December

2018

RESEP WORKING PAPER

Leading for literacy:

A review of the research

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Stellenbosch Working Paper No.WP19/2018

Keywords: school leadership, literacy, instructional leadership, leadership content knowledge

RESEP

Research on Socio-Economic Policy

UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

Department of ECONOMICS

Physical Address:

Research on Socio-Economic Policy (RESEP)

Department of Economics

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Leading for literacy: A review of the research[1]

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5 November 2018

Abstract

A significant body of literature converges on the notion that school leadership and management practices matter for student learning outcomes. Increasingly, researchers are concerned with the relationship between school leadership and management practices and reading outcomes – a relationship referred to as "leading for literacy". This review sketches some of the key factors and issues emerging from the international literature on leading for literacy. Findings from the review are in turn are used to establish a theoretical framework that could be applied to investigating the linkages between leadership and literacy in the South African context. The review suggests that there exist four categories of resources that are available to school leaders in promoting literacy improvements: material, human, knowledge and strategic resources.

[1] This report is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant ES/N01023X/1].

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1. Introduction

This document reports the findings of a review of research literature related to the management of reading in schools, or what is increasingly termed 'leading for literacy'. The review forms the background to a project titled "Succeeding Against the Odds: Understanding resilience and exceptionalism in high-functioning township and rural primary schools in South Africa". This research study involves a collaboration between researchers at Stellenbosch University, JET, UCT, UNISA and the DBE. The research is an outlier study, identifying higher-performing high-poverty schools and comparing them with lower-performing schools on matched demographic and geographic criteria. The focus of the Succeeding Against the Odds project is on the linkages between school leadership and management (SLM) practices and reading outcomes that focus specifically on reading at the school level.

There is a limited research literature base in the area of 'leading for literacy', a term which describes the relationship between school leadership and management (SLM) and reading outcomes. Internationally, however, and especially in the United States (US), this literature is growing. In part this growth is related to the widespread placement of literacy coaches or experts in schools as part of large-scale school reform efforts. The objective of this review, however, is to draw out a comprehensive set of issues and factors relevant to leading for literacy from the existent literature. This will provide the basis for an in-depth project investigation of the realities and possibilities of the role of SLM in improving reading instruction in the South African context.

The review begins by tracing a path from school effectiveness research on SLM to leading for literacy, showing how concerns with SLM have over time become more focused on instruction and subject specific matter. Following this the leading for literacy research is reviewed, identifying several themes that emerge from this relatively small research base. The review concludes with a discussion of some of the key factors and relationships that are identified in the review and that could usefully guide further project investigations.

1.1 From school effectiveness to leading for literacy

SLM has been researched in predominantly two ways. One approach has focused on school reform and the internal dynamics of schools as organisations, particularly the ways in which different kinds of leadership and management relate to and impact on the instructional core of the school. The other is school effectiveness research that attempts to attribute between-school differences in students' performance to different school variables or 'factors', after controlling for student home background.

School effectiveness research has been widely criticized for oversimplifying complex 'causalities' in schooling and for producing atomized, a-theoretical sets of 'factors' as explanations for improved performance. It has also been criticized for saying little about how effects are produced or how effective schools can be created (Cuban, 1984). School effectiveness often treats the classroom and learning as a black box.

Nonetheless, there is a relatively consistent set of factors that has emerged from this research as contributing to better outcomes (see Table 1).

Table 1 Common factors across school effectiveness studies related to improved schooling outcomes

Professional Leadership	Attendance and punctuality
Shared vision and goals	Thorough curriculum planning
A learning environment	Frequency and use of assessment
Time on task	Teacher knowledge
High expectations	Curriculum coverage
Positive reinforcement	Time management
Monitoring progress	Curriculum planning
Pupil rights and responsibilities	Procurement and retrieval of books
Purposeful teaching	A learning organization
Home-school partnership	Focus on teaching and learning

School effectiveness literature focusing on SLM argues for the importance of SLM in schools in contributing to effectiveness, although the effect size identified across studies are typically very small. The argument that follows from this is that school leaders do not have a *direct* effect on student achievement, but they do shape the structure of the school day, the school's culture, and the use of resources (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Korkmaz, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Leaders are key in initiating and implementing school-based reforms aimed at improving student learning (e.g., Bryk et al., 2010; Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

Over time there has been an increasingly concerted focus in the international literature to explore what is generally termed 'instructional leadership' in relation to the principals' role in instructional improvement. The focus on instruction derives from the argument that instructional improvement should be the main responsibility of school leaders (Murphy, 2002). In general, the view is that it is possible to improve teacher quality and instruction by focusing on instructional leadership that builds professional communities of educators (Burch, 2007).

Early formulations of instructional leadership assumed it to be the responsibility of the principal. Hence, measures of leadership, such as the Principals' Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) (Hallinger, 2000), focused on the principal and neglected the contribution of other actors in the school to structuring and supporting the school's programme of instruction and its learning culture. Over time it gained a more inclusive focus with many instructional leadership measures now focused on principals and others in positions of responsibility. Again, effect sizes are described as strong but small (Hallinger, 2005, p. 229). Hallinger (2003) identifies the effective aspects or factors of instructional leaders as:

- Framing and communicating goals
- Supervising and evaluating instruction
- Coordinating curriculum
- Developing high academic expectations and standards

- Monitoring student progress
- Promoting professional development of teachers
- Protecting instructional time
- Developing incentives for teachers and students.

'Instructional leadership' as presented here is a good example of how the school effectiveness literature, as well as the broader literature on SLM, tends to slide between the empirical and the normative. Leithwood et al (2004: 6) argue for skepticism toward models of "leadership by adjective," as a certain promoted style may mask important aspects of leading a school effectively. But the instructional leadership literature is useful in highlighting how principals that support learning improvements encourage teachers to improve instruction (Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genges, 1996; Sebring & Bryk, 2000) by changing school-wide norms and providing teachers with the resources to learn and implement new ideas and practices (Finnigan, 2010). In addition, these principals can facilitate instructional improvement by introducing teachers to new ideas (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

More recently, the critiques of instructional leadership have focused on the neglected issue of 'distributed leadership' (Spillane et al, 2004). Distributed leadership is a property of a number of actors at the school level, and is not invested in the principal or management solely. In Spillane et al's terms, leadership is 'stretched over' a number of roles, including 'followers', and also over situations, which include artefacts and organisational structures within the school. Leadership in this account is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals rather than a phenomenon which arises from the individual. Elmore (2000) shares this view: the idea behind distributed leadership is that the complex nature of instructional practice requires people to operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies that have a clearly defined division of labour.

1.2 Emphasising knowledge

While there is increasing recognition that instructional practice needs to be shared and networks within schools facilitate this sharing, attention has also been drawn to the *nature* of leaders' knowledge or expertise that underpins instructional or distributed leadership conceptions. Some consider this in relation to the notion of 'leadership content knowledge' (Stein & Nelson, 2004) that draws inspiration from Shulman's work on teachers' content knowledge. Here the focus is on different forms of school leaders' knowledge: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curriculum knowledge and how this informs their leadership practices. Leaders' sense-making (Coburn, 2005) and 'working knowledge' (Fennema & Franke, 1992) consider the ways in which beliefs and knowledge are intertwined and the degree to which aspects of knowledge do not exist as isolated or discrete categories.

In these accounts, knowledge encompasses both formal knowledge that is rooted in the profession's collective and accumulated wisdom and practical knowledge that is situated in particular contexts and rooted in personal inquiry and experience (see

Carter (1990) on this point). Stein and Nelson (2003) raise the question as to whether generic studies of leadership suffice in deepening our understanding of what it means to lead a school. They argue that "[w]ithout knowledge that connects subject matter, learning and teaching to acts of leadership, leadership floats disconnected from the very processes it is designed to govern" (p. 446). In their focus on a principal's depth of subject knowledge they argue that this is necessary for the principal "*to know good instruction when they see it, to encourage it when they don't, and to facilitate appropriate ongoing learning for staff*" (p. 424, my emphasis).

Elmore's (2000) view of leadership knowledge is somewhat different. He argues that "if the purpose of leadership is the improvement of teaching practice and performance, then the skills and knowledge that matter are those that bear on the creation of settings for learning focused on clear expectations for instruction" (p.20). The dominant theories of leadership (institutional, political, managerial and cultural), he argues, do not posit a direct relationship between what school leaders should be doing and the core function of the organisation: teaching and learning. Setting clear expectations, however, would seem to require in-depth knowledge of subjects.

Elmore (2008) conceives of leadership as the practice of improvement, defined as strategies for developing and for deploying knowledge and skills within school. To explain how leaders facilitate school improvement, Elmore distinguishes between a school's 'internal accountability' and its 'capacity'. The former is the degree of coherence in the school around norms, expectations, and processes, whereas the latter is the school's reservoir of knowledge that can be used to improve teaching and learning and simultaneously develop the school's internal accountability. From this perspective Elmore argues leadership is "defined less by position and more by expertise" (51). But in his account, it would seem that knowledge and expertise is more strategic than subject-based.

The work of James Spillane and colleagues, similar to Stein and Nelson (2003), focus on leadership and subject-specific expertise. School leaders' beliefs or convictions about the work of leadership – their schemata – also differ depending on the subject (Burch & Spillane, 2003). Further Spillane and Hopkins (2013) draw attention to "how the *school subject* matters" for the ways in which leading and managing instruction occurs in schools. Crucially they argue that "theoretical and empirical work on school systems and school organizations and their relations to the core technical work of schooling – instruction - must take the school subject into consideration because instruction is not a generic or monolithic variable but rather a subject-specific one" (p. 722).

Spillane's contention around the importance of subject-specificity in considerations of SLM leads directly into the focus of investigation in this review: leading for literacy or SLM for reading. In what follows, I review research linking leadership and the subject specificity of reading instruction and draw out the dominant themes and issues that emerge from this small but burgeoning literature.

2. Leading for literacy

Much of the leadership for literacy research considers management of literacy within the context of a specific reform. This is especially the case in the literature that emerges from the US, in relation to large-scale literacy reform programmes like Success for All, Reading First and Direct Instruction. The contention in much of this literature is that school-level change is as important as change within classrooms when attempting to improve literacy instruction (Taylor et al, 2005). The school-level aspects of literacy and its leadership and management have been neglected in favour of investigation of classroom-level aspects.

Much of the literature on leading for literacy usefully comes at the issue broadly. For example, in his account, Murphy (2004), working within an effectiveness frame, draws on four literatures to develop a research-based model for the practice of leadership for literacy: effective instruction; effective reading programmes; effective schools; and instructional leadership. This review focuses more narrowly on studies that have made a direct link between leadership and reading at the school level. I do, however, point out some of the difficulties in isolating this area for research by reviewing some of the studies that consider the link between school effectiveness and what is at times called 'reading effectiveness' research. I also reflect in the discussion at the end on the relationship *between* reading at the level of leadership and reading at the level of the classroom. Arguably, reading-specific leadership issues should not be prised apart from more general leadership aspects nor from the classroom. However, the purpose of this review is to gain some specificity about managing reading so that this can form part of the *focus* of investigation. This is not to suggest that these reading elements float free from more general features of schools that engender better reading instruction and better literacy outcomes.

The issue of leading for literacy is important for the South African context given very low levels of literacy. To give just one example, the PIRLS 2016 report showed that 78% of grade 4 pupils in South African schools had not developed the basic skills required for reading at an equivalent international grade 4 level (Mullis et al 2017). But the issue is also important in the context of a number of policies and programmes that have sought to address the issue of poor literacy teaching and learning. There have been a myriad of smaller scale projects often run by NGOS (e.g. NaliBali and the VulaBula graded reader project). Some of main provincial and national initiatives focused specifically on reading have included:

- National Reading Strategy (DOE, 2008a)
- National reading campaign (DOE, 2006)
- QIDS-Up classroom library project and "Drop all and Read" campaign (2007)
- 100 Storybooks campaign
- Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008b)
- Foundations for Learning Campaign (2008c)
- Integrated National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (INLNS) (Department of Basic Education, no date)

- Western Cape Numeracy and Literacy Strategy (including the daily reading half-hour project)
- The 100 Books per classroom project
- Foundations for learning (2008)
- Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) 2010–2014 (GDE, 2010)
- CAPS (DOE, 2011)
- Western Cape Living Laboratory schools (see van der Berg et al, 2016)

In different ways these programmes have sought to provide greater clarity and better resources for the teaching of reading. They have involved book provision, scripting for teachers, remedial programmes, coaching, timetabling guidance, assessment frameworks and methodology handbooks. Most recently the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS, the national curriculum) has provided strong specifications around timetabling of different reading pedagogies with strict time specifications for the teaching of different components of reading. Two aspects have been neglected in programmes thus far, however. One is the provision of clear benchmarks for reading achievement, which would include oral reading fluency benchmarks for different grades, as well as a "clear, measurable and shared definition of what constitutes "reading with fluency and comprehension'" (van der Berg et al, 2016).

The other neglected aspect is attention to the management of reading initiatives at the school level. Only two of the projects listed above directly address the issue of management, the National Reading Strategy (DOE, 2008) and the Western Cape Living Lab schools. The National Reading strategy recognizes leading for literacy as one of its six 'pillars' and comprehensively describes the task:

> The principal needs to show a relentless determination in pursuing the *National Reading Strategy*. The principal is responsible for the reading programme in the school, by at least taking the following steps: organizing staff training and support in the teaching of reading; recognizing achievement amongst learners and teachers; and involving parents in the reading programme (DOE, 2008, p.16).

It is the principal's responsibility to ensure that:

- every learner learns to read,
- steps are taken to promote reading,
- reading strategies are integrated in all school subjects, and
- a culture of reading is instilled in the school.
- It is essential that the principal takes a direct and personal interest in reading in the school.

The Living Lab schools project focuses on the importance of the Foundation Phase Head of Department (HOD) in supporting reading programmes. They argue for "[t]he need for competence testing and careful selection of Foundation Phase heads of department" (see Van der Berg et al 2016, p.53). Although the management of

reading was built into the GPLMS (GDE, 2010), the management focus was predominantly on monitoring at the district level.

There is, however, a growing recognition of the importance of leading for literacy, and especially in the UK, US and Australia, strong advocacy for literacy leadership, accompanied by a raft of guidelines (e.g. Munro, 2012; Wepner et al, 2016), normative statements and professional development courses. In developing countries, the use of literacy coaches and experts in schools has become a prominent intervention in trying to address poor levels of reading across a range of countries (for example, Piper et al. 2018 and Zuilkowski & Piper, 2017). Such interventions are likely to precipitate a focus on leadership and management of reading interventions at the school level.

The research base, however, is still small. The existent international literature is largely qualitative and the South African research base in this area is very small. In the next section of the review I draw out some of the central themes that emerge from the literature that relate to particular features of leading for literacy. I focus on the empirical rather than the normative literature. The final theme considers the important issue of the relationship between literacy leadership and more general school effectiveness research.

2.1 Collaboration and communication

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the literature on literacy leadership is that of collaboration and communication. This rests on an established literature that asserts the importance of a collaborative work environment (Blase & Blase, 1999; Blase & Kirby, 2000; Little, 1982; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Murphy, 1994). Collaboration can be thought of as a form of in-school professional development, which can occur either informally or formally. It also relates to notions like 'professional learning communities' (Stoll et al, 2006). More recently and specific to instruction, the notion of 'instructional rounds' has become current. Adapting ideas from the professional practice of medical rounds used by doctors, instructional rounds entail a professional grouping or network of teachers and leaders examining what is happening with teaching/learning in classrooms (City et al, 2009). The interest in much of this literature on collaboration around instruction is the contribution of coordinated collegial networks to providing high-quality teaching and learning at scale (ibid.).

School leaders play an important role in establishing a school's organizational context. Some research is able to show how school leaders who endorse knowledge sharing among teachers and create internal structures that promote collaboration are more effective at fostering change within their schools (e.g. Youngs & King, 2002), especially through establishing trust between school management and teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Collaboration and communication are commonly cited as features of schools that exhibit school-level management for improved reading specifically (Parise and Spillane, 2010; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Fletcher et al, 2013; Beretbisky et al, 2014). Parise and Spillane argue that collaborative discussion that is

closely tied to teachers' daily work and that focuses on specific content is more likely to facilitate learning and change (see also Garet et al., 2008).

Brisson (2010) used a multiple-case study to identify the literacy-related practices and beliefs of principals in three schools in Connecticut with statistically significant reading improvement. Among findings common to two of the three schools was that administrators and teachers reported that out of the five literacy-related practices framing the study, they valued collaborative leadership the most. Staff in these schools described their principal's leadership style as highly collaborative - the style advocated in professional literature on literacy leadership. However, the third principal was not described as collaborative and yet led a school with significant reading improvement. This is suggestive of a common refrain throughout the leadership literature, that more than one leadership style can be effective. In all three schools, though, principals shared literacy leadership with a key administrator, their respective English Department leader, and they supported efforts to infuse literacy strategies across disciplines. In addition, the principals all supported an ongoing professional development program devoted to literacy that built staff skills over several years.

Taylor et al (2000a) conducted a mixed-methods study of 14 high-poverty primary schools to examine what school and classroom factors were related to student achievement in reading. While the focus was on teacher-level factors related to reading, among school-level factors, the authors measured the quality of communication and collaboration at a school level through teacher survey responses and interview data. Statistical analyses showed that schools where communication and collaboration were identified as being frequent and effective made better gains in measures of fluency and retelling, whereas communication was often reported to be a problem in the least effective schools. In a case study of one particularly effective school in the study, "[c]ommunication across and within grades was the key" to successfully implementing externally mandated reform (Walpole, 2002, p. 207).

Cosner (2011) undertook a 3-year longitudinal study of three urban elementary schools as they attempted to improve literacy through evidence-based grade-level collaboration. In particular, evidence-based grade-level collaboration in these schools drew on common grade-level literacy assessments as a primary source of evidence regarding student learning. Specifically interested in the relationship between literacy coordinators and principals in the study schools, the research found that principals and literacy coordinators contributed to the development of evidence-based collaboration in complementary, but mutually reinforcing ways. For their part, principals tended to enact roles and strategies that drew more heavily on their positional power and authority while literacy coordinators drew more heavily on their content and instructional expertise in their work to support evidence-based collaboration. An interesting general point arises from this finding in relation to the division of labour within schools and how this functions to support improvement. Going back to the broader literature, the principal's impact on instruction is often indirect, creating the opportunities, conditions and structures for the enactment of

instructional change. Some of the literature, referenced above and reported in detail below, however, suggests the importance of principals' specialized knowledge with respect to reading.

Taylor et al (2000b) derive a model based on their study of eleven schools in the US that 'beat the odds' in bringing about improvement in students' reading achievement, prioritizing teachers' opportunities to work together to improve their knowledge of effective instruction. They argue that reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaborative efforts enhanced shared understandings and strengthened relationships within a school. They argue that for significant improvement in instruction and students' academic performance, schools must adopt an attitude of continuous improvement and shared commitment. But further, the study argued that what matters is sustained collaborative work with colleagues in school-wide efforts *and* refocused classroom instruction to improve students' reading achievement. Thus, reading improvement entailed not either classroom or school-wide focus, but both. This is an important point, drawing attention to the nexus between school leadership and management and the classroom. How do SLM practices penetrate the classroom, and in turn, how do classroom practices inform and drive SLM decision-making? I return to this question in the discussion.

2.2 School-wide focus on reading

The second theme that emerges strongly from the literature concerns the focus and emphasis on reading at the school level. Most of the policy levers and focus of debate in relation to literacy specifically, and especially in the US, is at the classroom or teacher level, not at the school level. The most powerful US intervention to date in the area of literacy, Reading Recovery and Success for All, has a pronounced focus on the instructional level as well as ensuring school-level conditions are conducive to reading instruction (Reynolds, 1998, p. 159). This dual focus on improved classroom reading instruction and school-wide organizational issues is echoed in the well-known report of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow et al, 1998).

Of the very little school effectiveness literature that exists in relation to reading specifically, a strong school-wide emphasis on reading is identified as a factor related to improved student outcomes (Weber, 1971). Taylor et al (2000) employed an outlier effectiveness design to look at both school-level and instructional-level factors in effective schools. At the school level they conclude:

> *Across the four most effective schools in this study, reading was clearly a priority. The teachers and principals considered reading instruction their job and they worked at it. They worked together, worked with parents, and worked with a positive attitude to reach the goal of all children reading well before they left the primary grades. They were able to reach consensus on school-wide monitoring systems, a collaborative approach for delivering reading instruction, and professional development, with the constant goal of improving an already effective reading program* (p. 143).

This school-level focus on reading relates to the discussion of principal knowledge and sense-making identified below. But crucially identifying reading as an important instructional goal at the level of the school means that leadership in the reading program needs to be provided by either the principal or deputy principal or a reading specialist within the school. Such literacy leadership ensures that attention is given to basic skills, making available a breadth of materials, and ensuring communication of ideas across teachers (Wilder, 1977).

Based on his review of effective reading programmes, Moats (2009) emphasises that all teachers, not only reading specialists, need to understand best practices of reading instruction. Prevention and amelioration of reading problems further needs to be viewed as a whole-school responsibility involving teamwork and a coordinated approach between teachers and other role-players in a school. This necessitates a common knowledge base between all teachers who must collaborate to the benefit of learners.

Whilst much of the literature that considers school-level factors related to literacy emphasizes shared responsibility, some emphasizes the principal's responsibility to oversee school-level instructional policies related to reading (Mullis & Martin, 2015). Puzio et al (2015) provide a good example of how a particular policy or approach to reading is structured and supported by the principal. They take the case of differentiation in reading instruction and look at the specific ways in which this is supported by principals in three purposively selected elementary schools with a documented history of literacy differentiation. Principals protected the 60-minute literacy block from push-in or pull-out services and leveraged the expertise of district staff. The principals also supported guided reading by providing teachers with structured opportunities to collaborate, where teachers shared resources, narratives, and expertise. Additionally, the principals purchased texts beyond the district curriculum, strategically networked teachers, and evaluated teachers during their literacy block, when teachers were expected to differentiate their instruction.

Whether concentrated in the function of the principal, or distributed across actors in the school, the school-level focus on reading as well as programmes that were regular, focused and sustained (Fletcher et al, 2013), is supported by the literature. Schools as a whole need to prioritise reading.

Finally, lending some quantitative weight to the findings, the Effective Schools in Reading study (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992) included a composite variable called 'School initiatives', which clustered a set of indicators including: sponsor reading initiatives; special programmes/individual instruction; and programme for improvement of reading instruction. The study found that more effective schools undertook more initiatives than less effective schools, especially reading programmes. To a lesser extent, the study found special reading programmes such as extra class lessons in reading, individualized instruction or special remedial reading courses were associated with effectiveness. Further, the study pointed out that ensuring dedicated reading programmes are run implies that principals and teachers

recognize that these are necessary and implement them, referring us back to the importance of a school-level focus on reading.

2.3 Reading knowledge and expertise

2.3.1 Where knowledge resides

The introductory discussion of this review referred to what Elmore (2008) terms the 'school's reservoir of knowledge' that can be used to improve instruction. In relation to principals' knowledge and expertise, the focus in the literature is often on the ways in which principals' understandings of what constitutes "good" reading instruction is crucial to how they shape the conditions for reading instruction and its improvement.

Coburn (2005), in relation to a number of qualitative case studies in the US, concludes that principals influence the way in which teachers interpret and take up policy, and that this rests on the principals' understandings about reading instruction and teacher learning:

> *principals' understandings about what constitutes "good" reading instruction, how those understandings influence leadership practices, and how those leadership practices, in turn, shape the micro-processes of teacher interpretation and adaptation. I argue that principals influence teacher sensemaking by shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of meaning making, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning (p. 477)*

In showing how principals influenced how teachers responded to policy ideas by shaping the social, structural, and cultural conditions for teacher learning in the school, Coburn emphasizes their understanding of teacher learning. Teachers as adult learners (with different requirements to younger learners) is another theme to emerge from the literature. Teaching teachers to teach reading requires this understanding.

Burch and Spillane (2005) draw attention to the importance of subject-specific knowledge, arguing like Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) that relations between elementary school leadership and subject matter are not well understood in the leadership literature. They argue that generally instruction is treated as a generic variable, whether the focus is on reading or mathematics. They suggest that what leaders do to improve instruction depends in part on their views of subject matter. Variation is reflected in a number of ways. One is the distribution of resources within a school, for example time allocations, staffing, and professional development (time and content), which are dependent on the value attached to each subject. Another is whether leaders think schools should use expertise from inside or outside the school to help with reforms. Principals in their study differed in that they saw the expertise for reforming literacy as 'homegrown', internal to the school, and for mathematics as associated with external programmes. These differences reflected in part widely held views of mathematics as a highly defined discipline in which expertise develops through formal training, and of literacy as having less defined areas of expertise (p.525).

Looking at literacy reforms across their eight schools, the schools reflected these norms of subject matter, locating expertise for reading reform at the school level. In mathematics leaders frequently put in place more sequenced, defined strategies. In reading interventions and reforms more internal, generalized strategies across subjects and levels that relied on existing internal expertise were instituted.

The question of internal and external expertise is an issue taken up by a number of researchers. Fletcher et al (2013), in the context of a longitudinal case study in New Zealand, identifies the need for an externally appointed literacy expert to lead ongoing school-wide professional development on teaching reading *and* the appointment, within the school, of a literacy leader charged with supporting this development. The role of a reading specialist or 'literacy leader' is given prominence in the literature in keeping with a strong argument that leadership or management of reading in a school needs to be undertaken by an expert in the field. The IRA (2000, p.3) describes the specific leadership role of a reading specialist in a school as including:

- aiding teachers by suggesting new ideas, strategies or materials that can enhance instruction;
- Supporting individual teachers – especially new teachers – and managers in becoming more knowledgeable about the teaching of reading;
- Leading professional development through workshops, modelling strategies or techniques, conducting demonstration or collaborative lessons;
- Understanding and supporting *adult* (i.e. teacher) learning;
- Building home-school connections with respect to reading.

The need for expertise provided in a specialized role is also emphasized in the *Preventing reading difficulties in young children report* (Snow et al, 1998), arguing that essential services in relation to reading need to be provided to not only students but teachers as well, directed by specialists who have been trained to provide leadership and instructional expertise for the prevention and remediation of reading difficulties. According to the authors, "schools will only succeed when teachers have the expertise and competence needed to teach reading effectively" (p. 194).

2.3.2 The kind of knowledge

Beyond *where* expertise is located, Coburn and Spillane in different ways draw particular attention to understanding *how* knowledge about reading is constituted and functions within the school. Their arguments concern how teachers and administrators come to understand and enact instructional policy, and how this is influenced by prior knowledge, the social context within which they work, and the nature of their connections to policy or reform messages (Coburn, 2001; Spillane et al., 2002). The meaning of information or events—in this case, messages about reading—is not given but is inherently problematic.

In a study of principals' responses to accountability policy in Chicago, Spillane and his colleagues (2002) find that, like teachers, school leaders interpret and adapt policy

in ways that are influenced by their pre-existing understandings and their overlapping social contexts inside and outside of school. In so doing, school leaders shape how district accountability policies unfold in schools in crucial ways. Closely related to this way of understanding principals' knowledge are concepts such as "working knowledge", "sensemaking" and "worldview" which also emphasize the integrated, situated, and embedded nature of the knowledge that individuals draw on in the course of their work. These forms of knowledge encompass both formal knowledge that is rooted in the profession's collective and accumulated wisdom and practical knowledge that is situated in contexts and rooted in personal inquiry and experience (see Carter, 1990, on this point).

In the South African context, Combrink et al (2014) give the issue of principals' knowledge of reading a very specific treatment drawing on the PIRLS 2011 data. In the principal survey questionnaire, principals were asked at which grade (Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4 or none of these grades) a range of reading skills and strategies first receive major emphasis in instruction at their school. They attempt to illustrate the combined effect of parental involvement in early home literacy activities and the early introduction of reading skills and strategies by schools (as reported by principals) as factors that contribute to higher attainment in reading literacy. In this study, the delayed introduction of reading skills and strategies in the foundation phase was found for four critical reading skills and strategies, despite an indication in the curriculum that these activities should be introduced in Grade 1. These neglected reading skills and strategies are:

- reading isolated sentences
- reading connected text
- locating information within text
- identifying the main idea of a text.

These skills, according to the curriculum, should be introduced in Grade 1, and the study showed better outcomes for students where the principal reported the early introduction of these aforementioned skills. The findings could indicate higher expectations with respect to student learning, rather than actual learning. Nonetheless, it was startling how few principals knew when different skills should be introduced. It was also interesting that there were high levels of non-response on those skills expected to be introduced beyond Grade 1. In other words, principals displayed only a very rudimentary knowledge of reading and its appropriate occurrence.

Table 2 Extract from the PIRLS principal questionnaire: Grade at which reading activity is initialised as per the curriculum

Item as in school questionnaire	Curriculum grade in which to start activity
Knowing letters of the alphabet	Grade 1
Knowing letter-sound relationships	Grade 1
Reading words	Grade R and Grade 1
Reading isolated sentences	Grade 1
Reading connected text	Grade 1
Locating information within text	Grade 1
Identifying main idea of text	Grade 1
Explaining or supporting understanding of text	Grade 3
Comparing a text with personal experience	Grade 2
Comparing different texts	Unclear
Making predictions about what will happen next in a text	Grade 4 and beyond
Making generalisations and drawing inferences based on a text	Grade 4 and beyond
Describing the style or structure of a text	Grade 4 and beyond
Determining the author's perspective or intention	Grade 7 and beyond

2.4 Assessment of reading

From early on in the relatively small 'reading effectiveness' literature, reading assessment has been identified as critical to improved reading outcomes. In a study of four outlier effective inner-city schools, Weber (1971) found alongside a strong school-wide emphasis on reading, continuous evaluation of pupil progress in reading was related to better reading outcomes. He also makes the obvious, but not often identified, point that having a relatively small number of children with serious reading difficulties (as opposed to a large number) also contributed to greater reading effectiveness. This is a crucial issue in the South African context where the number of learners with serious learning (including reading) difficulties has been frequently anecdotally reported though not yet systematically measured.

Fletcher (2013), in a longitudinal, four-year case study found that the use of assessment data to inform teaching and a school-wide action plan directed at literacy improvement had significant effects on the reading instructional environment and learners' reading outcomes. In their qualitative study of four London schools, McCullam (1999) come up with 13 characteristics common to all four schools that were selected based on exceptional performance on standardized reading tests. Those relating to leadership specifically were the establishment of baseline testing of reading, and regular assessment of reading and writing and passing up assessment records.

Mortimer et al (1998) in contrast identified a set of school-level reading policy factors associated with reading gains. Their study suggested the importance of principal engagement in *instruction* quite directly. However, they report negative associations between the use of reading tests and reading improvements in the same study. As

Reynolds (1998) argues, there is growing evidence of 'context specificity' in the precise factors associated with learning gains and this would apply to reading as well. While there are certainly universal factors across all settings (like having high expectations of learners), the extent of universality and context-specificity is not known. The problem that Reynolds identifies, and which stymies almost all policies in the South African context, is that in the area of primary school children's literacy, policies are undifferentiated, with the same policies, strategies and procedures introduced into very different schooling contexts. In addition, in the field of reading especially, the question of testing is fraught with largely ideological battles around the benefits for student learning (Hoadley & Muller, 2015). In the end it does matter how and why students are tested and how assessment data is used. In general, however, especially in research more in the teacher effectiveness and school effectiveness mould, assessment of reading is seen as crucial to the leadership of literacy in schools (see Reynolds, 1998).

2. 5 Resources

Because much of the research on leading for literacy emanates from developed countries, the issue of resources tends to be downplayed. The extent and quality of school reading resources are, however, critical for quality instruction and student learning (Greenwald et al, 1996; Lee & Zuze, 2011). The issue in developing countries is especially pressing in relation to instruction in multiple languages, or where the language of teaching and learning shifts from mother tongue to English across the grades as it does for the majority of children in South Africa and many other countries. Pretorius and Machet (2004) very usefully draw attention to three key resources that define the school context of literacy accomplishment in disadvantaged schools: books, instructional time and good teachers.

2.5.1 Books

Welch (2012) notes that conventional publishing models which rely on economies of scale are unable to provide texts in sufficient number or variety in Africa especially, where a multitude of languages are spoken, some by relatively small populations. Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) liken the lack of access to books to learning to play football without a ball, a 'preposterous' idea, but relevant to hundreds of thousands of learners in developing countries who are expected to acquire literacy skills without books. Clark (2010) draws attention to the importance of the richness and variety of reading material that forms the core of students' reading experience at school. Libraries are crucial in this regard, but only if they are stocked with sufficient variety of books that are of interest to learners at different grade levels. Allington et al (2010) have shown how the availability of books that students can choose from is positively related to reading achievement.

In the South African context, Pretorius and colleagues' series of studies in disadvantaged schools provides (albeit small-scale) evidence of the positive impact of providing access to collections of new books in children's mother tongues and of reading interventions such as book clubs on reading ability (Pretorius & Knoetze, 2013). Murry (2011) uses Stanovich's concept of the "Matthew Effect" to show why

children who have a wide choice of books and read a lot prosper in terms of their reading, while children in poorly resourced schools struggle to learn to read, come to dislike reading, and fall further and further behind. The sufficient provision of quality texts for reading instruction requires that provision is prioritized and sufficient budget is allocated or generated for this. In this sense, the provision of quality texts is a management function.

Finally, lending some quantitative support to the many qualitative studies, the Effective Schools in Reading study (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992) included several reading-specific indicators at the school level that related to leadership and management. This included a composite variable clustering indicators related to reading materials: School resources (reading materials in school; library or reading room; student newspaper; school library books per student).

Ranking for 56 variables was established by looking at the differences between the 20 most effective and 20 least effective schools in each country (based on reading outcome scores). In other words, indicators were ranked on their capacity to discriminate between schools. The study found the composite variable school resources ranked 14. Reading material was ranked important in schools, and "well-stocked school libraries represent a significant resource for helping students improve their reading literacy" (p. 31).

2.5.2 Knowledgeable teachers

The work of Pretorius and her colleagues draws attention to the issue of teachers' own levels of literacy, and the necessity of providing good reading teachers in order to foster better reading instruction. They identify what they call the 'paradox of the primary school professional' in the South African context:

> *Primary school teachers are professionals who are supposedly deeply involved in developing literacy skills in their learners. Yet it is precisely in the domain of literacy that many teachers are themselves unskilled. Many primary school teachers come from communities with a strong oral culture and so they are not inclined to be readers themselves, nor are they familiar with the traditions of storybook reading or books for young people. Furthermore, many of them teach in disadvantaged schools where the non-delivery of books, lack of supplementary reading materials and lack of access to libraries are common features (p. 58).*

The recruitment and development of good reading teachers is an SLM function, as is the provision of sufficient reading material and development opportunities at the school level to support reading instruction. In addition, principals' inclination and capacity to reduce the number of underperforming teachers in a school (in general, but with respect to teaching reading as well) bears further investigation.

2.5.3 Time

Time is a critical resource to consider in relation to SLM and reading given strong findings relating the amount of time spent in reading activities to student achievement (Taylor, 1999; Ivey, 2000; Denham & Lieberman, 1980, to name only a few). Mullis and Martin (2015) assert that within the constraints of the educational system, it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that the instructional time, including the time devoted to reading, is sufficient for the purposes of curriculum implementation. This refers both to the *allocation* of time in the school day to reading specifically, as well as ensuring the *use* of the time for reading. Murphy (2003) makes the argument based on research in the following way:

> *Since instructional time allocated for literacy instruction is obviously important (Allington, 1991, p. 10) and since learning to read requires time to read, leadership for literacy means creating carefully structured reading programmes (Samuels, 1981) in which a significant block of time is devoted to reading (p 94-95*).

Murphy (2004) also argues that within these blocks more time be allocated to reading text than is the norm in primary classrooms, and that leaders understand that "it is valuable for students to actually read during reading class" (p.51). A number of researchers also draw attention to the importance of carefully structuring and specifying the format of reading time, giving adequate attention to teacher-directed small group instruction (Allington et al, 1986) and to teacher-facilitated independent reading. The latter is grounded in Lainhardt et al's (1981) finding that "an average of one minute per day of additional silent reading time increases post-test performance by one point". Munro as well as others argue that these kinds of structuring decisions often are taken at the school level, or entail school management ensuring compliance with curriculum specifications around the structuring of reading instruction.

A final aspect regarding the management of time involves the protection of instructional time. Anderson et al, (1985) report that "schools that are especially effective in teaching reading maximize the amount of uninterrupted time available for learning (p. 114). And Sherman (2001, p. 16) argues that effective reading schools "fiercely protect instructional reading time". Finally, Torgesen et al (2007) draw attention to the importance of management developing and maintaining a school schedule that allows sufficient time for interventions.

2.6 The relationship between school effectiveness and literacy leadership

Having drawn out several of the dominant themes emerging from the leading for literacy literature, in this section of the review I consider the relationship between the school effectiveness and literacy leadership literature. There is some interest in the literature in the relationship between general school effectiveness and aspects of management that pertain to reading specifically. In some ways, the general finding is not surprising – that management of reading specifically is more effective in school settings characterized as more effective. But what is interesting is the way in which several authors have explored this relationship.

Amendum and Fitgerald (2013) specifically consider the difference between two different kinds of reading management interventions and broader school effectiveness. They considered the *structure of reading content delivery* and the *degree of professional development support for the teachers to learn the instructional structure and content.* Structure of reading content delivery was defined as the extent to which a framework was specified for content delivery and instructional activities. An example of high-structure delivery was one in which teachers were given scripts to use during reading lessons, and an example of low-structure delivery was book floods with little or no explicit instruction. The degree of professional development support for the teachers was defined as the extent to which professional development sessions were held as well as the extent of follow-up coaching or scaffolding. The study was unique in that it looked *longitudinally* at both content structuring *and* professional development within the same study (and schools) whereas the impact of these had generally been considered separately in the literature.

The study took these clearly defined aspects to the management of reading and considered them in relation to conditions of school effectiveness and the poverty level of the school. The school effectiveness measure was based on characteristics commonly identified with school effectiveness: (a) strength of school leadership, (b) degree of focus on improved student learning, (c) extent of staff collaboration, (d) extent of ongoing professional development, and (e) extent of school connections to parents.

The conclusions were interesting. The study reported that, firstly, less structured content delivery overshadowed more structured delivery for student growth, but there was added value of being in schools with more characteristics associated with effectiveness. Secondly, students with the largest improvements were in schools with higher support for teachers. But in low-support settings, students improved more if they were in schools with more characteristics associated with school effectiveness. Third, the degree of structure of content delivery and degree of professional development support were significantly related to improvement in phonics knowledge, but not to improvement in other reading sub-processes. Students whose phonics knowledge improved the most were from schools where a higher content-delivery structure was used. However, by the end of the two years, these students did not catch up with their initially higher-performing counterparts who received low-structure content delivery.

The authors argue that on the one hand these results fly in the face of an evidence base that documents the beneficial effects of highly structured programs in high-poverty, challenging situations. But on the other hand, they argue that the findings are consistent with evaluations that did not find significant impact of such large-scale highly structured programmes like Reading First.

Of relevance to the present study is the finding that being in schools with more school effectiveness characteristics (including leadership characteristics) brought added value to the degree of structure for content delivery. The authors offer a

reminder that we know from prior research that school contexts matter for student achievement. What they claim to advance is an understanding of how such school effectiveness characteristics have the potential of "boosting" reading growth in relation to the degree of structure for content delivery. They suggest that perhaps teachers in schools with more school effectiveness characteristics feel greater support and encouragement to learn and apply effective research-based practices as well as to make professional decisions about reading instruction. In a way this is a careful, detailed consideration of how leadership creates the *possibilities* for improved instruction specifically in relation to reading. Their policy recommendation, controversial in the current US policy environment, is that for high-poverty, low-achieving schools, policy makers might consider encouraging low-structure reading content delivery along with investing in the highest-level of support for teachers to learn about reading instruction. These mixed and unpredictable findings are interesting in relation to current efforts in South Africa to test different interventions

In the South African context, Van Staden (2014) was also interested in the relationship between school effectiveness and 'reading effectiveness'. She used Creemers' Model of Educational Effectiveness as grounds for a model of reading effectiveness based on South African Grade 5 data provided by PIRLS 2006. Creemer's model was adapted to reflect *reading* effectiveness in contrast with Creemers' original use of the model for school effectiveness. As in the Creemers model Van Staden considers effectiveness at different levels (learner, teacher, school and context) and extracts relevant items from the PIRLS questionnaires to measure these, considering the interaction between issues of quality, time and opportunity used at each structural level. The table below summarises the levels and 'factors' derived from the PIRLS data considered. Van Staden wanted to see whether Creemers' Comprehensive Model of Educational Effectiveness could provide a framework for explaining reading performance in a developing context in the absence of established reading education frameworks and their ability to capture the PIRLS 2006 data adequately.

Table 3 Factors of reading effectiveness as adapted from Creemers' Model of Educational Effectiveness (van Staden, 2014, p.178)

Levels	Components of quality, time and opportunity	PIRLS 2006 factors
School	Quality (Educational): Quality (Organisational): Time: Opportunities used:	Instructional activities and strategies Governance and organization of educational system Curriculum characteristics and policies Home-school connection
Classroom	Quality: Time: Opportunities used:	Instructional activities and strategies Demographics and resources Instructional activities and strategies Classroom environment and structure Instructional activities and strategies
Learner	Quality: Time: Opportunities used: Motivation: Social background: Basic skills/higher-order skills:	Activities fostering reading literacy Learners' out-of-school activities Home-school connection Learners' and parents' reading attitudes and self-concept Demographics and resources Home resources Language in the home

The Creemers framework was used to select variables and items from the PIRLS that were expected to be related to reading literacy achievement (what she calls a 'confirmatory' rather than 'exploratory approach'). The PIRLS items taken from the school questionnaire and teacher questionnaire for the school level model developed by Van Staden are listed below, as these items are illustrative and relevant to the present study:

In her analysis, Van Staden found that none of these factors were found to be of statistical significance in affecting reading literacy scores as measured on the PIRLS tests in African language schools (some effects were found in the higher SES Afrikaans and English medium schools). With most of the statistically significant effects found at the individual learner level, Van Staden concludes that adaptations to the model used, as well as more adequate data than the limited items from the PIRLS was needed to capture significant factors at work in African language schools especially. For a number of Creemers' factors, no appropriate variables could be identified under the relevant components in the conceptual framework (e.g. basic skills, variables that measure resources rather than opportunity). The study highlights the difficulties related to establishing relationships between reading outcomes and school level factors in the South African schooling context when drawing on large data sets. In particular, it draws attention to the question of whether investigating leading for literacy in a schooling context of low basic functionality would produce results.

Table 4Model variables from the PIRLS school and teacher questionnaire included at the school level (Van Staden, 2014, p. 181)

School questionnaire
Emphasis that the school places on teaching specific language and literacy skills to learners in Grade 1-4
Grade at which specific reading skills and strategies first receive major emphasis in instruction in the school.
The number of days per year that the school is open for instruction
Informal initiatives to encourage learners to read
School's use of the specific materials in reading instructional programmes in Grades 1 -4
Teacher questionnaire
Teacher strategies when a learner begins to fall behind in reading
Emphasis that is placed on specific courses to monitor learners' progress in reading
Frequency of using specific tools to assess learners' performance in reading
The amount of time per week spent on English language instruction and / or activities with the learners
The amount of time that is explicitly allocated for formal reading instruction
The amount of time that learners are expected to spend on homework involving reading (for any subject)
Frequency of using specific resources when doing reading activities / instruction.
Frequency of doing specific activities when doing reading activities / instruction
Frequency with which teacher requires learners to engage in specific activities to help develop reading comprehension skis or strategies.

On a much smaller scale Currin and Pretorius (2010) undertook a detailed case study of a school where a multi-level reading intervention was introduced. They argue that the intervention did produce planned reading improvement, but it also induced (and necessitated) unplanned outcomes at other levels of the school. Some of these outcomes suggested that the school was slowly becoming a more functional and effective school. In addition, these outcomes or changes showed that a reading intervention programme in a high-poverty context can never simply be a reading intervention and that an intervention permeates all aspects of school life. On the other hand, despite these unanticipated school-level changes, the improvements in reading levels were slight. Currin and Pretorius (2010) observe that the intervention was unable to shift certain factors identified in research as key to school effectiveness, including 'maximum opportunity to learn' time and enough suitable textbooks and support materials. The authors argue that there are a host of important variables that contribute to the effective functioning of a school and the successful accomplishment of literacy. Learners and schools in high poverty contexts especially require skilled and knowledgeable teachers and extra educational resources to counteract the effects of poverty on their learning (p. 43).

The difficulties in considering school leadership issues at scale in relation to reading is also highlighted in another study based on PIRLS and reported by Zimmerman et al. (2011). They were interested in a topic closely related to the present study: the role of school organisation in learners' reading success or failure.

Extracting relevant items from the PIRLS data set, and conducting six case studies, Zimmerman et al (2011) reported on two school-level dimensions: cooperation and collaboration, and organisation of the school reading literacy strategy. For the former they considered whether the school had an official policy statement for promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers, and the reported frequency of teacher meetings. For the school literacy strategy they considered the PIRLS items asking about the availability of a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught (in addition to national or regional curriculum guides) and the availability of school guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers. Only one school out of the six case studies they considered had such guidelines Findings from the PIRLS data set were inconclusive – and the presence of these factors was reported across the performance outcome distribution. Social desirability bias was likely the reason for this. The six case studies cast some light on in-school dynamics, although these are described in general rather than reading-specific terms. In short, the study does not add to our understanding of organization-level reading practices in schools related to reading outcomes in the South African context.

3. Discussion: resources and relationships

The vast majority of the studies covered in this review were conducted in developed country contexts, especially the US. As in broader school effectiveness literature and general studies of schools and school reform, the findings from developed countries are often not relevant to developing countries with very different schooling conditions and systems. While being mindful of this, it is nonetheless possible to cluster the various factors identified in the international literature into sets of resources that might be explored in the South African context, bracketing what is feasible or desirable. For purposes of summary I have organised the factors derived from the review into material, human, knowledge and strategic resources, and these are listed in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Instructional resources relevant to leading for literacy

Resource	Aspects / indicators	Key question/s
Material resources	Texts • Language availability • Quantity • Quality / variety • Use Library • Quantity • Quality • Use Time • Allocation for reading • Use for reading • Structuring of format of reading time	Are there sufficient resources, especially books, to make a programme of reading feasible in the first place? Sufficient refers to language range, graded reader range, variety. Are the texts utilized? Is time structured in a way that provides clear allocation for reading instruction with detailed formats for teaching reading? Is this time used?
Human resources	Specialist reading role Placement / distribution of teachers Recruitment / termination of staff Out of field teaching Teacher – learner ratios for reading Remedial assistance	Is the management and structuring of staff in the school in any way related to the promotion of reading instruction?
Knowledge resources	Level of general literacy in the school Principal/DP/HOD knowledge of reading Schoolwide emphasis on reading Shared understanding of what reading instruction entails Reading expertise amongst staff Awards / competitions for reading	Is there a culture of reading in the school, deriving from an importance placed on reading and on staff's own reading practices and expertise? Is expertise in reading available in the school?
Strategic resources	Reading programmes • Existence • Implementation • Duration Clear timetabling Staffing Reading assessment practices Use of data External assistance • Quality • Duration Opportunities for collaboration around reading instruction • Quality • Quantity Professional development • Focused / sustained	Are there programmes and practices in the school that are geared towards the improvement of reading instruction and outcomes?

In relation to these factors a select set of instrument items drawn from a range of studies is included in Appendix A.

In addition to the sets of factors that arise from the review, there are also a number of relationships that are useful to consider in further investigation. The first is that the factors listed above do not work in isolation but are relational. It is not a single factor that describes optimal SLM practices in relation to reading, but combinations. To take a simple example, Cosner (2011) found collaboration to be usefully combined with use of assessment evidence to inform decisions.

3.1 Resources: presence, management, use

The second relational aspect that comes from the literature reviewed is the distinction between the existence of resources (opportunities) and the use of resources, a distinction emphasized in the school effectiveness literature in general (Creemers, 1996). Many of the strategic and knowledge resources listed above may be in place or present in a school. The interest is whether these resources are actually used for the purpose of improving the reading instruction programme in the school, or merely represent compliance with policy or official programmes. This is an extension of Van der Berg's (2008) useful distinction between the presence of resources and management of resources, so that the investigation might consider three aspects:

Presence of resource ➔ management of resource ➔ use of resource

What this points to is a third crucial relational aspect to an investigation of leading for literacy: the relationship between instructional management and the classroom.

3.2 Instructional leadership and classroom practices

The focus in this review has been on management of reading. Part of the rationale for concentrating on this is the neglect in research on this level in favour of the classroom and what happens in relation to reading instruction there. The two spheres – the administrative and the classroom – have long been treated separately, conforming to the idea of loose-coupling that has held sway since the late 1970s. The argument simply put is that school administration 'decouples' itself from the classroom (or the technical core) in order to deal with pressures from outside (see Meyer and Rowan, 1978). Spillane and Burch (2003) and Coburn (2004) question this decoupling thesis, arguing that it is overstated. They explore the relationship between the school's administration and institutional environment and the classroom in relation to teachers' 'sense-making' (Coburn, 2004, see detail above). Spillane and Burch (2003) also argue that instruction is about subject matter. Institutional environments are formed around and shape instruction in relation to specific subjects (Spillane, 2003).

These arguments are of interest in the South African context. How schools strategise and prioritise around improvements in particular subjects, structuring classroom practices in particular ways, especially reading in this case, is a crucial question. How teachers make sense of institutional directives and school-level policies around reading is key, especially in relation to teachers' existing understandings and knowledge. But there is another dimension that is addressed by considering the relationship between SLM and the classroom specifically. There are known high levels of compliance in many schools, and this presents a difficulty in establishing the SLM aspects that contribute to differential outcomes. Schools often 'look' like they have adopted the required and appropriate policies and practices, or they report as much. If we consider the relationship between the management of the resource and the use of the resource, or, between management and the classroom, it is possible to frame the question in the following way:

What are the contact points between instructional leadership and pedagogy? Where do we find traction?

This would entail an investigation that looks across the school – from principal to deputy principal to head of department to class teacher - in order to track the presence, management and use of resources (broadly defined). This is not necessarily a one-way relation – rather in considering the nexus between administration and classroom, how do SLM practices penetrate the classroom, and in turn, how do classroom practices inform and drive SLM decision-making?

The notion of distributed leadership is also relevant here: what artefacts (like reading curricula; reading tests; texts; programmes) stretch across different levels of the school (leadership, grade groupings, classrooms), establishing norms for reading instruction at the school level?

3.3 The relation between leading for literacy and school effectiveness

While the review has drawn out specific aspects of leading for literacy that may provide the basis of an investigation, a number of studies point to the importance of general school effectiveness in relation to the management of reading instruction specifically. While a qualitative dimension of the research may focus specifically on leading for literacy aspects, a quantitative SLM investigation would need to include general school effectiveness aspects. It seems that without basic functionality being in place in schools, there is unlikely to be evident reading management. Further, where elements of leading for literacy are found, these are likely possible or even bolstered by general school effectiveness.

3.4 Knowledge and understanding of reading

The final relational aspect that the literature highlights is between teachers' knowledge and understanding of reading and the policy environment on the one hand, and their prior understandings on the other. Coburn (2001) and Spillane et al (2002) make the point that the ways in which teachers and administrators come to understand and enact instructional policy is influenced by prior knowledge, the social context within which they work, and the nature of their connections to policy or reform messages. The meaning of information or events—in this case, messages about reading—is not given but is inherently problematic. These messages and their reception are key to understanding how managers and teachers understand and reading and enact reading instruction.

These are complex issues in the South African context. In relation to the policy environment, South Africa has undergone fairly rapid curriculum reform in the last 20 years that shifted from an impoverished drill and rote recitation approach to reading under apartheid, to a radical whole language approach, poorly conceptualized and understood in Curriculum 2005, the first post-apartheid curriculum (DOE, 1997). Under the next reform, the National Curriculum Statement (DOE 2002), there was an attempt to shift to a balanced approach to reading, but

with contradictory messaging and insufficient articulation of what this required. Finally, under the Curriculum Policy and Assessment Statement (DBE, 2011), the curriculum has moved to a highly specified 'proficiency' approach that leans more towards basic skills. The key messages, therefore, around what reading instruction is and how it should be enacted in the classroom have changed radically in a relatively short period of time, with teacher professional development struggling to keep pace.

Alongside all these changes, the schooling context for the majority of students has been located within largely oral cultures where oral exchange in classrooms has been privileged (Pretorius; MacDonald, 2002; Hoadley, 2012). A concerted attempt to shift towards a text-based focus in literacy in the CAPS has come late in the day and has been a slow process. Difficulties in making the shift have been compounded by issues around multilingualism and the shift from mother-tongue literacy instruction to English language instruction. This presents a very complex environment to explore understandings of reading instruction and their take up in schools.

4. Conclusion

This review has sketched some of the key factors and issues emerging from the literature on leading for literacy. Although much of the literature is located within developed country contexts, the review draws out elements that may be relevant to the proposed study and contextualizes some of the aspects. The review suggests that a productive way forward to investigate leading for literacy in the South African schooling context may be to consider the relationship between the presence, management and use of reading resources and the nexus between SLM for reading on the one hand and reading instruction in the classroom on the other. In other words, how are material, strategic, knowledge and human resources relevant to reading distributed across different levels of the school, and what supports or restricts their productive circulation and use within the school to promote better reading instruction and improved outcomes.

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