

Research-based Instructional Reading Strategies to Enhance Reading Ability in Learners: A Compelling Case

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ABSTRACT Teaching reading skills is the core business of every teacher especially during foundation phase (primary schools). A teaching and learning agenda that informs teaching and learning in the university should be meticulously designed. In this concept paper the researcher interrogates key considerations in the teaching of reading in foundation phase. The researcher begins by examining- What actually reading is? Philosophical underpinnings that inform about teaching of reading skills should inform the basis for a teaching and learning agenda. In this paper, the researcher interrogates key instructional reading strategies that should taken into account while developing reading skills in children. The researcher argues that in order to meaningfully develop reading ability there is a need to be thoroughly grounded in theories related to teaching reading skills. Such theories inform practice and are considered within the broad context of the purpose of foundation phase in the given context.

INTRODUCTION

The core business of any foundation phase (FP) teacher involves teaching learners to read. The issue of learners who cannot read and understand a text is a major challenge in South Africa (PIRLS 2006; Govender 2004; Child 2012). A large number of learners who cannot read and understand the text are mostly in the foundation phase. This situation is a cause of concern since the foundation phase is the beginning of education. Therefore, if the foundation is not strong enough, the learners will not be able to further their studies.

Moats (1999:5) states:

Low reading achievement, more than any other factor, is the root cause of chronically low performing schools, which harm students and contribute to the loss of public confidence in our school system. When many children don't learn to read, the public schools cannot and will not be regarded as successful-and efforts to dismantle them will proceed.

In order to rectify this situation, studies by Moats (2000:7) on reading, indicate that although some children will learn to read in spite of incidental teaching, others never learn unless they are taught in an organised, systematic, efficient way by a knowledgeable teacher using a well-designed instructional approach. This implies that educational measures are critical to teach learners how to read the text proficiently, with understanding.

The instructional reading strategies are shared reading, read aloud, guided reading, and independent reading activities. These activities, if executed effectively in the classrooms, may help teachers to teach the learners how to unlock the code of written text with ease. In the following section, the research-based instructional reading strategies are presented as identified. These reading strategies are relevant as those can be used within any context and if employed correctly, may be effective in teaching reading to foundation phase learners.

What is Reading?

Teaching reading is a complex and requires highly skilled professional teachers. It seems that reading is an indefinable concept given the controversy surrounding definitions by various scholars. Reading is regarded as the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends (Moats 2000: 5). Boucher (2000: 89) describes reading as a communicative act that includes the interaction of mutually informative process. The interaction and combination of these processes add constantly to the readers understanding and thinking about the communication conveyed through the text. Burns et al. (1992) refer to reading as a life skill that combines nine aspects of the reading process to facilitate reading; these aspects include sensory, perceptual, sequential, experiential, thinking, learning, associational, affective and constructive. These aspects are critical in the reading process.

Reading is considered to be the foundation of literacy skills. It requires mastery of the alphabetic principle (letter sound relationships), rapid word recognition, wide vocabulary knowledge, and arrange of strategies to engage deeply with text meaning (Clay 1991; Leipzig 2001; Moats 2009; Pang et al. 2003).

Clay (1991: 6) defines reading as: a message getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced; and a process by which children can, on the run, extract a sequence of cues from printed texts and relate these, one to the other, so that they understand the message of the text.

Curriculum Council of Western Australia (CCWA 2008: 54) states;

Reading is the act of understanding from printed material that draws on a repertoire of social, cultural and cognitive resources. It is completed in different ways, for different purposes, in a variety of public and domestic settings. Reading is therefore a cultural, economic, ideological, political and psychological act. The issue of whether readers find a message, or engage in interpretation to generate a new meaning is subject to debate in literary circles Curriculum.

Reading is both an interactive and intra-active mode of communication. Intra-active as the reader is constantly making use of interactions between his or her own abilities, experiences, knowledge and skills to facilitate internal communication, understanding (semantic and personal meaning of what is being read).

During the reading process the reader is conducting dialogue with the text in an endeavour to process the sense intended by the author and uses the information of the printed text to construct meaning (Bouwer and Jordaan 2002: 134).

To show the importance of reading in the learners lives Leipzig (2001: 1) states:

Reading is a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation. Reading is making meaning from print. It requires that we identify the words in print-process called recognition; construct an understanding from tem-a process called comprehension; coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate-an achievement called fluency.

Hellekjaer (2007: 23) states:

Reading comprises decoding of the written text on the one hand, and efficiently processing the information gained. This implies that in order to process information gathered, that teachers must encourage learners to become actively involved in their own learning.

Snow et al. (1998: 15) provide a more expanded definition:

Reading is a complex developmental challenge that we know to be intertwined with many other developmental accomplishments: attention, memory, language, and motivation, for example. Reading is not only a cognitive psycholinguistic activity but also a social activity.

Hobbs (2005), Malloy et al. (2010) and Messaris (2005) note that the concept of reading has been broadened to include visual, analytical, and technological skills necessary to acquire information from digital video, handheld data assistants, computers, wireless reading devices, cell phones, or other technological learning devices

N’Namdi (2005: 13) states that the teacher’s role is to employ various behavioural and teaching strategies to promote learners’ motivation. If children are motivated to learn to read, they will try to learn to read, and continue to do so, even when faced with obstacles. The teacher is responsible for creating an environment that motivates children to read.

Teachers are directly responsible for creating and applying various techniques and strategies that lead to reading comprehension. They should, therefore, be aware of the factors and stages of reading development that affect a child’s ability to read.

What is Reading Strategy?

DoE (2008: 16) states:

Reading strategies are ways of solving problems that learner may come across while reading. For example, they might not know the meaning of a word, or they might find a section of the text difficult to understand. When these situations arise, learners should have strategy for knowing what to do.

‘A strategy is a plan; you are to be thoughtful when you do it, and often adjust the plan as you go along to fit the situation. Therefore, good readers use many strategies’. For example, predictions, question generating and question answering (Duffy 2002, 2003). This enables them

to independently understand, discuss the text and to relate it to other situations.

Afflerbach et al. (2008: 368), define reading strategies as specific, deliberate mental processes or behaviours, which control and modify the reader's efforts to decode a text, understand words and construct the meaning of a text. According to Anderson (1991), what is important is that readers should know what are the strategies and how and when to use them. In addition, the reader must also know how to apply the strategy successfully in different contexts.

What is the Purpose of Teaching Reading at Foundation Phase?

The purpose of teaching reading in the foundation phase should be looked at in the broader context of the 'knowledge economy.' Brown (1996: 119) argues that being able to read is not sufficient; it is the active use of reading that is important, as it is this competence that enables children to function in school and in literate society. Some authors indicate that readings have cognitive, social, emotional and cultural values.

Cognitive Value: Piaget (1968) believes that children should learn to read because of its adaptive value. This implies that through the reading process the learner encountered problems and will be required to resolve them through normal assimilation and accommodation.

Social Value: Through reading learners can learn about life and how to deal with challenges. This implies that reading is a life skill that is necessary in one's life. Therefore reading has social value because it can influence a person's social development. Learners can learn how well they can adapt to the environment and become good members of the society. Learners can learn how to express themselves in an acceptable way in different contexts.

Emotional Value: Reading involves emotion and thought of human beings. Therefore it may include both positive and negative emotions, thoughts and needs. For example the need for security, the need to belong and to be accepted, the need to be loved and love, the need to achieve and to feel worthy; the need for beauty, order and harmony.

Cultural Value: Culture and language are interrelated. Language serves a variety of purposes and therefore fulfils a cultural value (DoE 2002). This implies that through reading learn-

ers can understand their culture as well as the meaning of heritage days.

According to Machado (1999: 226),

Reading not only educates the head but the heart as well. It promotes empathy and invites readers to adopt new perspectives. It offers opportunities for children to learn to recognize our similarities, value our differences, and respect our common humanity. In an important sense, then, children need literature that serves as a window onto lives and experiences different from their own, and literature that serve as a mirror reflecting themselves and their cultural values, attitudes, and behaviours.

This implies that it is imperative for foundation phase teachers to have the theoretical knowledge about what research based instructional strategies for teaching reading are. This knowledge will assist them to teach learners with the necessary skills to become competent readers in the changing world.

The Reading Acquisition Process

There are six stages of how reading is acquired, namely, pre-reader, emergent reader, early reader, developing reader, early fluent reader and independent reader (DOE 2008: 10-11).

The responsibility of the teacher is to encourage reading interest with enjoyable experiences and activities, with an emphasis on oral expression. The principal goal at this stage is to ensure that the learner is socially, mentally, emotionally and physically ready to learn to read. Spatial development is important at this stage (N'Namdi 2005). During the pre-reader stage, the learner is expected to hold the book and turns pages correctly, recognise the beginning and the end of the page, listen and respond to stories, interpret the pictures, pretend to read loudly and silently, know some letters and show interest in print and point at them whenever they see signs and labels, and create stories out of pictures (DOE 2008: 10-11).

The emergent readers use pictures to tell stories, know some sounds and some letters that can make a sound, are aware that there are reading strategies from left to right, like to join someone who is reading, recognise some words, and read some familiar books (DOE 2008: 10-11). At this stage of development, the learner must acquire an ability to recognize letters of the alphabet, but not to memorize them. This is accom-

plished by varying the types of techniques used to teach the alphabet (N'Namdi 2005: 16).

The early fluent reader knows some letter sounds and names, recognises some common words, can retell a story, uses pictures to make meaning of the written text, reads aloud when reading to self, reads word for word loudly, reads early readers and picture books with pattern, repetition and rhyme (DOE 2008: 10-11; N'Namdi 2005: 16). The developing reader uses pictures to make reading, uses knowledge of sentence structure, uses phonics to decode words, combines words into phrases, retells the beginning, the middle and the end of the story, can also give some details of the story, use punctuation marks, reads silently, corrects himself/herself, reads books with large prints (DOE 2008: 10-11).

N'Namdi (2005: 18) states:

At this stage of development the pupil is prepared to identify word that he or she cannot pronounce and the pronunciation done independently, read simple stories and feel comfortably learning new concepts

During the fluent reader stage, learners move from learning to read, to reading to learn. In this stage, the reader builds up a substantial background of knowledge of spelling. The learner recognises most familiar words on sight, reads fluently- at least 60 words per minute, uses punctuation to enhance comprehension, stops at all full stops, and begins to understand implied meaning (DOE 2008: 10-11; N'Namdi 2005).

Learners in the independent reader stage read fluently and read more advanced books. They read and understand the implied meaning of the text.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Teaching Reading

Reading involves a number of different reading activities, purposes, and strategies. The dynamic, complex, and interrelating correlation between the cognitive and the interactive processes may be defined as follows: 'Reading comprises decoding of the written text on the one hand and efficiently processing the information gained on the other' (Hellekjaer 2007: 23). This definition obtains substantial support from other scholars (August et al. 2008: 144; Grabe 2002: 18; Day and Bamford 1998: 12). The many facets that constitute the reading activity are closely inter-

twined, defining this activity may require a multiple approach.

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget (1968) has provided one of the most comprehensive descriptions of children's cognitive capabilities and development. Piaget's theory is based on a number of assumptions, which underpin the way in which he believed children learn (Kail 2001: 150-152). He maintained that children use schemes to organise, categorise and understand the world. As children grow older, these strategies become increasingly abstract as new experiences are assimilated into the existing plans. Piaget in (Lieberman et al. 1992: 392) used the term 'accommodation' to refer to the process of reorganising existing schemes to improve the new information so that equilibrium is achieved. If accommodation does not occur, then disequilibrium occurs and children have to organise their efforts to achieve equilibrium. Piaget (1968) states that experiences and interaction with the environment, and not only maturation, that facilitate the development of cognitive structures. According to Piaget, children's cognitive development progresses sequentially through a series of stages which are linked to certain age ranges. The transition from the sensory motor stage through the preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational stages can be seen as a continuum on which children move from subjective to objective realisation (Gage and Berliner 1992: 105-116).

For Piaget (1968) learning is a process of internal construction. Learners must construct knowledge in their own minds through the guidance of experts into the area. In the context of the study, teachers must teach learners to acquire self-regulatory competence by observing and hearing their explanations, for example, when the teacher is demonstrating the use of the strategy, guiding and giving constructive feedback the learners use the self-directing, self-pacing and self-correcting strategy and learn how to adjust their skill to change personal, behavioural and contextual conditions to optimise their own learning during reading.

For this study, attention is given to the concrete operational stage lasting from seven to eleven years of age as promoted by Piaget. During this stage, children start to use logical

thought processes, such as reversal of concepts, multiple classifications and mental ordering, to begin to solve problems limited to real, observable objects. Centralisation is no longer present during this stage as children begin to realise that there are many sides to a particular problem (Mwamwenda 2004: 95-100; Biehler and Snowman 1993: 61-66; Vasta Haith and Miller 1992: 35).

Piaget's theory has implications for teaching reading, as each individual child's current stage of cognition development must be taken into account when the teacher plans learning activities. The theory helps teachers to understand that learners at this level have reached a new level of self-development that allows them to understand some of the ways in which they are related to people. Through interaction with the teacher and other persons, and during play, learners become able to understand the physical and the social world. Here, during reading comprehension, realistic fiction may encourage learners to interact with characters who are involved in a conflict situation. Knowledge about this stage will assist the teacher to understand that the learners are ready to listen to stories and to read about real-life heroes and stories which move between the past and present, such as legends.

The knowledgeable teacher is aware that learners in this stage begin to apply logic to concrete experience, so that they begin to move beyond one-dimensional thinking. Concerning reading, this enables learners to relate one event to a system of interrelated parts. They gradually start perceiving an event from the beginning to the end and from the conclusion to the beginning. It is therefore important that the environment should be rich to encourage learners to learn and reason about what they read. Learners at this stage have the ability to understand picture storybooks, folk tales, and books written for bibliotherapy. It is critical for the teacher to guide learners on which strategies to use, showing them when and why and how to apply each strategy correctly.

Piaget's theory relates to this study because reading text should match the developmental stages of learners. Learners should construct the meaning of the text and be able to use it in contexts other than the classroom. Learning activities should match the level of the conceptual development of the learners. The teacher must

use the stages as a way to gauge and monitor learners' pace of learning. Piaget's view is that learners must be self-initiated and actively involved in learning. In reading comprehension, teachers must be able to model good behaviour of reading with understanding so that learners will ultimately take responsibility for their own learning. Piaget also emphasises the importance of the environment in learning, particularly in the social environment. In reading comprehension, the comprehension development may be influenced by interactions with others. The learners see and hear the teachers and peers reading and then internalise and model what they observe and hear. The following section, the researcher reports on the theory of Vygotsky and how does it relate to this essay.

Vygotsky's Socio-Historical Theory of Cognitive Development

Lev Vygotsky (1978) attributed cognitive development to the social environment of the child. He noted that children begin learning from the behaviours, attitudes, values and skills of the people around them. The social world and one's culture determine which stimuli occur and are attended to. Vygotsky emphasised the role of adults in influencing the cognitive development of children. Development is enhanced when children work cooperatively or collaboratively with adults and other children. Cognitive development proceeds from behaviours regulated by others to self-regulated behaviour (Zimmerman 1998). To help children move from a social to a personal psychological form of knowledge, adults should determine the child's actual development level by learning about his capacity to solve problems when working with or without adult help.

According to Vygotsky, when a child is working independently, we see the actual development level of the child. When the child is working with an adult, we see the potential development of the child, under optimal circumstances, while learning with a competent nurturing mediator. The difference between these two levels of functioning is referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Biehler and Snowman 1993: 63; Gage and Berliner 1992: 122-123). In regard to the importance of the ZPD, Vygotsky (1998: 137-138) emphasised:

Everything that the child cannot do independently, but which he can be taught or which he can do with direction or cooperation or with the help of leading questions, we will include in the sphere of imitation... Thus, in studying what the child is capable of doing independently, we study yesterday's development. Studying what the child is capable of doing cooperatively, we ascertain tomorrow's development.

When children face challenging situations, they can seek help from their teachers and peers, which is termed 'scaffolding' (Woolfolk 1995: 50).

Vygotsky believed that language is an important tool because it is internalised by the child to affect thinking and problem-solving (Bukatko and Daehner 2001: 27; Shaffer 1996: 279). The role of the adult is to assist children to acquire language in ways that enable them to take control of their own learning (Engelbrecht and Green 2001: 84). Teachers can focus on effective communication, meaning, comprehension and respect for language in the classroom. Vygotsky's theory has implications for teaching reading comprehension because in facilitating learning, the teacher must take the cultural context of the learners into consideration as it influences their thinking and actions. Learners can be given problem-solving activities with instructions, for the task of reading comprehension. Thereafter, the learner should work independently using his or her own knowledge and skills with the guidance received from the teacher. Two approaches are pertinent to teaching reading comprehension, based on the views of Vygotsky, namely reciprocal teaching and scaffolded support.

Research-Based Instructional Reading Sessions for Teaching Reading

The most important task of the primary teachers is to develop readers and writers. Children learn best when teachers employ a variety of strategies to model and demonstrate reading knowledge, strategy and skills. These are strategies such as shared reading, reading aloud, oral reading, guided reading and individual or independent reading.

Children must be introduced to books and stories straight away, letting children play with books and discover what books and written language are about. Readers learn about written language while playing and working with real

books (Flanagan 1995: 16). This implies that the teacher must be aware of the instructional activities that should be used during reading.

Moats (1999: 10) states:

Learning to read is not natural or easy for most children. Reading is an acquired skill.

This implies that classroom instruction is very important for the development of teaching reading skills. Teachers should help and encourage the students to read effectively in the class. To perform the job, teachers have to design effective activities for teaching reading in the class, because, a successful teaching of reading in the class depends largely on the proper planning of reading lessons. Teaching techniques should be designed according to the level of the perception of the students. An experienced and efficient teacher knows well when a particular technique should be followed and in what manner.

According to Moats (1999: 16),

Learning to read is not natural or easy for most children. Reading is an acquired skill, unlike, unlike spoken language, which is learned with almost any kind of contextual exposure. If learning to read were as natural as acquiring spoken language, many more societies would have written languages; human beings would have invented writing systems many thousands of years before we did; and everyone would learn reading as easily as ducks learn to swim.....thus teachers must be reflective and knowledgeable about the content they are teaching, that is, symbol system itself and its relationship to meaning.

Shared Reading

In a shared reading session, the teacher reads with the class or group using a large storybook that has big, bold print (DoE 2008). Learners share the reading task with the teacher and gradually learners take over the task of reading (DoE 2008).

Shared reading involves a child and teacher or other adult reading together, in one-to-one interaction, from a book. It is a practice frequently used in early year's classrooms and it is a practice commonly used by many parents at home.

In Shared Reading the teacher works with the whole class. Shared Reading generally occurs two to four days a week using a single, enlarged text for the whole class such as Big Books, posters and pictures or a text on an over-

head transparency or individual fiction and non-fiction texts for each child. Although there will normally be only one text used per week, the texts selected for each grade should be increased in length and complexity across the year and across the grades.

Children should be introduced to a range of stories, poems, rhymes and plays as well as information and graphical texts.

Department of Basic Education (DBE CAPS 2011: 11-12) states: Each Shared Reading session will have a learning focus from the following: concepts of print, text features, phonics, language patterns, word identification strategies and comprehension at a range of levels (for example, literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluation and appreciation questions). The first session focuses on the enjoyment and first 'look' at the text, with the children giving a personal response to the text. In the next session the same text is used and the focus shifts to more involvement in the reading with the teacher using the discussions that take place to develop vocabulary, comprehension, decoding skills and text structures (grammar, punctuation). On the third, and possibly the fourth day, children read the text themselves and engage in oral, practical and written activities based on the text. Some texts might only be used over a day or two, especially in Grade 2 and Grade 3.

The purpose of shared reading is explained as follows: 'Shared Reading' has become a recognised strategy for teaching reading in which pupils and teacher read a text together with a focus on a specific aspect. Through experiencing a variety of texts, fiction and non-fiction, children will become aware of the range of strategies required when reading for different purposes (Dole 2000).

In shared reading, the teacher models reading strategies to learners using Big Books and addressing specific skills in reading. During the lesson, the teacher leads a discussion about the cover and some of the illustrations in the book. This places the text within the context of learners' prior knowledge, and encourages learners to predict what will happen in the story. The teacher reads using a pointer to point at the words as she/he reads. After reading, the teacher checks the learners' understanding of the text through discussion or questions. The benefits of shared reading are that the teacher models different reading comprehension strategies for

the learners. The planned activities should cater for different learners' abilities by allowing them to join in wherever they can. The environment must be non-threatening for learners to experience success.

During shared reading the teacher is expected to teach learners while they read certain kinds of texts. The teacher models how they read the text, the expression and intonation (tone of voice) suited to the text. The teacher is expected to teach a variety of reading strategies and promote comprehension through differentiated questioning and discussion (DoE 2008).

N'Namdi (2005: 48) states:

Shared reading follows the same format as reading aloud, only the teacher reads the text with the pupils. The reading includes pupils identifying key words, either by circling or underlining the words and phrases that they know. This practice is continued on numerous occasions, until the learner can read more and more of the text independently. This may be done individually, with the pupil using a tape recorder with the story being read by the teacher on the cassette. This can also be classified as an independent reading activity.

Group Guided Reading

Group guided reading is regarded as one of the key components of a balanced language programme (Hornsby 2000; Cunningham and Allington 1999; Pressley 2002) and is a teacher-directed activity (DoE 2008). It involves using carefully selected books at the learners' instructional level.

Department of Basic Education (DBE CAPS 2011: 11) states:

This is an ability-group reading teaching strategy where all the members in the group read the same text under the direction of the teacher and should take place every day. Guided reading involves the teacher in a session with a group of between 6 and 10 children. The teacher plans the lessons to include a range of word-attack strategies that children will learn to apply when meeting challenges in texts. The 'text talk' between teacher and children (and children with each other) is central to this approach. During this time the teacher should not be interrupted by other children who are doing independent activities. Each group session should be between 10 and 15 minutes long

with two groups reading with the teacher every day (approximately half an hour per day in total).

In group guided sessions, the learners can be grouped according to their reading abilities. The benefits are that it gives the teacher the opportunity to observe reading behaviours, identify areas of need and allow learners to develop more independence and confidence as they practice and consolidate reading behaviours and skills. During the process, the role of the teacher is to bring learners to a higher level by demonstrating, modelling, explaining and encouraging learners during reading (Opitz and Ford 2001).

The steps of the guided reading can be linked to the theory of Bruner's scaffolding process leading to independence. Teachers prepare ahead of time. Before reading starts, the teacher has to spend some time talking about comprehension strategies, introducing difficult words that are contained in the text and assisting individual learners to practice strategies for comprehending the text (Fountas and Pinnel 2001). It provides opportunities for the teacher to integrate learners' growing knowledge of the conventions of print, letter-sound relationships and other foundational skills in context.

During guided reading learners are exposed to reading aloud and shared reading. Simultaneously, the teacher is able to teach learners how to construct meaning from the text by using strategies to self-pace, self-direct and self-monitor under the teacher's guidance. This kind of support is linked to Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) view that learners learn more as they get support from knowledgeable others. The South African government regards it as the solution to the low level of literacy. However, a study on an evaluation of guided reading in three primary schools in the Western Cape, Kruizinga (2010) found that teachers had a superficial understanding of guided reading and that it was difficult for teachers to implement the steps for guided reading in their classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of guided reading is to assist learners to become independent readers who can read the text for enjoyment and be able to get the meaning from the text.

Paired Reading

The Department of Basic Education (CAPS 2011: 14) states:

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

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

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

N'Namdi (2005: 48) states:

Children work in pairs and assist each other in reading and comprehending the text. This activity must be guided by the teacher by giving the pair questions to answer based on the text information. It may be beneficial to have older (but still close in age) learners work with the younger ones. This opportunity is provided in multi-grade classes.

Independent Reading

Independent reading is important in reading comprehension. During this activity, learners learn to apply the comprehension strategies independently that they were taught during guided reading (Biddulph 2000).

According to DoE (2008), independent reading is a purposeful planned activity. The teacher has a structured daily time during which learners associate themselves with books. Learners choose their own books according to their own interest and ability. However, learners should be guided to choose the texts that they can read with a high degree of success. During this session, the teacher should listen, observe and gather information about learners' reading behaviour. Learners are able to listen to themselves as

they read and cross-check while they practice the strategies (Fountas and Pinnell 1999). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and Zimmerman (1998) support the view that learners learn best when they are responsible for their own learning. The goal of teaching reading comprehension strategies is for the learners to become self-managed readers who can take over the process themselves. However, Taberski (2000) argued that during independent reading, frustrated learners do not sustain their reading long enough to practice the skill. This is because they are unable to decode the words and do not understand the text. However, independent reading could prove to be a meaningless exercise.

N'Namdi (2005: 48) states:

Independent reading is a good opportunity for pupils to utilize a learning centre.

If there is a learning centre in the classroom, the students may go to that area and select a reading activity of their choice, and begin reading and working on comprehension exercises. If it is time for leisurely reading, then the pupils may want to bring in an appropriate book from home once a week or once a month to read during independent reading (otherwise, the books can come from the school library).

Learners can also make and exchange reading materials. This builds their home libraries and thereby encourages reading at home. It also provides an opportunity for pupils to share what is learned.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is another approach that can have a positive effect on the development of reading comprehension (Lane and Wright 2007). Read-aloud times should be a well-planned activity and not impromptu (Sipe 2008). The teacher should be well prepared, read to the whole class or to a small group, using material that is at the listening comprehension level of the learners (Teale 2003). Reading aloud is regarded as the best motivator for instilling the desire to read in learners. In read-aloud sessions, the teacher reads to the whole class or to small group using material that is at listening comprehension level of the learners. The benefit of this approach to the learners is that it helps them to develop a love of literature, motivates them to read various kinds of texts on their own and increases their vocabulary (Lane and Wright 2007). The

speaking skills of the learners are enhanced by hearing good pronunciation and language use, as well as their thinking skills through their comprehension of the text and experience with cause and effect including logical sequencing.

According to the DoE (2008), reading aloud should occur every day to stimulate learners' interest in the written text. Several key activities take place before, during and after reading. With regard to the teaching of reading comprehension, the DoE (2008) emphasises that teachers should keep a close check on learners to ensure that they are not barking at print, but reading with understanding. They must also be able to and interpret what they read in various situations. Involving learners interactively while reading aloud help to improve comprehension whereas after-reading discussions encourage learners to link the story events to their personal experiences (Sipe 2008).

CONCLUSION

All learning theories are rooted in the philosophical, social and political context of time and influence the way we teach contemporary children. The theories may assist teachers to consciously plan and teach learners how to use strategies independently and to understand that learners at this level touch a new level of self-development that allows them to understand multiple ways in which they are related to people. The aim of reading strategies at foundation phase is that learners should be able to master their own learning. This paper suggests that, as a cardinal requirement, teachers should have in depth theoretical information in teaching and training the reading skills.

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