years. As there had been a shift towards the collaborative and collegiate levels of participation according to Biggs'

continuum of participation or control (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995: 1669; Lilja & Bellon, 2008: 482), I had hoped that participants would take control of the CoP. I thought that a dedicated coordinator would not be needed if participants had started taking ownership of the CoP. I was wrong. No further CoP sessions were arranged in the absence of a coordinator. The need for a dedicated CoP coordinator is confirmed by Brodie and Borko (2016: 7) who state that the professional development of CoP facilitators is needed.

I now realise that members could still experience ownership even if there is a coordinator of the CoP. A dedicated coordinator, who is likely to be the person who initiates a CoP at a school, is crucial if a CoP is to be sustained.

### **6.3.2 Professional Development timeslots**

As in studies by Antinluola, Ilomäki, Lahti-Nuutila and Toom (2018: 76, 84); Brodie and Borko (2016: 11 – 12); Wilson (2016: 54-55); Schechter & Feldman (2013: 787), the time issue proved to be one of the challenges in this study. It was difficult to find suitable and convenient time-slots for CoP members to meet. This challenge was, however, overcome with the support of the principal. During the second year that the CoP ran, designated CoP time-slots were scheduled on the school's annual plan. In this way, permanent time slots, that did not clash with other school commitments, were available for the CoP to meet. Ahn (2017: 86-87) confirms the importance of pre-determined periods of time for the CoP to meet if it is to be established and sustained. Since professional learning is a compulsory aspect of the teaching profession (RSA SACE, 2012: 7), it makes sense that time be allocated to professional development initiatives.

### **6.3.3 Professional Development Points**

Teachers are required to earn a minimum of 150 points within a three-year cycle as evidence of their continuing professional teacher development (CPTD). These professional development points are allocated by SACE when teachers provide evidence of participation in SACE approved professional development activities (RSA SACE, 2012: 5).

Participating in a CoP, such as the CoP for reading for cross-curricular learning, forms part of professional activities that allow teachers to earn points towards their Personal Professional Development Points Account (RSA SACE, 2012: 5,7). According to SACE (2012: 8) penalties might, in future, be imposed for non-compliance with participation in professional development activities and the accumulation of professional development points. It will be interesting to note whether this might contribute to sustaining CoPs in the future. There is a danger in this though. Teachers might join CoPs with the sole aim of earning professional development points, instead of working towards a collective goal.

## **6.4 THE ADVANTAGES OF THE COP**

### **6.4.1 Inclusive practices**

Teachers not only discussed the difficulties they experienced when working with learners experiencing barriers to learning, but importantly proposed potential solutions to these frustrations. The collaboration that took place encouraged a sense of unity and collegiality among participants. Democratic practices were enhanced as participants had the choice of implementing and experimenting with potential solutions that they selected. They used the strategies they selected to try and address the barriers to learning that certain learners were experiencing. Over the course of two years, teachers built up a store of information on teaching strategies that they could possibly draw on

when striving to accommodate the different learning needs of learners. Participants thus, attempted to accommodate all learners they taught. In this sense, the CoP contributed to the implementation of inclusive teaching practices.

#### **6.4.2 Action Research and teacher reflection**

Action research is described by Bertram & Christiansen (2014: 45) as a way in which teachers can participate in “professional learning” through inquiry “into their own practices”. I found that participants who experimented with the use of various strategies over the two-year research period, in fact performed action research. This occurred when, in the CoP sessions, they explored and reflected on the use of socio-constructivist reading strategies to develop reading for cross-curricular learning.

This cycle of action research consists of identifying the problem or “issue identification” (reading for learning among intermediate and senior phase learners at the school), “data collection” (obtaining information on reading strategies for cross-curricular learning within CoP sessions), the “action plan” (selecting the reading strategy to explore), the “plan activation” (implementing, exploring with and monitoring the effect of the strategy on learners’ responses), and “outcome assessment” (individually and within the CoP, participants reflect on the effect of the strategies on learners’ learning) (Pelton, 2010: 8-9). The participants engaged in action research by continually reflecting on, and adjusting their practice to better meet learners’ learning needs (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 45).

This action research process, as described by Pelton (2010: 8-9) and performed by individual participants, is illustrated in the diagram below.

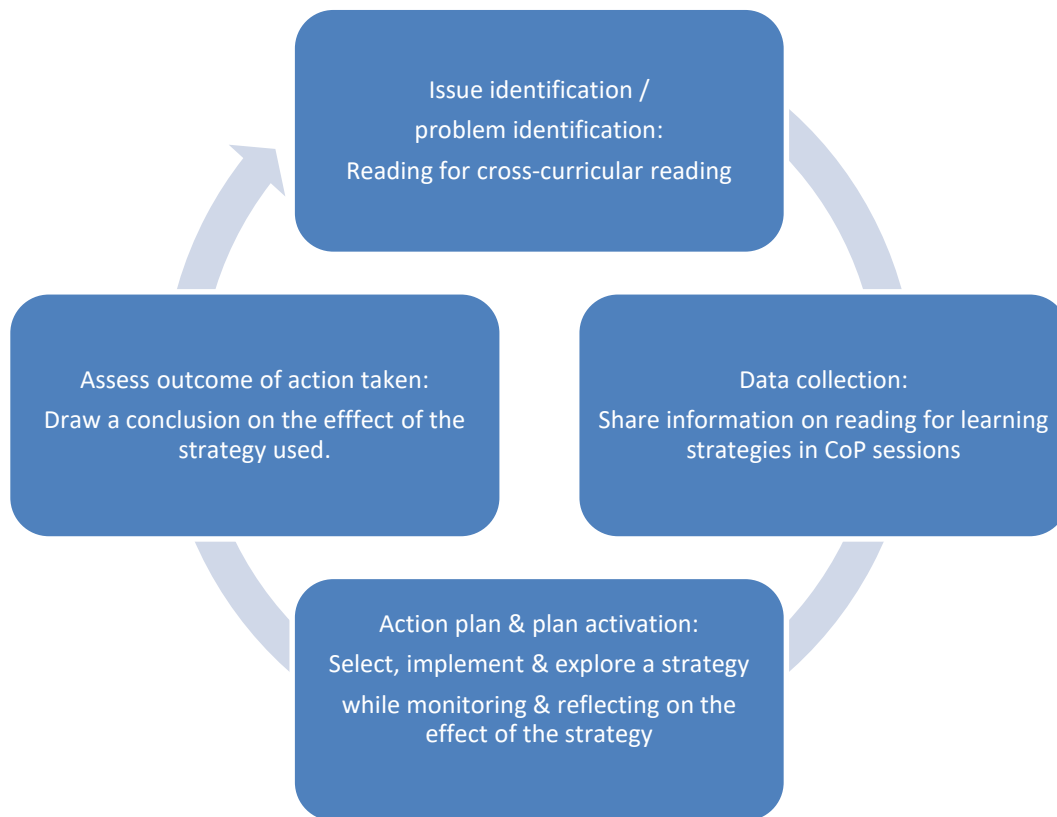


Figure 5: Action research process by individual participants

During each CoP session, participants had the opportunity to learn from colleagues. This was done by sharing ideas on adapting practices, or learning about different strategies for cross-curricular reading and learning.

The cyclical and reflective process of action research resulted from the CoP approach to learning, about reading for cross-curricular learning. When participants reported on the outcomes of the strategies they employed, it served as a form of reflection on their practice. This particular CoP approach encouraged what Rossouw (2009: 5) refers to as “structured reflection” which “requires educators to engage in reflection by thinking critically and creatively and discussing any problematic aspects of their teaching...”.

Reflection within the action research cycle, that developed through the CoP sessions, encouraged participants to take ownership and responsibility for the challenges their learners experienced in their classrooms. This can potentially minimise the practice of blaming others for learners’ achievement (Mavuso, 2015: 23) and encourage teachers to

differentiate instruction in order to take responsibility for all learners learning (Brodie & Borka, 2016:3; Walton, 2016: 145-146). Could the reward of learner growth and development encourage teacher motivation and morale, and foster within teachers, a positive attitude towards learners who experience barriers to learning?

### **6.4.3 Trust and collaboration**

I found that most participants became more confident in sharing the strategies that they had made their own through adapting strategies to their learning contexts. Participants started sharing information with each other that related to topics that were discussed during CoP sessions. They were confident enough to share what they had learned in the CoP, with 'visiting' teachers, and to initiate projects of their own which were related to literacy development. Collaboration among participants appeared to be enhanced. Teachers felt secure and comfortable enough in the CoP, to ask for assistance and support from fellow teachers. Trust thus, developed among participants, who then viewed the CoP as a network of teacher support. Participation in the CoP appeared to improve teacher confidence in providing learning support to learners in their class.

Teachers willing to implement reading and learning strategies, were able to address the needs of some learners without relying on a so called expert. Participants experienced context specific professional learning through participation in the CoP (Cereseto, 2016: 81). In doing so, one of the aims of teacher professional learning, which is to improve learners' learning (Walton, 2016: 50), was achieved.

## **6.4.4 Professional Teacher development**

### **6.4.4.1 Professional learning needs**

Teachers' professional development needs could be identified and addressed in a non-threatening way. During the CoP sessions, participants inadvertently brought their own learning needs to the fore when they identified the challenges they faced. These challenges focused mainly on how to accommodate learners who experienced barriers to language development. The CoP sessions were thus, "driven by teachers' and learners' needs" (Brodie & Borka, 2016: 6). Participants were exposed to various reading strategies that could be used to facilitate learning in various subjects. The information shared in the CoP sessions had the potential to address the learning needs of learners.

### **6.4.4.2 Increased teacher autonomy**

In traditional forms of professional development teachers generally do not select the topics that they want to learn about (Bradley, 2015: 8 – 9). These decisions are typically imposed from someone higher up in the hierarchical structure. It is strongly associated with "someone else's desire to tell" (Timperley, 2011: 14). Teachers frequently experience these forms of professional learning as irrelevant time wasters (Bradley, 2015: 8 – 9, 12).

The community of practice approach encouraged teachers to select the topics that they wanted to discuss and explore. This contributed to increased teacher autonomy. The topics aligned to the teachers' learning needs in respect of their learners' learning needs. It also aligned to the school and classroom contexts. Teachers were directly and actively involved in, and responsible for, their professional learning. They identified their professional learning needs. This guided the topics and strategies discussed in the CoP sessions and subsequently explored in classrooms. This form of professional learning was relevant to their specific context. The participants built up a repertoire of reading

strategies. Most participants implemented these to support and develop learners' reading for cross-curricular learning.

Teachers' autonomy regarding decisions about their professional learning, was increased. They were thus, more likely to take ownership of their professional learning. This, in turn, led to a greater focus on what the teacher needs to do in order to increase learner development.

It was surprising that one participant, who was negative towards the constructivist strategies, shared the strategies with learners' parents. These parents wanted to assist their children's language development at home. She, however, made it crystal clear to the CoP, that she would not use this approach in class – only as a means for parents to assist their children.

Issues of power relations came to mind. This participant appeared content when she was in the position to inform and educate others on a particular issue. She appeared reluctant though, to apply the same information she was sharing with parents, in her classroom practice. Could a mind-set prevail in which she, as a member of the senior management team, viewed herself as an 'expert' who should be the one educating others, but found it unacceptable to learn something different from colleagues in post-level one positions?

#### **6.4.4.3 Responsibility for all learners' learning**

Participants also started taking responsibility for the learning needs of learners. This became evident when they reported back on the outcomes of the strategies they experimented with. When an outcome was reported as a so-called 'failure', it was usually accompanied by reflective thoughts on how to adapt the strategy. This brings to mind the words of McLaughlin & Talbert (2006: 5) who state that "...failures in classroom instruction motivates change." This, I believe to be true only when teachers display a

positive attitude towards learners, and are convinced that they are able to support the learners' learning.

The traditional notion of 'experts or specialists' who have to step in to 'fix learners' appeared to be diminishing. Teachers themselves were seeking solutions to the teaching challenges voiced within the CoP. This relates to the teachers' changing perceptions.

#### **6.4.4.4 Learner participation and learning**

Through their professional learning within the CoP, teachers contributed to improved learner participation and learning. Participation in the CoP also contributed to changing some teachers' perspectives on facilitating the teaching and learning process. Participants started taking responsibility for providing learners with learning support by implementing reading strategies for cross-curricular learning.

#### **6.4.5 Participants' perspectives on teaching and learning**

##### **6.4.5.1 Transformed perspectives**

Participation in the CoP resulted in participants thinking differently about their teaching approaches; becoming more aware of reading strategies, and making learners more aware of its use; consciously enhancing language development when teaching content subjects; and in a reported increase in learner participation in class. It can thus, be said that the CoP as a form of professional development, brought about a change in the teaching practices of some of the participants.

The key to transforming perspectives appears to be the result of personal experience. Through the CoP, participants were exposed to various reading and learning strategies and techniques. They explored and experienced the influence of the strategies on their

teaching and on learners' learning when they experimented with these in their classrooms. Participants further adapted some strategies to suit their particular classroom context and learners' needs. In doing this, they were able to take ownership of the strategies. Over time, those who experimented with the strategies, changed their view regarding an integrated approach to facilitating learning in their classrooms.

This CoP contributed to transforming teachers' beliefs regarding the approach to teaching and learning. Over the two-year period that the CoP ran, most of the teachers in the group were implementing some reading and learning strategies based on a constructivist approach in some of their lessons. These teachers started focusing on the learners – what they as the teachers, needed to do in order to engage with learners and improve learners' learning. Participants were edging towards a learner-centred approach to teaching. Starting to use teaching strategies based on a socio-constructivist philosophy and moving towards a learner-centred approach are gradual steps towards teaching that fosters democracy. This is in line with what Nel (2015: 133) and Nel (2014: 790) refers to as transformative autonomy which he describes as:

*...the form of autonomy in which school role players, such as teachers, have the urge to be involved with fellow role players, in education development initiatives towards social transformation which contributes to democracy. In exercising this transformative autonomy, role players have their school as starting point but do not exclude external forces, such as the DoE.*

#### **6.4.5.2 Unchanged perspectives**

The perspectives of at least two of the participants' remained unchanged. These participants were not convinced that reading and learning are developmental processes. They were not convinced that they could take responsibility for providing some level of support to learners experiencing a barrier to learning. The following beliefs persisted: that at a particular grade and age, learners must be on the same level of learning; that scholastic success depends on rote learning; learning to read should have been

completed after the foundation phase; and that phonics as an approach to teaching reading will ensure that all learners are able to read.

Teachers, whose teaching approaches are still rooted in the ways in which they were taught to teach, are unlikely to attribute a learner's 'failure' to the teacher's approach to teaching, but rather to a 'problem' "within the child" (Wilding & Griffy, 2015: 44; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006: 1).

When teachers' philosophical beliefs are firmly embedded in the medical-deficit approach to teaching, they are unlikely to benefit from a CoP approach to professional teacher learning. A mind-shift, away from the notion of the teacher as the expert, needs to be made if the CoP is to function as a forum for professional teacher development. For a CoP to succeed, participants must be willing to learn from others. This includes learning from both the positive and negative learner responses to teaching practices. Participants need to be flexible with their teaching practices and make adaptations when necessary. Successful instructional practices should be gauged on the degree of learning it allows learners to experience.

## **6.5 PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COP**

Towards the end of the first year of the CoP process, teachers started viewing the CoP as a forum through which they could both receive support and be a form of support to colleagues. Requests were made that the CoP continue, and comments suggested that teachers found the CoP helpful in thinking differently about their approach to teaching. Through collaboration, participants pooled their experience, knowledge and ideas to stimulate the generation of potential solutions to problems. This aligned with findings of Trust, Krutka and Carpernter (2016: 16, 17) who reported that CoPs created a support network within which teachers could "co-construct knowledge" to meet their professional learning needs.

This led me to the assumption that participants found the CoP to be valuable to their professional learning. This could be because the topics discussed addressed their learning needs. The strategies they employed encouraged greater learner participation in their classes. Learning in CoP sessions was driven by the learning needs of the participants.

I suspect too, that participants experienced the CoP as a supportive environment where they could share successes, 'failures', and ideas on overcoming challenges in their teaching and learning contexts. They saw the CoP as a safe place in which they could learn, become more motivated, and in turn, positively influence their learners.

## **6.6 PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS ON READING FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING**

Reading for cross-curricular learning is also known, amongst other terms, as content area reading and writing (Fisher & Frey, 2015) and as integrated reading and writing (Kang, McKenna, Arden, Ciullo, 2016). Fisher and Frey (2015: 524) describe reading for cross-curricular learning as making use of the expository texts in content subjects to develop learners' reading so as to reinforce and strengthen their understanding of the content subject texts they read. Reading for cross-curricular learning thus, promotes the application of reading strategies so that they become learning strategies, not only in the language classroom, but across the curriculum. Teachers who experimented with making learners aware of language structures in content subjects warmed to the idea of reading for cross-curricular learning, during the course of this CoP.

During one of the CoP sessions, a discussion of an English question paper was held. The question paper contained text usually found in the Natural Science. A debate about the question paper helped participants to see the value of reading for cross-curricular learning. The importance of supporting learners in exploring strategies suitable for various text types and not restricting certain strategies to particular subjects, became clear. This experience contributed to teachers realising the value of implementing reading and learning strategies across the curriculum. It showed the interrelatedness of

reading and learning and how strategies taught in content subjects (such as Natural Science) can be utilised and applied in answering a Language question paper. This experience can be related to the overarching research question namely; How can a CoP be established to develop teachers' professional learning about reading for cross-curricular learning in a special school?

Making use of the question paper, like the grade 6 English question paper (Annexure H), was a good way of introducing the concept of reading for cross-curricular learning. The question paper, being an official document of the DoE, served as a tool to convince participants of the relevance of encouraging reading for cross-curricular learning. This points to the need for teachers to receive confirmation or verification from those in authority before implementing something new. The power within these hierarchical structures appeared to be necessary in order to nudge teachers into the direction of transformation. There could possibly be reluctance to engage in different teaching strategies if they are not in some way, endorsed by those seen to be in positions of power. The relevance of different teaching strategies being beneficial to learners' learning is overridden by a need for approval from departmental officials.

## **6.7 THE PHILOSOPHY UNDERPINNING TEACHING AND LEARNING**

A philosophy of teaching, consciously or sub-consciously influences every facet of one's teaching. It was thus, unsurprising that the pedagogies that some teachers implemented continued to be influenced by their initial teacher training. This training was based on fundamental pedagogics, despite change in the philosophical underpinning of South Africa's current curriculum. Teachers who staunchly and doggedly persist on clinging to the philosophy of their initial teacher training, are unlikely to attempt to implement socio-constructivist reading strategies for cross-curricular learning. It is therefore, necessary for teachers to be aware of their teaching philosophy and its influence on all aspects of teaching and learning (Sefotho, 2018: 10; Reber, 2011: 102; Spurgeon & Moore, 1997: 11; 12). In this study, all findings on the participants' beliefs about teaching and learning

within the context of a special school, can be attributed to their philosophy of teaching and learning.

All participants, except for one, initially trained at Afrikaans Teacher Training Colleges during the 1970s – 1980s. Their training was likely entrenched in Fundamental Pedagogics (FP) and Christian National Education (Higgs, 2003: 5; Higgs, 1998: 190; Msila, 1997: 148; Venter, 1995: 58). These participants' philosophy of teaching and learning was evident from their views on learners' reading development; their approach to teaching; the teaching methods they used (Msila, 2007: 149); their attitude to learners with barriers to learning; and their view regarding the responsibility for supporting learners with barriers to learning.

It must be noted, however, that one participant, who received her initial training at an Afrikaner institution between 1980 – 1983, expressed a constructivist view of reading as a developmental process at the beginning and throughout the CoP (cf. 5.2.2: *'n manier om inligting te versamel. [to assemble information];* cf. 5.2.4: *Well they have reading homework everyday actually – because it's so integrated.*). She implemented some of the reading strategies and encouraged fellow participants to continue to do so. She reported improved learner participation and enthusiasm for independent reading among her learners. This participant attributed the success of her grade 12 Afrikaans learners to the reading strategies used in class. This participant, together with the participant who graduated from the University of the Western Cape in 1999, were positive about the CoP from the outset. These two participants were most receptive to implementing and adapting strategies for cross-curricular reading and learning from the outset of the CoP initiative. Not all teachers whose initial teacher training were embedded in FP continued to rigidly adhere to the teaching strategies promoted by that philosophy.

Teachers' inflexible teaching methods; obsession with the adherence to, and completion of, a set curriculum; view of reading; and their view of learners who experience barriers to learning, indicated that they were possibly clinging to the way in which they were

trained to teach. Their basic teaching belief might not align with the socio-constructivist philosophy, but to the behaviourist perspective of Fundamental Pedagogics and Christian National Education.

At the start of the CoP sessions, most participants did not view reading as a developmental process. It was viewed as a once-off process to be completed by the end of grade three. These participants strongly favoured the use of phonics as the only instructional approach to *teaching reading*. This view is indicative of a teaching approach that is linked to the political motivations of Far Right groups (Weaver, 1998: 297). Phonics, as the only strategy to teach reading, aligns with the philosophy that FP and CNE promoted in White Afrikaans teacher training institutions, during the apartheid era in South Africa (Herman, 2010: 490; Msila, 2007: 148 – 149; Venter, 1997: 58; Cross, 1986: 186). The exclusive use of phonics encourages learners to decipher letter for letter, and word for word what is written. This detracts from the meaning of the text. Learners are also not engaged in activities to stimulate their prior knowledge about a text or topic. Mechanical reading, without comprehension is often the result. Reading passages are traditionally followed by a series of low-order questions which do not encourage learners to critically evaluate or question the writer's intent. They are not encouraged to bring their own meaning and interpretation to the text. Learners are praised and regarded as good readers when they fluently recognised and pronounced the words. Little attention is paid to understanding or critically questioning the text. In this way, the use of phonics, as the exclusive method for teaching reading, favoured the political intentions of that time.

South Africa's education curriculum is meant to transform to one based on a constructivist philosophy. This requires teachers to reconsider their beliefs on how learners learn (Reber, 2011: 102). If a thorough understanding of the socio-constructivist perspective is not developed, the scene depicted in the following cartoon, is likely to ring true:



*"I expect you all to be independent, innovative, critical thinkers who will do exactly as I say!"*

Image sourced from:

[https://www.google.co.za/search?q=critical+thinkers+that+do+exactly+as+i+say&rlz=1C1GCEU\\_enZA819ZA819&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiSkYfaifbeAhVKLMAKHfKxD6wQ\\_AUIDigB&biw=1242&bih=597#imgrc=uDhwPKU3tjzaDM](https://www.google.co.za/search?q=critical+thinkers+that+do+exactly+as+i+say&rlz=1C1GCEU_enZA819ZA819&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiSkYfaifbeAhVKLMAKHfKxD6wQ_AUIDigB&biw=1242&bih=597#imgrc=uDhwPKU3tjzaDM):

At the start of the CoP process, most teachers expressed the belief that the way in which they were taught continues to be the only way to teach. One reason for this could be that beliefs are embedded in practical experiences (Apps, 1997 & McKenzie, 1985 as cited in Spurgoen & Moore, 1997: 14). Another reason could be that teachers were unaware that the philosophy underpinning their teaching, influenced the way that they taught and the way that learners' learn. In his research, Reber (2011: 103) confirms that "teachers rarely examine the philosophy of their teaching."

The aims of the new curriculum involve the development of responsible, independent, creative critical thinkers who can collaboratively solve problems (RSA DBE, 2011:5). There are teachers whose dominant approach is behaviourist and teacher-centred while expecting learners to achieve the aims of the new curriculum. In such classrooms, the teacher is the expert and authority figure who is not to be questioned. Teaching methods prompted by behaviourism and the transmission model of teaching are predisposed to encouraging rote learning (Nel & Nel, 2016: 38, 40). If the direct instruction teaching strategy is the only one learners are exposed to, auditory learners will be favoured (Nel & Nel, 2016: 47). It is doubtful that learners' voices and critical thinking will be

encouraged through discussion and debate, if the transmission model of teaching is exclusively used with learners.

Teachers who insist on implementing an exclusively behaviourist, teacher-centred, transmission model of education that detracts from inspiring critical and independent thinking, preserve the philosophy advocated in the apartheid era. This is particularly true when their inflexible teaching serves to exclude rather than include learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Two teachers, close to retirement at the time of this research project, made the decision not to experiment with the various reading strategies. They appeared to have been, as Spurgeon and Moore (1997: 12) explain, tied up in their belief that learners should have mastered reading on completion of the foundation phase. As intermediate phase teachers, the task of developing learners' reading was not their responsibility. Their behaviourist philosophy occasioned their belief that the Department of Education was responsible for providing *specialists* to *fix* the barriers to reading and learning experienced by learners, and they "regard[ed] this as true" (Spurgeon & Moore, 1997: 14). They were averse to equipping themselves and using their teaching time to develop learners' reading for cross-curricular learning. Unfortunately, despite participating, albeit as the negative voices in the CoP, these two participants remained firmly grounded in an exclusively behaviourist approach to teaching and learning. Their beliefs could be influenced by their experiences as learners at school, and their teacher training at institutions of higher learning (Apps, 1973 as cited in Spurgeon & Moore, 1997: 14).

I strongly believe that all professional development initiatives should inform or remind participants about the way in which different teaching philosophies can suppress or encourage learners' critical thinking and the ideology of democracy. This is confirmed by Spurgeon and Moore (1997: 12, 14) who state that teachers need an understanding of the philosophy that drives educational practices. This is necessary in the South African

context, not only for teaching approaches to align with a socio-constructivist philosophy, but to promote inclusive educational practices.

Teachers' philosophies, can be developed and transformed through "educational decisions and each new educational experience" (Spurgeon & Moore, 1997: 11). The CoP has shown the potential to contribute to some teachers' acceptance of teaching strategies based on constructivist principles.

## **6.8 SURPRISE FINDINGS**

The naming of the CoP proved to be important in attracting participants. A discussion with two colleagues – one teaching English and another teaching a content subject – showed that the naming of the CoP is important (cf. 5.3.1). If this CoP had been named 'A CoP for cross-curricular learning', thus, omitting the word 'reading' might more content area teachers have been interested in participating?

Unexpectedly, the use of an English question paper, the theme of which was strongly related to Natural Science, convinced teachers of the relevance of reading for cross-curricular learning (cf. 6.6). The use of a similar document could be useful in introducing teachers to the necessity of reading for cross-curricular learning.

I was surprised that teachers, with heavy workloads and time constraints, participated in the study over a period of two years. The CoP must be of benefit to the participants if it is to succeed. It is necessary for the CoP to meet the learning needs of the participants, which this CoP appeared to do.

## 6.9 CONCLUSION

According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2006: 5), one of the functions of a CoP is to “sustain aspects of the school’s culture vital for continued, consistent norms and instructional practice”. In this study, however, the hope was to transform the norms and instructional practices, to reflect those consistent with the ideals of democracy and inclusive teaching practices.

This CoP helped some participants develop a positive attitude towards learners who experienced barriers to reading and learning. This was evident through their reflections in the CoP sessions. There appeared to be a decrease in the expectation that someone, other than themselves, should provide support to learners with barriers to learning. This attitude will be beneficial to learners as they will be less likely to experience a ‘widening’ of their barrier to learning.

Participants came to the realisation that reading for cross-curricular learning is essential. Importantly, they commented on their responsibility in addressing reading for cross-curricular learning.

The learning needs of learners change continuously. This creates the need for continuous professional learning for teachers (RSA DBE, 2015: 4). At this special school, the CoP served to support teachers’ learning needs. This simultaneously resulted in some learners’ learning needs being addressed.

The CoP can serve to support teachers to support learners’ learning, when teachers themselves identify the topics to be discussed in CoPs. It then equates to a more democratic process than having topics selected on teachers’ behalf – such as in once-off workshops.

When thinking of the participants in this CoP and their provision of learner support through the use of reading for cross-curricular learning, I would like to adapt the lyrics of Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart's "Sisters are doin' it for themselves" (1985) to "Teachers are doing it for themselves".

## **CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This is the final chapter that aims to draw this study to a close. I consider some findings which I view to be key. I draw my final conclusions related to the aim and objectives of the study. This is followed by my recommendations for practice, policy, theory and future research. I acknowledge the limitations of this study and conclude with a final word on the essence of this research.

### **7.2 KEY FINDINGS**

#### **7.2.1 Participants' philosophy of teaching**

Participants' philosophy of teaching influences all aspects of their teaching. The philosophical beliefs of some teachers can, however, be transformed through positive personal experience of an alternative approach to teaching and learning. Some participants are, however, try to achieve learning outcomes based on a constructivist teaching philosophy, using teaching strategies based on a medical-deficit and a behaviourist approach to teaching.

#### **7.2.2 Establishing a CoP**

A CoP for reading for cross-curricular learning, was established at the study's special school. The CoP consisted of ten core participants – six participant-researchers, three critical monitors, and myself as the researcher-participant. "Focusing on strengths enables people to build on their pre-existing resources, capacities and talents" (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 6). The success of the CoP lay in the reliance of participants on each

other's' strengths, ideas and teaching experience. This interdependence contributed to a sense of community and enhanced the collaborative nature of the CoP. The core community psychology values of "citizen participation", "sense of community", and "collaboration and community strengths" (Dalton et al., 2007: 24-25, 27-28) were realised within the CoP. Individual participants were able to influence the group and be influenced by the group. This shows the correlation and interaction between the individual and a community, within the theory of community psychology (Dalton et al., 2007: 16).

Collaboratively (within the CoP) and individually (within their classroom contexts), participants were able to learn more about their practice, in practice, for the development of their practice. Participants were able to learn about reading for cross-curricular learning, by becoming researchers into their own practice. In doing so, via the CoP, participants became more aware of the philosophy underpinning the current curriculum. This aligns to the framework of community psychology which values "human resource development, political activity and scientific inquiry" (Rappaport, 1997 as cited in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 4).

When establishing a CoP, it is vital that participation in the initiative be voluntary. Prospective participants need to be interested in the aim or domain of the CoP. They need to envision the value that a CoP may hold for them. It is important that participants determine the aim of the CoP. This is likely to contribute to their sense of ownership of the initiative. In addition, it is more likely to address participants' specific learning needs. Participants should favour sharing ideas, resources, experiences, instructional successes and challenges. In addition, participants have to be open-minded and positive about experimenting with teaching strategies that are likely to be new to them and their learners. Participants should be willing to become researchers into their own practice, thus, realising the community psychology value of "empirical grounding" (Dalton et al., 2007: 29). Participants applied, and also adapted when necessary, the information on reading strategies, and experimented with it in their classroom situations. The practical, action-driven, and participatory nature (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 7; Viljoen, Pistorius

& Eskell-Blokland, 2007: 118) of both the CoP and critical community psychology, were witnessed.

When initiating or establishing a CoP, it is important to think carefully about the name. This CoP was referred to as the “Reading CoP”. This gave the impression that only teachers involved in the traditional sense of teaching reading, namely; the language teachers, might benefit from the CoP. From this, I can also conclude that most teachers still see the task of ‘reading development’ as that of language teachers. The necessity to address reading for learning needs to be emphasised in both pre-service and in-service teacher development initiatives.

It is advantageous to have access to a comfortable, conveniently situated physical space for participants to meet. At this school, CoP sessions were held after school hours. Teachers had just spent an often challenging day in their classrooms. Having a pleasant on-site space in which to convene, made a long school day more bearable; so did the refreshments that were served to participants at each CoP session. The provision of refreshments may seem trivial, yet participants interacted in a relaxed and informal manner at such gatherings. These interactions advanced a sense of community among participants.

A sense of community, fundamental to community psychology, is described as experiencing a feeling of belonging, being able to associate and interact with each other, while displaying concern for each group member. It is further described as the reliance on, and connection to, each other that unites members as they strive towards a common goal (Sarason, 1974, as cited in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 103; McMillan & Chavis, 1986, Sarason, 1974, as cited in Dalton et al., 2007: 24). A sense of community results from the “participatory action” that the group participates in, as they work towards a common goal (Tebes, 2017: 24). Time for informal interaction between CoP members was valuable in developing a sense of community among us.

### 7.2.3 Sustaining a CoP

A dedicated co-ordinator is needed to facilitate the running of the CoP, if it is to be sustained. Even when the CoP reaches the stage of collegiality, a co-ordinator or facilitator is imperative to the continuation of the CoP. A co-ordinator can ensure that reminders for dates for the CoP sessions are sent out, and also verify whether the participant presenting to the group or leading a particular aspect of the CoP needs assistance.

In this study, the 'To GROW' process was used to facilitate each CoP session. This was found to be useful in structuring the CoP sessions. It ensured that discussions and the process did not stagnate. It helped the group to set the topic for subsequent CoP sessions. In this way participants collaboratively set context-specific topics that they wanted to learn about. Topics selected by the CoP members were relevant to their classroom contexts and to participants' learning needs. The members thus, controlled what was to be addressed in CoP sessions. This contributed to members' ownership of the CoP and to the democratic process that was intended. From a critical community psychology perspective, the 'To GROW' process encouraged values such as equal member participation, which is associated with the practice of democracy and collaboration, which influences relationships and aims to diminish power dynamics between members (Akhurst, 2017: 4; Dalton et al., 2007: 27–28).

It is important for participants to have an opportunity to share their findings and explorations of the reading strategies with others. This was evident when the CoP members shared information with visitors to a CoP session. Sharing what they had learnt contributed to participants' sense of ownership, leadership, and autonomy. It also boosts the confidence, morale and motivation of CoP participants.

The support of the principal was a significant factor in both establishing and sustaining the CoP. The principal gave permission for the CoP to be established. He regarded this

CoP as beneficial to both the learners and the teachers at the school. He supported its establishment and maintenance by availing the staff room for CoP sessions. The principal also agreed to participate as a critical monitor in this study. He provided further support by, not only listening to the challenges encountered with running the CoP, but also seeking solutions to them as well. The principal accommodated the CoP on the school's extra-curricular timetable, during the second year of the initiative. This was crucial in enabling the CoP members to meet during assigned time-slots. Critical community psychology calls on us to be conscious of power dynamics as they can either advance or impede well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 107). In this case, the principal used his positional power to advocate the formation and maintenance of the CoP. The reason for this was that he viewed the CoP as potentially beneficial to participants and ultimately learners at the school. The power of his position as principal was used "to promote well-being" (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 115) among participants and their learners.

#### **7.2.4 Value of the CoP**

A CoP as a form of professional learning is aligned to democratic principles. It is a bottom-up approach to teacher development. It subscribes to the principles of critical community psychology as it promotes shared leadership and ownership a learning initiative that is collaborative in nature. Through encouraging shared leadership, there is an attempt to diminish the hierarchical power relations inherent within a school community.

The CoP-approach allowed participants to identify their own professional learning needs in a safe, non-threatening, and non-judgmental environment. Asking participants to identify the challenges that learners encountered in class, allowed participants to inadvertently identify their own learning needs. These learning needs related to how participants could support learners in their classrooms. The in-class support of learners experiencing any form of barrier to learning, promoted inclusivity in our teaching and learning contexts.

Teacher participation in the CoP resulted in additional benefits to learning. In this case, participation in the CoP led to one participant running an initiative that encouraged reading and writing among learners at the school – including learners experiencing barriers to reading and writing. In addition to involving the learners at the school, the initiative also involved their parents and extended family members. Attendees of the Women’s Day event were reminded of the importance of encouraging children to read. Practical ways to encourage a love of reading and to assist learners who experience difficulties with literacy, were demonstrated. It also reminded those attending of the important link between reading and learning. The CoP promoted the value of the social ecological aspect encapsulated within a critical community psychology perspective (Visser, 2007: 102-110). The ecological perspective serves to indicate the multiple influences of one occurrence (Dalton, et al., 2007: 17). The Women’s Day event potentially stimulated attendees’ (e.g. parents, grandparents, siblings of learners at the school) thoughts regarding literacy and its advantages for learners. A prospective link between learners’ microsystems of home and school (Dalton et al., 2007: 19; Visser, 2007: 106) was potentially enhanced. The hope was that, support in learners’ development of literacy would be extended to the home. In this way, the power play in the misconception of the teacher as ‘expert’ (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 37-38) and sole provider of assistance to learners (as in the medical-deficit model), would be diminished. Teachers and parents were encouraged to collaboratively support learners’ development of literacy and learning.

### **7.2.5 Action research**

Participants, inadvertently, embarked on the cyclical and reflective process of action research by continually reflecting on, and adjusting their, practice to better meet learners’ learning needs (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 45).

During the CoP sessions, participants reported on the outcomes of the strategies they implemented. Reports on effective strategies were applauded. New goals were then set

in terms of a different strategy they wanted to explore. Participants also identified new challenges that they wished to address. This would determine the topic to be discussed in future CoPs. Strategies that were reported as being ineffective in certain contexts were also discussed. Colleagues suggested alternatives or modifications which were then explored. Participants encountered the action research process through: “issue identification”, “data collection”, the “action plan”, the “plan activation”, and “outcome assessment” (Pelton, 2010: 8-9). The “participatory” and “action orientated” nature of participants’ learning about the strategies for reading for cross-curricular learning, are concomitant to a community psychology perspective (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 7).

Unfortunately, in this study, participants were not made aware that they were engaging in individual cycles of action research. The term ‘action research’, its process, advantages and disadvantages were not emphasised or discussed in CoP sessions. In the initiation of future CoPs, I will emphasise teachers’ Action Research as a further means of professional learning.

Through the CoP, teachers found ways to assist and support learners’ reading for cross-curricular learning. Teachers, with a positive attitude, participated in the cyclical and reflective process that the CoP encouraged. Participants addressed the challenges they faced in the teaching and learning context through their report back and subsequent reflection in the CoP sessions. They reflected on the outcome of the instructional changes they made and shared this with others.

The action research cycle that the CoP process evolved into, presented the opportunity to work collaboratively *with*, and not *on*, participants. It contributed to participants’ “self-determination” and sense of “control” as they chose and, when necessary, adapted strategies to suit their classroom contexts (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 38). This is one way in which the principle of power within critical community psychology, came to the fore. Participants’ search for solutions to problems, served to illustrate to them that they themselves had or could obtain the know-how to support learners’ learning. The notion

of an “expert” was in the process of being “depowered” (Akhurst, 2017: 2; Hart & Akhurst, 2016: 4; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 40-41).

### **7.2.6 Reflection on learning**

The CoP encouraged participants to reflect on their practice. Each CoP session in which the participants provided feedback on the strategies they had explored, acted as a form of reflection on what they had learned. Participants started showing greater responsibility for learners’ learning as they sought and explored different ways in which to support learners experiencing barriers to reading and thus to learning.

The CoP was a form of support and motivation to participants. Potential solutions to challenges in specific teaching and learning contexts were collaboratively addressed. Participants realised that they could not only discuss challenges that they experienced in their classrooms, but importantly, seek potential solutions to these. There were collaborative efforts to address classroom challenges. The CoP became a support network for participants. It served to diminish the isolated manner that teachers traditionally worked in, within their classrooms. The knowledge that fellow colleagues also experienced difficulties in class, further minimised the feeling of isolation.

### **7.2.7 Reading for cross-curricular learning**

Through the CoP, participants were able to value the relevance and integrated nature of reading for cross-curricular learning. Using a grade 6 English question paper, which according to participants was structured more like a Natural Science question paper, was useful in convincing participants of the value of reading for cross-curricular learning.

## **7.3 FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this study was to explore the use of a Community of Practice, as a school-based form of teacher professional learning about reading for cross-curricular learning.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To identify the way in which teachers' underlying teaching philosophy influence their implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school.
2. To explore the factors that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a CoP at a special school.
3. To determine the advantages and disadvantages of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school.
4. To explore teachers' perceptions of a CoP-approach to teacher professional development at a special school.
5. To investigate teachers' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular learning at a special school.

### **7.3.1 Teachers' underlying teaching philosophy and the implementation of reading for cross-curricular learning**

In the South African context, professional learning initiatives should remind teachers of the reason for the change to a socio-constructivist perspective to education. It should remind teachers how the teaching strategies, such as rote learning that promotes only surface learning (Dolmans, Loyens, Marcq & Gijbels, 2016: 1088 – 1089), deprive learners from developing critical thinking skills, and how this was effectively used to fuel the apartheid ideology. Teaching approaches and the teaching strategies employed in a classroom links to political ideologies. This is supported by Attard Tonna and Shanks (2017: 91) who state that "...teachers' beliefs, and the meanings they ascribe to their

social worlds, impact on their behaviour and their disposition towards learning ...". The link between political ideologies should therefore, be incorporated into professional development initiatives. The political goals of a behaviourist/transmission model and the goals of socio-constructivist/transformational model should be made clear. If teachers understand this link, they may be more open to a paradigm shift towards a constructivist and an inclusive perspective to education. Teachers who cling to the medical-deficit, transmission model of education are unlikely to implement inclusive teaching practices and provide learners with learning support. They are likely to regard this task as that of a learning support specialist.

Perspectives can be changed if success is personally experienced. Participants who were convinced that an integrated, constructivist approach to developing learners' learning, were participants who; experimented with the strategies and experienced a positive response from their learners, and those who saw their own children experience success when a constructivist approach to teaching and learning was used.

Teachers have to implement and experiment with the reading strategies over a period of time, if they are to experience the influence they will have on learners' learning. Applying the reading strategies over a period of time is necessary for teachers to start changing their perspective on constructivist-based reading strategies for cross-curricular learning. Teachers who have experienced success when exploring the use of a constructivist approach to teaching, are more likely to make a mind-shift towards the use of teaching strategies based on this perspective. This is a gradual process.

Teachers need a safe, supportive environment (Attard Tonna & Shanks, 2017: 99) in which to experiment with, and explore the use of, constructivist teaching strategies in order to experience the influence of these strategies on their teaching and learners' learning. The CoP provides such a platform, together with collegial support that can result in collective, collaborative professional learning among teachers.

## **7.3.2 Factors that contribute to establishing and sustaining a CoP**

### **7.3.2.1 Establishing a CoP**

It is possible to establish a CoP at a special school. The establishment of a CoP is enhanced if it is supported by the principal; and if the topics or challenges to be discussed and addressed are determined by the participants. The name given to a CoP when it is introduced to prospective members, should be carefully considered.

### **7.3.2.2 Sustaining a CoP**

This study has shown that five factors are among those that are crucial for sustaining a functional CoP. Firstly, dedicated, committed teachers are essential if functional CoPs are to be established and sustained.

Secondly, a CoP is likely to be sustained if participants find that the challenges they identified are addressed, and positively contribute to their teaching and to learners' learning. Professional learning then becomes specific and relevant to their teaching and learning contexts.

Another factor found to influence the maintenance of a CoP is the presence of a co-ordinator or facilitator. To sustain a CoP, a dedicated coordinator needs to facilitate its running. This should happen even once all or most participants appear to have taken ownership of the CoP.

The factor often mentioned in the literature and experienced in this study, was the issue of time. CoPs cannot run effectively if sessions are slotted on an ad hoc basis. Dedicated timeslots on the school's annual timetable or planning calendar need to be allocated for CoPs to convene.

The fifth factor identified as being crucial to establishing and sustaining the CoP, was the support of the principal. As previously stated, the principal played a vital role in establishing this CoP. He gave permission for it to be established, availed the use of the staff room, encouraged teachers to participate, played the role of a critical monitor, and contributed to alleviating the problem of time for CoP sessions. The support of the principal enabled the establishment and maintenance of the CoP.

### **7.3.3 The advantages and disadvantages of a CoP-approach to teachers' professional learning**

#### **7.3.3.1 The advantages of a CoP**

Participating in a CoP, such as the one on reading for cross-curricular learning, can promote inclusive practices as teachers explore and learn various ways to accommodate and support learners experiencing barriers to reading (Darling-Hammond, Hylar & Gardner, 2017: 2). CoPs thus, have the potential to enhance the implementation of inclusive practices in the teaching and learning context. As the learner population at the school is diverse and always changing, teachers are likely to need ongoing support to address the diverse barriers that learners experience. A CoP could be one way of accommodating this need.

The ripple effective of the principles of critical community psychology were noted as inclusive practices can contribute social justice. CoP members who explored, reflected on and continually tried to support learners' development in reading and learning, reported a positive change in some learners' learning (cf. 6.4.1). Social justice was encouraged as attempts were made by some participants to ensure that *all* learners had access to the learning process (Bond, Serrano-Garcia & Keys, 2017: 6). These participants provided necessary resources to (often marginalised) learners who experienced barriers to learning. Learners at this special school had already been separated from learners in

so-called ordinary schools. Every effort should thus be made to not further marginalise learners by denying them access to learning because of a barrier to reading. From a critical community psychology perspective, the CoP aimed to support teachers to support all learners not only in minimising existing barriers to learning, but in preventing the further development of barriers to learning and thus exclusionary practices (Evans, Duckett, Lawthom & Kivell, 2017: 108). The CoP addressed the critical community psychology principles of inclusion and prevention and the value of social justice (Hart & Akhurst, 2017: 3; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 36-37, 39 Roos, Visser, Pistorius & Nefale, 2007: 395).

Another advantage of a CoP is that there is minimal, if any, disruption to the teaching and learning programme. This is so, if CoPs are conducted after teaching hours and according to pre-determined scheduled timeslots assigned for such professional learning initiatives (cf. 5.3.3.5; 6.3.2).

This CoP was school-based. There was thus, no additional costs and time spent on travelling to another venue (cf. 5.3.3.5). Professional learning through a CoP enables convenient access to teacher-led, school-based learning. A CoP is a cost effective means of supporting teachers in providing the first level of support to learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Teachers were able to participate in professional learning that was relevant to their context specific learning needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017: 2). Within the CoP, participants were encouraged to adapt strategies to suit their teaching and learning contexts.

The CoP at this school succeeded in providing a support network for participants (cf. 5.3.5.1). Participants themselves were able to provide each other with potential solutions to problems and adaptations to strategies discussed and explored. In this way, teacher

isolation was reduced. The support from co-participants served to build teacher motivation and morale. The “participatory” rather than “expert-driven” approaches, which are features of critical community psychology, was practiced through the CoP (Akhurst, 2017: 2).

Participation in the CoP contributed to participants’ professional learning (cf. 5.3.5.2). This occurred when participants explored a different strategy in their class and reflected on the outcome through report backs to the CoP. Teachers could initiate individual action research projects (cf. 6.4.2).

Participants had the opportunity to lead CoP sessions or sections of CoP sessions. We thus worked with each other to seek appropriate interventions to support learners experiencing barriers to learning. This contributed to teacher autonomy through teachers’ roles as leaders within the CoP (Wilson, 2016: 48). The CoP addressed the power dynamic which is important to examine within the perspective of critical community psychology (Hart & Akhurst, 2016: 4; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 38). “Power dynamics” have an influence on people’s “well-being” (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 102). This could be detected in the CoP. Participants could exercise their power to:

- Participate in the CoP on a voluntary basis;
- Identify their own learning needs and thus select topics to be addressed;
- Select the reading strategy/strategies they wanted to explore within their specific classroom context;
- Share the outcomes of the strategies they explored;
- Reflect on and evaluate the information that was shared within the CoP;
- Share their own ideas and/or modify research based strategies to suit the learners they were working with;
- Collaboratively develop or construct new knowledge that could be used by the group.

Participants described being motivated through their participation in the CoP (cf. 5.3.3.1). Their autonomy and self-determination in decision making speaks of the power participants wielded within the CoP, which promoted their own well-being (Wilson, 2016: 48; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 121).

Teacher autonomy was increased as participants identified their own learning needs which were directly aimed at supporting learners' learning (cf. 6.4.4.2). They selected the reading strategies that they felt best accommodated the challenges that they and their learners encountered. Participants were also encouraged to adapt strategies to suit their specific classroom contexts. Curiosity about the outcomes of the implemented strategies, served as an intrinsic motivator to teachers.

An important advantage of the CoP, was the realisation by participants, that they, and not only an *expert*, could provide learning support to learners at this special school. This realisation was instrumental in bolstering teachers' self-worth and their confidence in taking responsibility for learning support to learners (Churchman, Weisenfeld & Sadan, 2017: 319).

The CoP was a platform through which participants reflected on their teaching, and learners' learning. This happened when they reported on the outcomes of the implemented strategies. The CoP thus, encouraged teacher reflection which is an important element in the professional development of teachers (Korthagen, 2017: 388, 392; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017: 14; Allen, Brodeur, Israelson, Martin-Ker, Ortman & Pieterston, 2018: 81-82; Gheith & Aljaberi, 2018: 161-162; Aldahmash, Alshmrani & Almufti, 2017: 43). CoPs can provide an opportunity for teachers to do research into their own practice. The CoP enabled the notion of a teacher as a life-long reflective learner.

The CoP provided the possibility for participants to receive a form of scaffolding or support from colleagues within the school and from support structures outside of the

school when needed. This relates to the ecological aspect of critical community psychology (Dalton et al., 2007: 17-21). The principles, “*interdependence, distribution of resources, adaptation and succession*” of a social ecological model (Visser, 2007: 104-105) could be identified when this CoP was analysed from a critical community psychology perspective. Collaboration (*interdependence*) with support structures outside of the school, such as the learning support specialist within the Inclusive Education Unit, can provide CoP participants with broader perspectives, ideas and support when attempting to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to reading and learning. The CoP creates a support network for participants.

*Distribution of resources* was evident when participants shared ideas, experiences and information with each other. Participants adapted the resources they were exposed to in the CoP, to suit their particular teaching and learning contexts (*adaptation*). “Succession refers to the orderly process of community change as a way of adapting to new situations.” (Visser, 2007: 105). Participants participated in the CoP for a period of two years. During this time, most continually sought solutions to new challenges they were presented with in their class situations and explored reading strategies for cross-curricular learning which were based on a constructivist perspective.

The overall aim of any undertaking entrenched in community psychology, is to meet the needs of the community (Swart, Bowman, 2007: 435). The value of the CoP, was that it achieved this overall aim of community psychology, by addressing the need of this community of practitioners, which was to supporting learners in developing reading for cross-curricular learning.

The values and principles of critical community psychology, namely; concern for other’s well-being, self-determination, accountability, social justice, inclusive practices, power dynamics, sense of community, critical participation, and collaboration (Churchman, Wiesenfeld & Sadan, 2017: 317 Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 35, 37-39; Dalton et al., 2007: 23-28), could be identified within the CoP. The values of participation and

democracy were emboldened, especially when members openly communicated with each other and when they shared their knowledge of reading strategies with visitors to the CoP (Churchman et al., 2017: 319). When participants reflected on the strategies implemented, they determined the efficacy thereof, within their contexts. Participants then exercised autonomy in deciding whether and how to adapt strategies to best suit their classroom contexts. In this way, they practiced critical participation as they had the power to determine the suitability of the reading strategies for their specific contexts (Churchman et al., 2017: 317).

The principle of community and the notion of sense of community (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 37; Dalton et al., 2007: 24) became evident when members collaborated with each other in finding potential solutions to difficulties experienced in their teaching contexts. Members' collaborative participation contributed to a sense of community within the CoP. Their collaboration with each other within the CoP sessions and the exploratory action undertaken when experimenting with the reading strategies in their classrooms, resulted in participants performing research into their individual practices. This led to their professional learning which was teacher-led. Leadership of the CoP sessions was shared among participants. Participants led various CoP sessions, sections of CoP, and an event involving the parent community of the school.

Shared leadership within this CoP diminished the power dynamic usually present in professional development initiatives that are enforced on teachers by others. The power dynamic was further reduced as teachers identified their own learning needs. This resulted in topics relevant to the participants being addressed in CoP sessions. CoP participants exercised the power to "self-determine and control" the reading strategies they would implement in their classrooms (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010: 38). In so doing, participants controlled the way in which they supported and accommodated all learners' learning in their classrooms. The CoP set in motion participants' "capacity to [imagine] new paths and take action" (Evans, Duckett, Lawthom & Kivell, 2017:117) to support learners in developing reading for cross-curricular learning.

### **7.3.3.2 Disadvantages of a CoP**

Participation in the CoP is voluntary. A CoP usually comprises a relatively small number of members. All staff members are not involved – a limited number of staff participate in the learning within the CoP.

There is a risk of limited perspectives being aired because of the small number of participants. This can, however, be alleviated by inviting knowledgeable guest speakers to address various topics.

Establishing a functioning CoP is a time consuming process. It takes a considerable time for participants to develop a trusting relationship with each other. It also takes time to experiment with the strategies shared within the CoP. The outcomes of the reading strategies on cross-curricular learning are thus, not evident immediately. When establishing a CoP, the chronological or time aspect within the ecological perspective of community psychology should be considered.

There is no official reward or acknowledgment for members who participate in CoPs, except for the possibility of earning professional development points with SACE.

### **7.3.4 Participants' perceptions of a CoP-approach to professional development**

Participants reported that the CoP contributed to their professional learning. They also reported that there was a positive change in learners' responses in class when the strategies were used.

Teacher autonomy can be increased by teachers taking responsibility for supporting learners' learning. It can also be enhanced by the realisation that they, within a structure as a CoP, can be responsible for their own learning.

### **7.3.5 Participants' perceptions of reading for cross-curricular reading**

The use of a grade-6 English Language question paper (Annexure H) was an effective way to promote the value and rationale for reading for cross-curricular reading. Such a tool could be a good start when introducing the ideas of reading for cross-curricular learning; and the notion that all teachers, and not only language teachers, can contribute to the development of learners reading and learning.

Through the CoP, participants were able to value the relevance and integrated nature of reading for cross-curricular learning.

## **7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In light of the conclusions that I have drawn from this study, I make the following recommendations with regard to practice, policy, theory, and future research.

### **7.4.1 Practice**

In the context of this specific school, there is one head of department in the primary school. According to Wilson (2016: 46 – 47) CoPs have the potential to encourage leadership among teachers. Within this special school, I recommend the use of the CoP-approach for subject meetings so as to encourage the integration of support to learners across all subjects. Teachers can rely on each other for support (Wilson, 2016: 45) and

not solely on the head of department. This could minimise the work pressure that is likely to be placed on the head of department who is to be the head for all subjects. I further recommend that research be done into the use of a CoP-approach to subject meetings, where there is only one head of department for all the subjects. I also recommend that the use of the CoP-approach at this particular school be extended by establishing various CoPs related to the different content subjects within the school.

A further recommendation would be for teachers at this special school to share their experience of learning via a CoP, with other schools. Acting in its capacity as a resource centre (RSA, DoE, 2001), as recommended in White Paper 6, this special school could encourage other schools to establish CoPs. Collaboration between various schools could be encouraged. Teachers from different schools could form a CoP addressing the same domain. A variety of perspectives could be gained in this manner as teachers from different schools work together to share various ideas, perspectives and resources. A topic for future research could emerge from this. I suggest that future research be done on the use of a special school as a resource centre in facilitating the establishment of CoPs in ordinary schools. Research can also be conducted to discover whether CoPs in ordinary schools contribute to inclusive teaching practices within these schools.

As members of the district based support team (DBST), Learning Support Specialists from the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU) are each assigned to a cluster of schools, with the aim of assisting teachers in providing the necessary level of learning support to learners (RSA, DBE, 2014: 10 – 11; RSA, DoE, 2001: 47). I recommend that the Learning Support Specialist encourage teachers, including teachers at rural schools, to establish CoPs. This can be linked to further research which involves the exploration of the way in which CoPs can be used to augment and increase the support that district officials provide to teachers and learners at schools.

As stated previously (cf. 7.2.5), I did not focus on the Action Research to draw participants' attention to the fact they embarked on individual action research projects

(cf. 5.3.3.7; 6.4.2) when experimenting with various reading strategies. I therefore, recommend that emphasis be placed on action research as a means of professional learning, when initiating CoPs. I believe that the notion of teachers-as-researchers should be galvanised.

#### **7.4.2 Policy**

It is disheartening to learn that some teachers at special schools have a negative attitude to learners experiencing barriers to learning (cf. 5.5.4.2). It is of concern that there are teachers in special schools who do not deem it their responsibility to provide learning support to learners experiencing barriers to learning (cf. 5.2.5). It is therefore, recommended that there should be a policy stating that all teachers who teach at special schools must be willing and able to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning. In addition, they must possess the knowledge and skills to implement inclusive practices. If teachers are unable to do so, they must participate in continuous professional development that capacitates them to provide support to learners experiencing barriers to learning.

#### **7.4.3 Theory**

The CoP in this study served as a means for teachers to collaboratively learn to support and accommodate learners experiencing barriers to reading and learning (cf. 5.3.3.1). The CoP process afforded participants the opportunity to explore and discuss reading strategies that were based on a constructivist philosophy – a philosophy which was new to some participants. According to Amobi (2003: 25) “...a teacher’s educational beliefs dominate and dictate classroom practice”. It is, therefore, important that teachers be made aware of their philosophies of education. They need to be cognisant of the way in which one’s teaching philosophy, not only determines classroom practices, but impacts and shapes learners’ learning, either positively or negatively, and could indeed influence

their beliefs and life views. I recommend the use of CoPs as platforms to engage with teaching philosophies when problems and solutions related to educational issues within a specific institution or classroom are discussed. I recommend that CoPs be used as means to collaboratively explore, challenge and possibly transform perceptions – often ingrained by the past education system that bolstered Fundamental Pedagogics, Christian National Education and a medical deficit model of education – about the various ways in which teachers can support all learners to learn and develop to the best of their potential (cf. 5.3.3.3; 6.4.5.1).

Literature does not mention the naming of the CoP as a factor that influences its establishment. A discussion with two colleagues – one teaching English and another teaching a content subject – showed that the naming of the CoP is important (cf. 5.3.1). When given a hypothetical choice, the English teacher indicated that she would be interested in participating in a ‘CoP for reading across the curriculum’ while the content subject teacher said he would be interested in a ‘CoP for learning across the curriculum’. A name suggesting the domain that is to be addressed in the CoP determines the interest of potential participants. I thus, recommend that particular attention be paid to the name given to a CoP. The name given should indicate what the focus of the CoP will be.

#### **7.4.4 Future research**

This study shows that there are teachers whose classroom practices continue to be influenced by the philosophical grounding of their initial teacher training. Classroom practices that continue in this vein will stifle inclusive and democratic practices. I suggest that further research be conducted to determine how teachers form and also express their theoretical beliefs. This could serve as an indication of the extent to which teacher professional development initiatives should focus on developing teachers’ awareness of the effect of an educational philosophy on classroom teaching and learning.

This research was conducted in one special school. I therefore, recommend that research be done on the establishment of CoPs at other special schools and at ordinary (mainstream) schools, with the aim of establishing whether it is a viable option for professional learning for teachers in these institutions. The value of action research as a means of professional learning, could be incorporated into further research on CoPs.

All the participants in this study were language teachers who also taught a content subject. For future study, it would be interesting to select participants who are exclusively content subject teachers in an ordinary or mainstream school. In this way, the strategies as a means of both developing reading for cross-curricular learning and as a means of promoting and implementing inclusive practices within ordinary schools, can be explored.

To stimulate the idea of school-based, collaborative, continuous professional learning among pre-service teachers, I recommend the investigation into the use of CoPs among pre-service teachers when they embark on practice teaching. Teachers have traditionally worked in isolation and 'behind closed doors' so to speak. Introducing the use of CoPs may be one way to encourage the idea of cooperative, collaborative working and collective learning among future teachers.

## **7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In this study, the use of a CoP-approach to professional teacher learning was explored in one special school. There was a limited number of participants in this research undertaking (six teachers, three critical monitors and myself as researcher). The limited number of participants was because participation in the CoP was voluntary.

The research design was described as participatory, yet the typical, orthodox cycle of participatory research was not strictly followed. The study was done as a requirement

for a PhD thesis and ran for a period of two years. Time constraints thus, restricted the implementation of the cyclical nature of typical participatory research. However, the two-year period that the CoP ran, was sufficient to gauge the effect of this approach as a means of teacher professional development. Typical participatory research encompassing the continuous cycle of inquiry and with participants being fully involved in the process of data collection and analysis, was not applied. Teachers analysed the outcomes of the strategies they implemented when they reflected on its influence on learners' learning. They did not analyse the data that was collected via the audio recordings of the CoP sessions. This analysis was done by myself as the researcher.

The participants' continual participation in each CoP session was the participatory aspect of this study. The cyclical participatory aspect could be seen when teachers repeatedly met to reflect on the reading strategies they had individually explored in practice. The adaptations made, were to individual practices when the strategies did not appear to improve learners' responses. Individual teachers, at various times during the two-year period, repeated the cycle of trying out a particular (adapted) strategy. Participants explored and reported on the outcomes of the reading strategies. This spontaneously resulted in cycles of action research. However, the participants' individual use of action research and the action research process was not emphasised. Teachers were not made aware of the term and the idea of action research.

The research question was set by me, although the problem of learners' barriers to reading and the need to address it, was initiated by the teachers at the school.

My inexperience as a researcher limited this study. The guidance of my supervisor, however, served to address this limitation.

## 7.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings of this study are related to the professional learning of teachers in the field of reading for cross-curricular learning. Reading equates to learning. Learners who experience any form of barrier to reading, will also experience a barrier to learning at school.

Traditionally, learners are taught to read in the foundation phase. Any further development of their reading, was accepted as the duty of the language teacher or a remedial teacher. A change to a socio-constructivist approach to teaching in South Africa necessitates a change to this way of thinking. Inclusive instructional practices are advocated and the class teacher is now tasked with providing the first level of learning support to learners. This would extend to learners who need support in developing their reading for the purpose of learning. A change in the role of the teacher exacts the need for professional teacher learning and development.

Since South Africa is a democratic country, the form of professional learning should aspire to democratic principles. Professional learning, alternative to one-off, top-down formats traditionally used, are needed. Professional learning opportunities for teachers need to be on-going and need to appeal to adult learners. A Community of Practice approach to the professional learning of teachers promotes distributed leadership among its participants. Distributed leadership serves to diminish the issues of power within a group. In addition, it contributes to participants' sense of ownership over their learning.

The CoP-approach resulted in participants engaging in their own action research projects. This occurred when participants experimented with, assessed, and reflected on, the reading strategies that they had implemented in their classes. Selecting the topics to

be discussed during CoP sessions and becoming researchers of their own practices, contributed to teachers' autonomy and ownership of their learning.

I believe that CoPs can become powerful learning environments for teachers. They are a means of increasing the belief that class teachers are capable of providing the first level of support to learners experiencing barriers to learning. They could also be a means of diminishing the belief that only *experts* or *specialists* can provide support to learners experiencing a barrier to learning. Learning support specialists and therapists will, however, be consulted when learners are in need of higher levels of support.

The value of the CoP as a means of addressing teachers' learning needs regarding reading for cross-curricular learning were underscored and affirmed by the following quotes: "PLCs are at the heart of teaching and learning within schools" (Wilson, 2017: 48), "This [the CoP] must please not end" (Victoria, research participant, cf. 5.3.3.1) and "I would say it's really a positive influence...on the learners and on myself. I'm using the opportunity for language development in all my subjects" (Beatrice, research participant, cf. 5.3.3.1). It is essential that we, as teachers, start chipping away at the "literacy crisis" (Nel, 2018: 1) experienced in South African schools. Reading, and as a result, learners' learning will remain in crisis if the facilitation and development of learners' reading is not addressed by all teachers.

Through this study, I have been reminded of the desperate need for a change from a behaviourist, medical-deficit approach to teaching fueled by the ideology of fundamental pedagogics, to a social constructivist approach that promotes inclusive practices when facilitating the learning of all learners. I have become more cognizant of the need to develop learners' reading in such a way that it positively impacts on their learning in all subjects and the accompanying need for teachers to equip themselves to support and develop learners' reading for cross-curricular learning. I collaborated with teachers within the CoP for a period of two years, at this special school. I have experienced the

success with which teachers can assist each other in assisting learners in using reading strategies to enhance learning in content subjects.

I believe that the call, through Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa by the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training (RSA DBE & DHET, 2011: 14) to establish CoPs (referred to as PLCs), should be intensely pursued. I strongly advocate for practices that encourage participatory engagement, such as CoPs, for teachers to collaboratively build up and share their repertoires of socio-constructivist reading strategies that can enhance learners' learning across the curriculum.

In this study, the CoP has shown to be an effective process for providing continuous, context-specific, school-based, teacher-led, collaborative professional learning about reading for cross-curricular learning. The CoP was an effective means of sharing ways of supporting learners in developing their reading for cross-curricular learning, within the setting of a special school.

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Wilson, A. (2016) 'From professional practice to practical leader: teacher leadership in professional learning communities', *International journal of teacher leadership*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 45-62.

A. Annexure: Ethical clearance



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Ethics Office

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21 May 2013

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION**

***A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE-APPROACH TO SUPPORT SOCIO-PSYCHOLINGUISTIC READING DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE CURRICULUM***

Dear Ms T Herman

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research with the following stipulation:

- Participatory research is acceptable in this research but the harm that it could have on how "other" is portrayed, has not been clarified.
- The research design is quite vague. For example, more emphasis could be placed on the facilitation role of the researcher in this participatory research to somehow anticipate potential deadlocks in the research process (for e.g. some teachers might need some assistance implementing the socio-psycholinguistic approach to reading as they might not have received training in this approach).

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

**UFS-EDU-2013-015**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Barclay'.

Andrew Barclay  
Faculty Ethics Officer



B. Annexure: Consent to do research at a special school



5 Zambezi Street  
Kimberley  
8301

The Head of Department  
Northern Cape Department of Education  
Barkly Road  
Kimberley

Sir

**PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE A RESEARCH PROJECT REGARDING "THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TO STIMULATE READING DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE CURRICULUM"**

I am currently registered for a PhD (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Free State. An integral part of the study is to conduct a Participatory Research project to explore a means of providing support to intermediate and senior phase teachers, at a special school, in developing reading across the curriculum.

I therefore request your permission to conduct this study at a special school such as the [redacted] school. The reason for this is that both intermediate and senior phase learners admitted to this school encounter a spectrum of barriers to learning. As a support teacher at this school, it is my experience that many intermediate and senior phase learners experience backlogs in reading. In order for reading development across the curriculum to materialise, I believe that, ideally, teachers of all subjects should be equipped with strategies to stimulate reading development.

I assume that teachers, whose teacher training did not include reading support strategies to learners, might find the task of stimulating reading development across the curriculum challenging, hence my effort at establishing a Community of Practice. A Community of Practice (CoP) can be likened to a self-help group. The aim of establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) will be to explore whether this will be a viable means for teachers at a school to work together to develop reading across the curriculum.



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UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
1827-2017 190 YEARS

In conducting this research I will need to work with:

- The principal, intermediate and senior phase teachers at a school, who are interested in participating in the research process on a voluntary basis [redacted] provides the opportunity to work with intermediate and senior phase teachers within one setting); and
- A Learning Support Specialist from the Inclusive Education Unit (Education Support Services). The role of this person will be that of a critical monitor to give critical commentary on the support strategies being offered to teachers.

### Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data collection methods, all of which are dependent on the written consent obtained from the participants, will be used. This includes individual and focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

### Ethical Statement

I promise to ensure good ethical practice in conducting this research. In addition to your permission, I will obtain ethical clearance from my university before I venture into any school. Participants will be fully informed about what participation in this research process entails. I promise at all times to negotiate permission to conduct the research, respect confidentiality and ensure participants' rights to withdraw, at any time, from the research. Permission will be requested and informed consent obtained in writing from voluntary participants.

As the Head of Department, you (or any interested departmental official) are most welcome to observe or scrutinize the process at any time.

I hereby request permission to conduct this research project.

Thank you for considering this application.

  
Tracey Herman  
Cell: 073550775



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UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIBESITHI YAM DALI  
UNYITHAT YAM BHEITHI YA FREDOTANA

- Permission is granted for this research to be conducted.
- Permission is not granted for this research to be conducted.

Comments:

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G. J. AMARA

Signature and full names  
The Head of Department: Northern Cape Education Department



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KAPPROVINSIE

C. Annexure: Consent from the principal

March 2013

The Principal  
[Redacted] School  
Kimberley

Mr E. Malouly

**PARTICIPATION AS A CRITICAL MONITOR IN A RESEARCH UNDERTAKING**

I am currently registered for a PhD (Educational Psychology) at the Free State University. An integral part of the study is a research undertaking. I would like to conduct a Participatory Research undertaking. The aim of the research is to explore a means of providing support to intermediate and senior phase teachers by using a Community of Practice-approach to support socio-psycholinguistic reading development across the curriculum.

I assume that teachers, whose teacher training did not include reading support strategies to learners, might find the task of stimulating reading development across the curriculum challenging. A Community of Practice (CoP) can be likened to a self-help group. The aim of establishing a CoP will be an attempt to explore whether it will be a viable means for teacher self-development within a school setting. In this case, the focus of the CoP will be on socio-psycholinguistic reading development across the curriculum. Teachers will conduct their own research by exploring the influence of selected socio-psycholinguistic reading strategies in their specific and unique classroom contexts. This will occur over a period of two school quarters. CoP meetings will be held at least once per month over this period. The aim of these meetings is for all participants to offer support and motivation to each other. Emphasis is therefore not on doing research 'on' but 'with' participants.

Your role as a critical monitor will be to critically evaluate the process and give critical commentary on the use of a CoP as a teacher self-development tool. A critical monitor plays an important role in validating the findings and value of this research undertaking.

Your experience in the field of education, your knowledge regarding the dynamics at play and the context in which teaching and learning occurs within this school will be of immense value to this project. It is for this reason that I request your participation as a critical monitor in this research undertaking.

Kindly complete the form below. I will collect it at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your time and co-operation. It is greatly appreciated.



Tracey Herman  
073 555 0775

CONSENT FORM FROM THE PRINCIPAL AS A CRITICAL MONITOR

I agree to participate as a critical monitor in this research.

I am unable to participate as a critical monitor in this research undertaking.

Comments:

*I pledge to monitor the progress of the research;  
the implementation of decisions taken; and give honest,  
and critical and regular feedback as required.*



Date: 9.04.2013

The Principal:  School

**CONSENT FORM: TEACHER WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH UNDERTAKING**

**PROJECT TITLE: A Community of Practice-approach to support socio-psycholinguistic reading development across the intermediate and senior phase curriculum**

Name of Researcher: Tracey Herman

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.
4. I understand that my name, or that of the school, will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.
5. I give permission for individual, focus group interviews, Community of Practice meetings and teacher presentation to be recorded, transcribed and analysed.
6. I understand that the results of the analysis of discussions in meetings, interviews and the teacher presentation will be given back to me in order for me to confirm whether the deductions made and conclusions drawn are indeed correct.
7. I understand that requests will be made for the researcher to observe the implementation of the reading strategies in my class. I understand that I am not obliged to extend this invitation to the researcher.
8. I understand too, that if I wish, I may share my researcher's journal or extracts from it with the researcher. This too is not mandatory and it entirely my choice to do so or not.
9. I am willing to give a presentation on my experience of the implementation of the reading approach and the reading strategy/strategies in my class.

This consent form has been adapted from a consent form of the following institutions:  
Health RDS North West, Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YT  
• Web: [www.hrdn.org](http://www.hrdn.org)

10. I agree to take part in the above study. I understand that this process will, however, commence only after Tracey Herman has obtained ethical clearance from the Ethical Clearance Committee of the University of the Free State.

Comments:

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_____ Name of Participant	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Researcher: Tracey Herman	_____ Date	_____ Signature

Kindly return this form to Tracey Herman. A certified copy will be given to you and the original is to be kept in a file at the residence of Tracey Herman at:  
5 Zambezi Street, Kimberley

<b>CONSENT FORM: CRITICAL MONITOR</b> <b>PROJECT TITLE: A Community of Practice-approach to support socio-psycholinguistic reading development across the intermediate phase curriculum</b>
--

Name of Researcher: Tracey Herman

Name of participant in the role of a critical monitor: [REDACTED]

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study (dated 18 March 2013). I have had the opportunity to consider the role of as a critical monitor, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I have agreed to participate as a critical monitor in this research undertaking. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this project at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I am aware that the group of critical monitors will negotiate dates and times to meet with Tracey Herman in order to provide critical feed-back on our observations of and reflections on the research project.
4. I give permission for these meetings to be recorded.
5. I understand that the recorded meetings will be transcribed and analysed.
6. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.
7. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.
8. I understand that the results of the analysis of discussions in meetings will be given back to me in order for me to confirm whether the deductions made and conclusions drawn by the researcher are indeed correct.
9. I agree to take part in the above study. I understand that this process will, however, commence only after Tracey Herman has obtained ethical clearance from the Ethical Clearance Committee of the University of the Free State.

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Comments:

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Name of Participant	Date	Signature

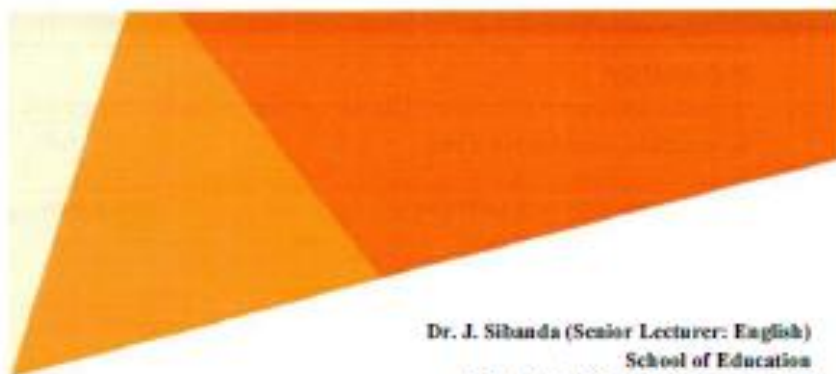
\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher: Tracey Herman

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

After completing the form please return to Tracey Herman. A certified copy will be given to you and the original is to be kept in a file at the residence of Tracey Herman at:  
**5 Zambezi Street, Kimberley**

F. Annexure: Confirmation of language editing



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20 December 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that I have proof read and edited the following PhD Thesis, using Windows 'Tracking' System to reflect my comments and suggested corrections for the author(s) to action:

- **Author Name:** Tracey Herman
- **Title:** The Development of Reading for Cross-Curricular Learning at a Special School: A Community of Practice-Approach
- **Date:** 20 December 2018

Although the greatest care was taken in the editing of this document, the final responsibility for the product rests with the author.

Sincerely

20.12.2018

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

G. Annexure: Turnitin report

Document Viewer

## Turnitin Originality Report

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS  
LEFAPHA LA THUTO  
ISEBE LEZEMFUNDO

**PROVINCIAL COMMON QUESTION PAPER**

**GRADE 6**

**ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE**

**PAPER 3**

**JUNE 2014**

**MARKS: 30**

**TIME: 1 hour**

**LEARNER NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GENDER (tick):**  **BOY**  **GIRL**

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DISTRICT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMIS NO:** \_\_\_\_\_

**This question paper consists of 6 pages.**

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NORTHERN CAPE

Please turn over

**WRITING AND PRESENTING**

A. Study the following table and answer the questions that follow.

**TRAIN STATION TIMETABLES**

Platform 1		Platform 2	
<i>Departure time</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Destination (to)</i>	<i>Arrival time</i>
06h00	Durban	Kimberley	06h00
06h10	Cape Town	Bloemfontein	06h15
06h20	Mahikeng	Sun City	06h00
06h35	Ritchie	Jacobsdal	06h00

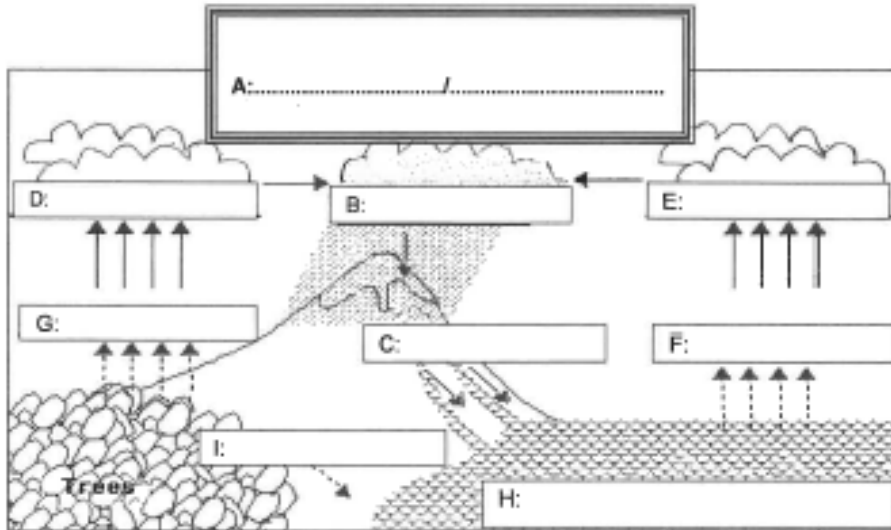
- When is the train from Cape Town departing?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- The train arriving at Sun City is from  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- Trains depart from \_\_\_\_\_ and arrive at  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- A certain train leaves at twenty-five to seven to  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- At quarter past six, a train arrives from \_\_\_\_\_ on Platform 2. (1)
- Write 2 – 3 sentences on what the table tells us.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(4)  
[10]

- B. Read the table below then **label** the Water Cycle diagram on the next page with the **correct bolded** word(s).

WORD	DEFINITIONS
<b>The Water/hydrologic cycle</b>	describes the route water takes as it circulates from the land to the sky and back again
<b>Accumulation</b>	the process in which water pools in large bodies (like oceans, seas and lakes)
<b>Condensation</b>	the process in which water vapour (a gas) in the air turns into liquid water. Condensing water forms clouds in the sky. Water drops that form on the outside of a glass of icy water are condensed water. (This term appears twice in the diagram)
<b>Evaporation</b>	the process in which liquid water becomes water vapour (a gas). Water vaporizes from the surfaces of oceans and lakes, from the surface of the land, and from melts in snow fields.
<b>Precipitation</b>	the process in which water (in the form of rain, snow, sleet, or hail) falls from clouds in the sky
<b>Subsurface runoff</b>	water that flows in underground streams, drains and sewers
<b>Surface runoff</b>	water that flows in surface streams, rivers, or canals
<b>Transpiration</b>	the process in which some water within plants evaporates into the atmosphere. Water is first absorbed by the plant's roots, then later exits by evaporating through pores in the plant.

1. Label



(10 x ½) (5)

2. Use the space below to write a narrative (brief) paragraph on the Water Cycle. **NB!** A topic must be written.

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(5)  
[10]

- C. Read the passage below carefully and choose **ONLY ONE** of the given forms below to present the information correctly. **[graph/chart or a table]**

*Which materials are magnetic?*

All materials can be classified as "magnetic" or "non-magnetic".

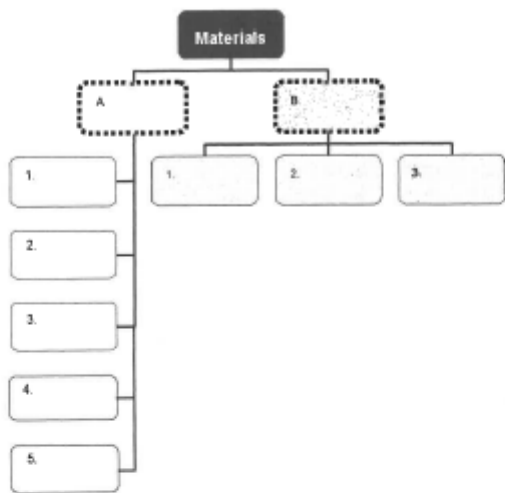
Magnetics are materials which are attracted to magnets and there are only three materials that are magnetic: iron and two other metals – cobalt and nickel.

Alternatively, non-magnetic materials are materials which are not attracted to magnets and include all materials, apart from those mentioned above. Ceramics, fabrics, paper, glass, plastic and most other metals are non-magnetic.

**NB! PLEASE CHOOSE ONE ONLY**

Materials	

**OR**



[10]

GRAND TOTAL: 30

I. Annexure: Open ended questionnaire to CoP participants

**Your view of the CoP for reading for cross-curricular learning**

**(After an implementation period of \_\_\_\_ weeks)**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Kindly complete the following with regard to the reading strategies you selected to try out in your classroom. Please indicate the grade and the subject in which the strategy/strategies were implemented.**

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Gr.** \_\_\_\_\_

The reading strategy/strategies that you focused on:

\_\_\_\_\_

The activity/activities you applied to develop the strategy/strategies:

\_\_\_\_\_

Reason(s) for selecting the strategies and activities:

\_\_\_\_\_

1. What were learners' reactions after their initial introduction to the strategy and activities you introduced?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your view with regard to the strategy that you introduced to your class?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What adaptations to the strategy did you make/will you make in future?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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4. What is your view of the CoP at this stage?

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5. What are your recommendations for improvements to the CoP? What changes would you like to see?

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Please feel free to add any other comment(s):

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete this!**