

Preservice Teacher Training Through Service-Learning on a Shared Reading Project

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Abstract:

This project is motivated by the urgent need to address the reading crisis in South Africa, which has become a focal point in educational discourse and draws attention from academics, education specialists, and the public. Reports reveal alarmingly low reading levels among learners, emphasising the necessity for immediate intervention. The project is grounded in activity theory, which emphasises the role of tools and social practices in mediating learning activities. This framework informs the design of activities that promote meaningful engagement with texts, considering the social and cultural context of reading. The project utilises a qualitative approach, collecting data through student reflection and interviews with students and teachers. Analysis involves thematic analysis of qualitative data to understand the impact on teaching practices and community engagement. Partnering with a local less affluent school and the Western Cape Education Department, preservice teachers plan and deliver shared reading sessions to Grade 4 learners. Initial observations suggest that this approach improves learners' fluency and comprehension while providing valuable experience for preservice teachers. This is an ongoing project that aims to address the reading crisis in South Africa and demonstrate the potential of service-learning as an innovative and authentic approach to tertiary education. By bridging the gap between the Foundation and Intermediate Phases and including foundational reading skills, such as phonics and decoding, the project equips preservice teachers with the skills and strategies to improve reading outcomes in the Intermediate Phase. This underscores the transformative power of service-learning and its role in addressing the reading crisis in South Africa.

Keywords:

Authentic approach, Decoding, Phonics, Preservice teachers, Reading Comprehension, Reading crisis, Service-learning, Shared reading.