

# Learners and Learning

## Section Four: Text as a context for Learning

**Writers** | Ian Moll, Jill Bradbury, Gisela Winkler,  
Maggie Tshule, Merlyn van Voore, Lynne Slonimsky

○ **Editor** | John Gultig

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**Learners and Learning**

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1ST EDITION SERIES EDITOR: John Gultig

1ST EDITION AUDIOTAPE: George Lekorotsoana (producer) and John Gultig (concept and script)

DESIGN FOR DIGITAL VERSION: Michelle Randell

ILLUSTRATIONS: Andre Plant

SAIDE

PO Box 31822

Braamfontein 2017

T: (011) 403 2813

F: (011) 403 2814

[www.saide.org.za](http://www.saide.org.za); [www.oerafrica.org](http://www.oerafrica.org)

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## SECTION FOUR

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# Text as a context for learning

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# Introduction

# 4.1

## What will you learn in this section?

As you have discovered, everyday learning is very different from schooling. One of the features that distinguishes the two is the centrality of language as an instrument for school learning. Language allows learners to develop a more generalized and systematic understanding of the world.

We have discussed how teachers make deliberate and powerful interventions in learning and how these interventions assist learners to bridge the gap between what they know and what they still need to learn.

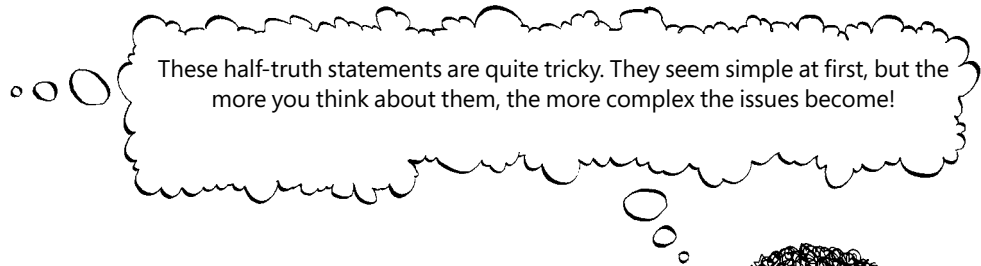
Texts are often used by teachers to evoke and scaffold learning. Texts organize and systematize knowledge and so play an important role in teaching learners to think in school-like ways. Because of this, reading is one of the most important language acts in school learning. We will see that at school a text is often the **context** for learning, and the use of school textbooks requires learners to be active and independent readers.

This section will explore the relationship between learners, text, and the world. We will find out how textbooks are written, how learners read, and how teachers can assist learners to read critically.



## More half-truths to think through

Read through the following assumptions about reading and learning. As before, make notes about your agreements and disagreements with these half-truths.



These half-truth statements are quite tricky. They seem simple at first, but the more you think about them, the more complex the issues become!



Statement about learning	What is true about the statement?	What is inaccurate or false about the statement?
Reading is difficult and boring.		
All readers will understand the meaning of a text in exactly the same way.		
There is only one way to read.		
Textbooks should be read differently to storybooks.		
Children learn to love or hate reading because of their parents' attitudes to books.		
Reading is only useful for school learning.		
Learning through reading is just the same as learning through talking and listening.		

# 4.2

## How do we enter the world of reading?

Have you ever noticed that many languages use similar words for 'reading', 'studying', or 'learning'? In Zulu, for example, the word '-funda' can mean all three:

- **reading** a book;
- **studying** at school;
- **learning** how to ride a bicycle.

Even in English, where separate words exist, our mental links between reading and school learning (studying) are so close that the words can be exchanged. Students are often described as '**reading** History' when they study at a university, or as '**studying** a book' when they read through a book.

Reading seems such an obvious and integrated part of school learning that we often forget to mention it. For example, in the previous section on school learning, only a very brief comment is made about the fact that school learning usually requires us to be literate. Yet there is no subject at school that does not involve reading, and there isn't a child who can succeed at school without learning to read.

So all teachers need to understand how the reading process works in order to make it a meaningful and rewarding activity for their learners. The purpose of this section is to help you to do that. We will:

- explore how learners can successfully enter the world of reading;
- look at the power of the written word in influencing the way we think.

### Differences between the written and spoken word

#### ACTIVITY 31

- 1 Here are a few open-ended sentences about the spoken and the written word. Complete each sentence in any way you like.
  - a The written word mostly ...
  - b The spoken word only ...
  - c Without spoken words ...
  - d The written word can ...
  - e The biggest difference between spoken and written words is ...
- 2 Now read what Margaret Donaldson says about the differences between written and spoken language:

*'As literate adults, we have become so accustomed to the written word that we seldom stop to think how dramatically it differs from the spoken one. The spoken word (unless it is recorded) exists for a brief moment as one element in a tangle of shifting events, [...] and then it fades. The written word endures. It is there on the page, distinct, lasting. We may return to it tomorrow. [...] We can pick it up and slip it into a pocket or briefcase. Once a child has begun to learn to read, he can bring his book home from school and read to his mother the same words which he read to his teacher in the classroom earlier in the day.*

*So a child's first encounter with books provides him with much more favourable opportunities for becoming aware of language in its own right than his earlier encounters with the spoken word are likely to have done. Of course in some homes awareness of the spoken word is greatly encouraged. Some parents talk about words*



Spend about 30 minutes on this activity. The extract comes from M. Donaldson, *Children's Minds* (London, Fontana, 1978), pp. 86–95.

*to their children, play word games with them and so on. But most talk only with words. [...]*

*For many children the earliest encounter with the written word is indirect, arising in the situation where a story is read aloud by an adult. This is already in a sense language freed from context; but the experience of hearing a story is not so likely to enhance awareness [of language] as the direct grappling with words on a page is. [...]*

*It turns out that those very features of the written word which encourage awareness of language may also encourage awareness of one's own thinking and thus be relevant to the development of intellectual self-control. This has important consequences for the development of the kinds of thinking which are characteristic of logic, mathematics, and the sciences.'*

**3** Answer the following questions:

- a** What, according to Donaldson, is the most important difference between spoken and written language?
- b** What do you think it means to become 'aware of language in its own right'?
- c** What is the significance of the distinction between spoken and written language for learning? (In addition to the last paragraph of Donaldson's extract, it may also help you to look again at the discussion of discourse in Section Three on pages 83–91.)
- d** Donaldson makes the strong claim that reading has 'important consequences for the development of kinds of thinking'. What do you think the relationship between reading and thinking is? Make some notes in your workbook. We will return to this question again at the end of the section.

“  
Reading, like  
learning, begins with  
the mystery of the  
unknown.  
”

**What did we think?**

Donaldson draws our attention to the fact that written words (as opposed to spoken ones) are made *permanent* on paper or in books. As a result, books take on a life of their own where experiences exist in and through language *alone*. Only by paying attention to the language can we begin to unravel the meaning of the written words.

Think, for instance, of those who can't read. For them the words on a page are simply dead little black marks. As a literate person you might have experienced similar feelings when looking at a sheet of music, or some scientific formula. Musicians hear music when they read the notes on a music sheet. A formula creates a whole world, a whole new concept, for the mathematician. But for us? These notations are just dead little black marks!

However, for those who can 'crack the code', each little mark will help to reveal the world within the book. In this sense, reading is a more active process than listening, and it relies on an understanding of an abstract code. Readers must be able to interpret letters and understand how these are formed into words and sentences.

Reading, like learning, begins with the mystery of the unknown. At first there is a huge gap between the world of the reader and the world of the book. At school these two worlds exist together in the same place, but they do not necessarily meet. Since written words are completely separated from our lives, we can look at them and not be part of the experience they present.

So how can we enter the world of reading?

## What happens when we read a book?

### ACTIVITY 32

- 1 Look carefully at this picture of a woman reading a book.



“

*Reading is a complex, abstract process that happens in the mind.*

”

- 2 Now read the statements below and decide for yourself if they are true or false. Mark the statements where you are unsure about what to think. We will return to this activity later and perhaps you will be able to make a decision then.
- a The woman is a good reader only if she carefully reads every word in the book.
  - b She is a good reader if she can predict from her own experience what will happen next in the book.
  - c The woman is not doing much while she is reading.
  - d Once the woman knows the words, she should be able to understand everything in the book without much further effort.
  - e When she reads she also has to think about what she is reading.
  - f When she reads she thinks about other books she has read.

### **What does this woman need to know in order to read?**

Remember that reading happens *in the mind*; it is an abstract process. When we read, we link the information on the page (written letters and words) with information 'in our heads' to make meaning of the potentially meaningless squiggles on the page.

This is a complex process. We need to activate and link a lot of different kinds of information before we can begin to make sense of the little black marks our eyes see on the page. What kinds of knowledge or information do we draw on when we read?

#### **Knowledge of the written code**

First, we need *knowledge about the written code*. We need to know how the letters on the page *represent particular sounds* and *how they combine* to communicate meaning in the form of words.



For example, we need to recognize that 'd' sounds like 'duh', and that if it is combined with 'o' and 'g' we have a word 'dog' that describes an animal many of us keep at home. (We should also know that if we reverse these letters – 'g' + 'o' + 'd' – we have a word that means something very different!)

### Knowledge of the language

Second, we need *knowledge of the language* in which we read. Even if we can sound out words correctly, they will remain meaningless if we do not know the language of which they are a part.

So, for instance, our example of 'dog' is only meaningful for those who can speak English. Likewise, an isiZulu word like 'funda' is easy enough to **sound out** (although we would probably pronounce it with an English accent), but if we don't know isiZulu, we won't know what the word **means** even though we recognize all the letters.

In South Africa many students do a lot of their reading in English, which is their **second language**. This obviously creates additional barriers and difficulties in the reading process.

Becoming familiar with the language in **spoken** form is also important for the reading process as it enables us to develop an 'ear' for the language. This gives us a basis from which to guess the sounds and meanings of new, unfamiliar words encountered in text.

However, knowing the language in which we read doesn't only entail knowing English or Zulu or Spanish. It also involves becoming familiar with the terms and special discourse of the **learning area** in which we are reading. Many of us might be very fluent in English but unable to understand a scientific text because it uses specialist terminology and often uses common words differently from the way in which they are used in everyday language. You are **now** in the process of learning the language of **learning** as you read this module.

### Knowledge of the rules of writing

Third, we need *knowledge about the rules of writing*. Even if we can **sound out** words and **know what they mean**, we must **relate the words to each other** in a meaningful way.

We must be able to link the words we read into a **larger network** or structure. The meaning of a text is not only about the parts but also, importantly, about the whole. The way in which words are combined in sentences, paragraphs, and perhaps sections with headings, develops a particular meaning.

Throughout this text we have emphasized the importance of understanding how different ideas link together to create a network of ideas or a concept. For example, at the simplest level, a sentence like 'The ball is in the net' tells us, firstly, about the relationship between the 'ball' and the 'net' (it is 'in' the net, not 'on' it or 'next to' it). But secondly, if we are soccer fans, then the relationship between the 'ball' and the 'net' takes on new significance. It means that a goal has been scored.

This is a simple way of moving into the next point. We also need to recognize the kind of text (or **genre**) that we are reading – a textbook, a story, a newspaper article etc. – in order to make meaning of a sentence or network of sentences. The sentence 'The ball is in the net' on the news or soccer pages of a newspaper means that a goal has been scored.

Equally though, we would read a textbook on soccer (or anything else) differently from a story or newspaper article on soccer. Different kinds of texts **need to be** read, and **are** read or interpreted, in different ways.

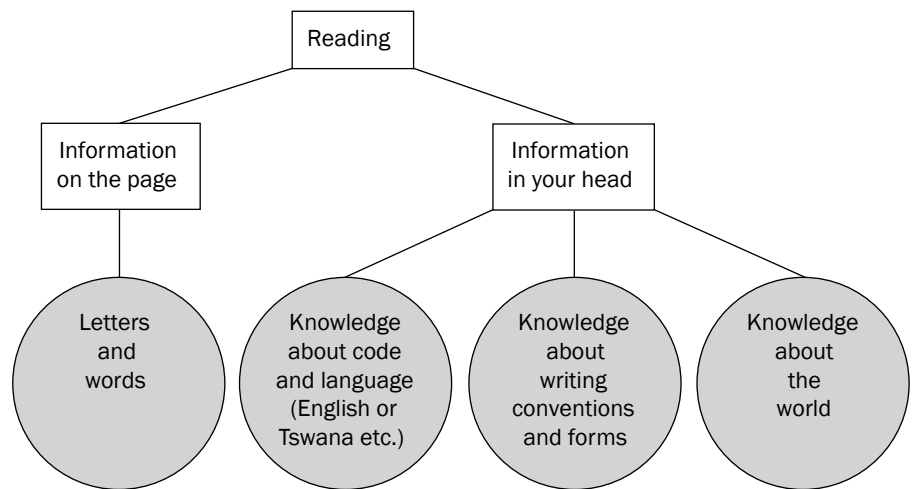
**Knowledge of the world and how it works**

Fourth, we need *knowledge of the world and how it works*. In written text, experiences exist in and through language *alone*, and so we need to make links *actively* between the *language of experience* and what we actually see, hear, and feel in the world.

For example, when we read about children waiting for a bus on a warm day, we will only ‘live’ the experience of that waiting if we can *imagine* the situation by drawing on our own experiences or what we already know. (As South Africans, we will probably imagine a hot, sweaty, possibly dusty wait. Canadians, on the other hand, may imagine a cold, snowy wait!)

**To summarize**

- Becoming a good reader means learning to ‘crack the code’.
- In order to do this, we must know the alphabet and the language in which the text is written and recognize what kind of text it is. We should be able to tell if we are reading a story, a letter, or part of a textbook and what we can expect from each kind of writing. (What can you expect from a story that you cannot expect from a textbook?)
- Finally, we need knowledge of the world so that we can bring our own experiences to the text and make it come alive. The richer our own life experiences are, the more colourful and vibrant the world of books can become.



Towards a definition of reading.



Take some time to reflect on the issue being raised here.

**STOP. THINK.**

Go back to Activity 32. We’d say that statements a), c), and d) in this activity are false or at least not entirely true. Use the above discussion of reading to explain how you think we’d justify why we think this.

**How did we answer this?**

The statement ‘The woman is a good reader only if she carefully reads every word in the book’ is based, we believe, on a half-truth. A good reader will read the individual words, but will also use previous knowledge and reading experiences to predict what will happen next. She will be aware of the network of knowledge that she can draw on to construct meaning from the text. She will make guesses where she meets words she does not know and work out the meaning from the context, rather than from the individual word.

The statement 'The woman is not doing much while she is reading' is false. As we found out earlier, reading is a complex activity of the mind that involves using many different skills all at once. Although the woman is sitting quietly, her mind is very active. She is relating the information on the page to her knowledge of the language, and of the world, and of previous books she might have read in order to make meaning of the text.

Knowing the words is only a small part of reading so a statement like 'Once the woman knows the words, she should be able to understand everything in the book at once' is also false. If the words do not link up with a meaningful experience, the woman can read the words off the page, but she might still not understand what the book is about.

Reading is an active process that can change from one sitting to the next. As the interconnections and links we make between words (and also between the text and our own lives and other texts that we have read) change, our understanding can become more layered and complex each time we reread a book.

### ***What do we do when we read?***

In Section Two we discovered that knowledge is a network of interconnected information and that the relationships between different facts are as important as the facts themselves. We also realized that we can only bridge the gap between the known and the unknown by using what we know to construct links for ourselves. This process enables us to guess, question, and imagine the unknown.

When we compare these insights to the discussion on reading above, we notice many similarities:

- First, reading is also about networking and making links between different kinds of knowledge we already have. The relationships between headings, sentences, or paragraphs are as important as the meaning of individual words.
- Second, when we read we also have to construct the as yet unknown meaning of the text by using what we already know about books and the world. Reading presents us with a particular case of moving from the known to the unknown.

### ***Why is reading so difficult?***

Not all of us who read, however, *enjoy* the experience. Reading is hard work and can be exhausting, especially if our experience of the world is very different to the world of the text we are reading.

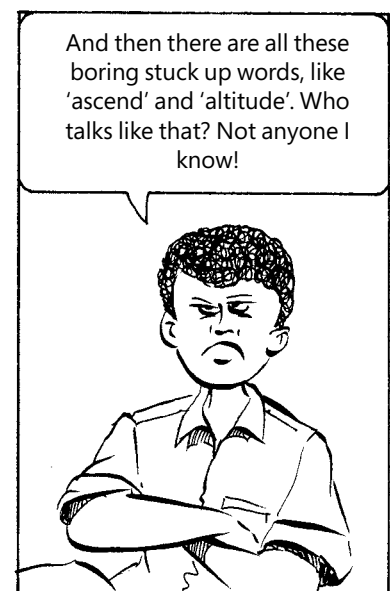
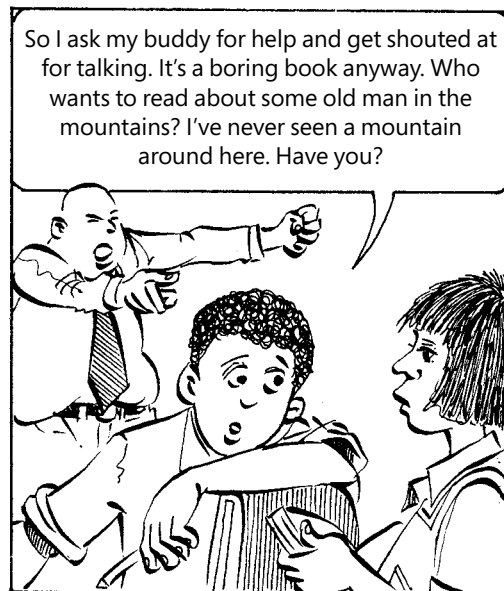
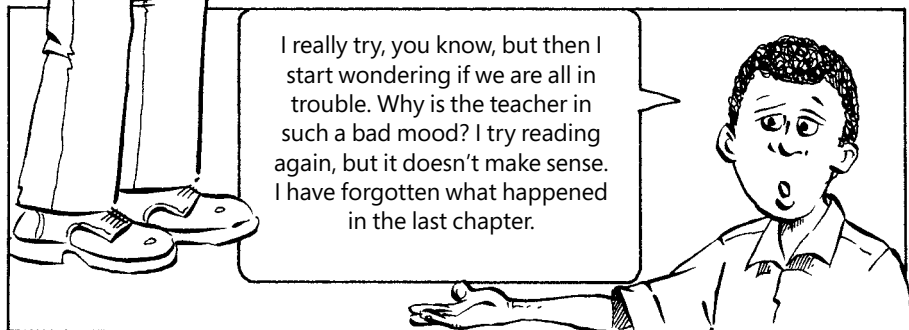
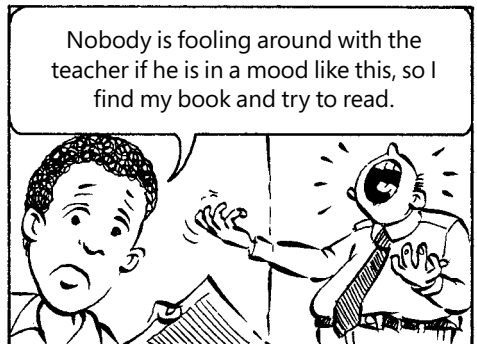
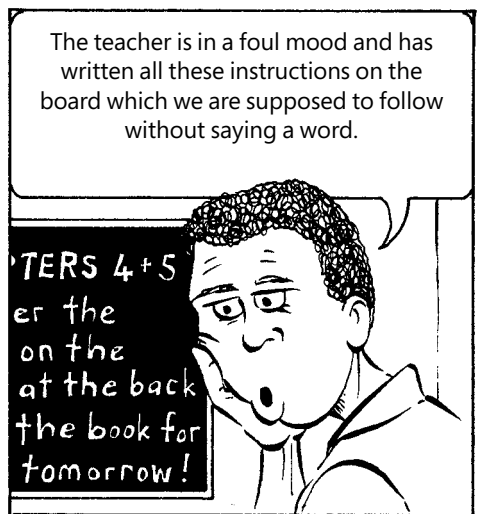
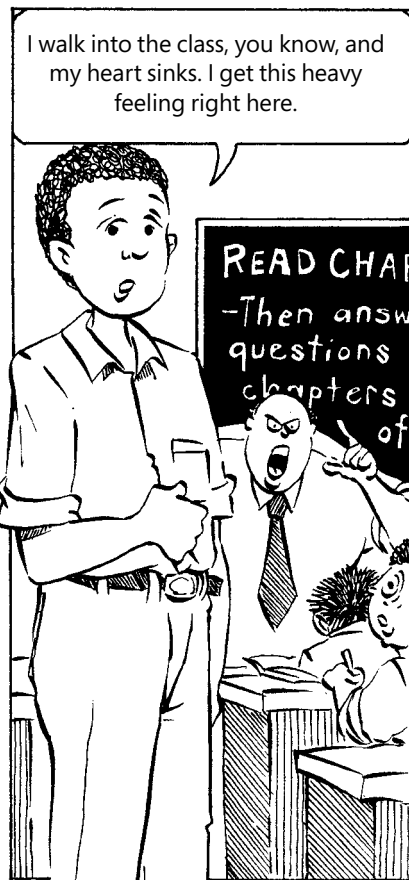
Look at the following comment by a fifteen-year-old learner, Mike. He describes what happened when he was supposed to read a book in class. As you read his story, try to identify at least two reasons why Mike is not interacting with the book he is supposed to be reading.

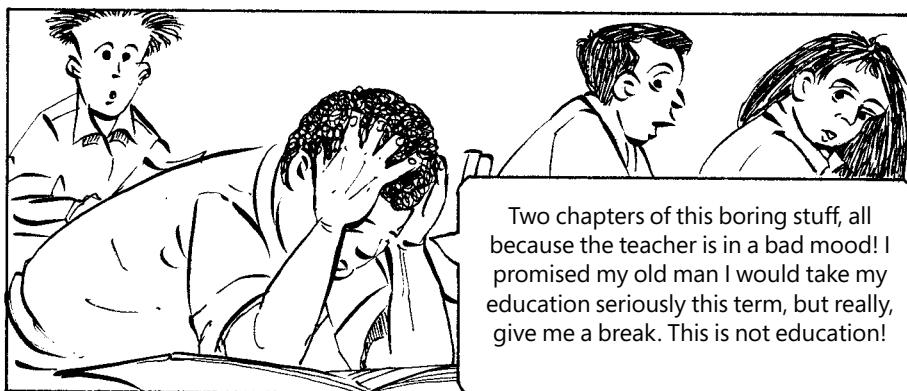
We have represented his thoughts as a cartoon strip on the next two pages.

“

*Reading is hard work and can be exhausting, especially if our experience of the world is very different to the world of the text we are reading about.*

”





For many learners reading is a struggle.

### STOP. THINK.

- Think about your own experience of reading at school. Was it similar to Mike's experience? What was different?
- Did you ever experience reading as difficult, *but worthwhile*? If you answer yes, what made it worthwhile? If no, why do you think reading isn't worthwhile?



Take some time to reflect on the issue being raised here.

### Why is Mike struggling to read?

Mike's difficulty is not that he is unable or unwilling to read, but that he is *not sure how to approach* the reading task:

- He is not ready to read his book because he can see *no real purpose* for the task. He doesn't feel like interacting with the text simply because the teacher is in a bad mood.
- He has *no motivation* for reading the book on his own because he doesn't enjoy it. He finds it irrelevant and difficult to follow.
- He also has *no strategy* for dealing with the difficult sections of the book or for remembering what happens from one chapter to the next.
- The topic *doesn't interest* him. He cannot relate it to his own life and so his attention wanders to the things that really matter to him.

Mike's story illustrates that *our attitude* to reading is very important for the reading process. When a person begins to read, be it for pleasure, for work, or at school, several factors influence how successful the interaction between the reader and the text will be. The quality of the reading experience in turn influences what will be understood and what will be remembered.

### Important factors for a successful reading experience

- If learners find a reading task *purposeful*, they will have high expectations from their interaction with the text. If the main purpose is simply to get through the reading to please the teacher, the task will seem meaningless from the start. One of the problems we face with new readers who have no prior experience (through family, for instance) of how reading can be useful, is to get them to believe that reading can serve a purpose.
- If learners are *interested* in a topic, they will remember what they read about it. This is closely linked to purpose but it is possible to have a purpose that motivates without arousing much interest (for example, having to fix your car despite having no interest in car mechanics).
- The *motivation* for reading will come from the purpose and the interest. But it can also be outside of the task. For example, a learner who wants to do well at school will read with great care, even if the topic is not very interesting.
- *Attention* is another powerful factor that can influence reading. If a learner's mind

“  
Our attitude to reading  
is very important to  
the reading process.

”

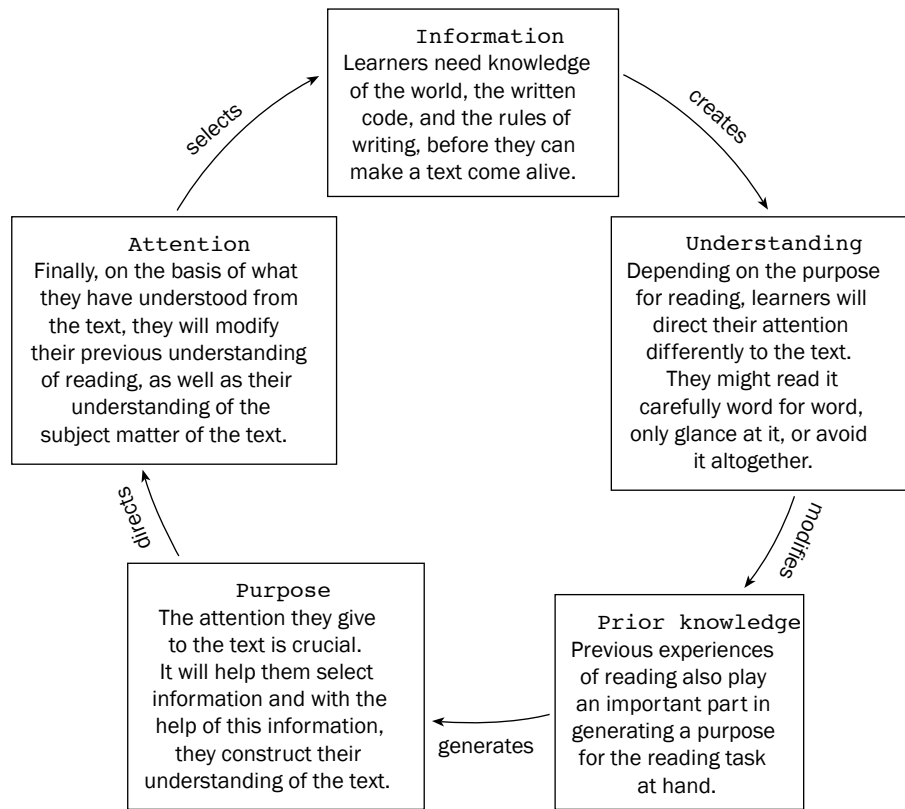
Do you notice how similar the prerequisites for successful reading are to the prerequisites for successful learning? What does this tell you about the relationship between reading and learning?

is on other things, it will be difficult to make sense of the reading even if the topic is interesting and the learner knows why it is important to read it (he or she has a purpose).

- A good reading *strategy* (like asking questions or predicting) can help learners to focus their interest and attention on the reading, even if it is difficult. This is an important way of overcoming distractions.
- Making meaningful *links* between the text and our existing knowledge will influence how successful the reading experience will be. (This is why we have tried to use familiar analogies in this text but, more importantly, why we have asked *you* to constantly relate ideas to your lives and practices as teachers.)

These factors, together with the knowledge we need to ‘crack the code’, determine our capacity for successful reading. They work together and influence how willingly learners, like Mike, will use books to help them learn. The relationship between the different factors is important because they all form part of a reading-learning cycle:

This diagram has been adapted from N. Marshall, ‘The students: who are they and how do I reach them?’ in D. Lapp, J. Flood, and N. Farnan (eds.), *Content area reading and learning*, p. 82.



The reading-learning cycle.



Spend about 30 minutes on this activity. Do it on your own first, then discuss your ideas with other teachers.

### ACTIVITY 33

- 1 In the light of these factors, let us revisit Mike’s reading experience and try to investigate why he found reading such a difficult experience. Copy the learning cycle down. Then go back to Mike’s experience of reading and show at what points in the cycle the breakdown of Mike’s learning occurred.
- 2 If Mike was in your class, how could you prevent this breakdown of learning?

### ***What did we think?***

We discussed earlier that reading is an *activity of the mind*.

By plotting Mike's reading experience on the learning cycle we can see clearly how involved the learner must be. The real breakdown in Mike's learning occurred at the point where he could not be bothered to read and so the gap between him and the text couldn't be bridged. He didn't read, so he didn't understand and didn't learn anything new.

Although, technically speaking, Mike is literate and at school, he isn't reading and he isn't learning. Reading has become a meaningless experience for him (as it is for many other South African learners). As teachers, we need to recognize that reading is inherently difficult (think about your own struggles with various texts – perhaps even this module text).

We can only nurture a positive attitude towards reading if we create a learning environment in which reading connects with our learners' worlds and where the new worlds revealed in text are exciting.



# 4.3

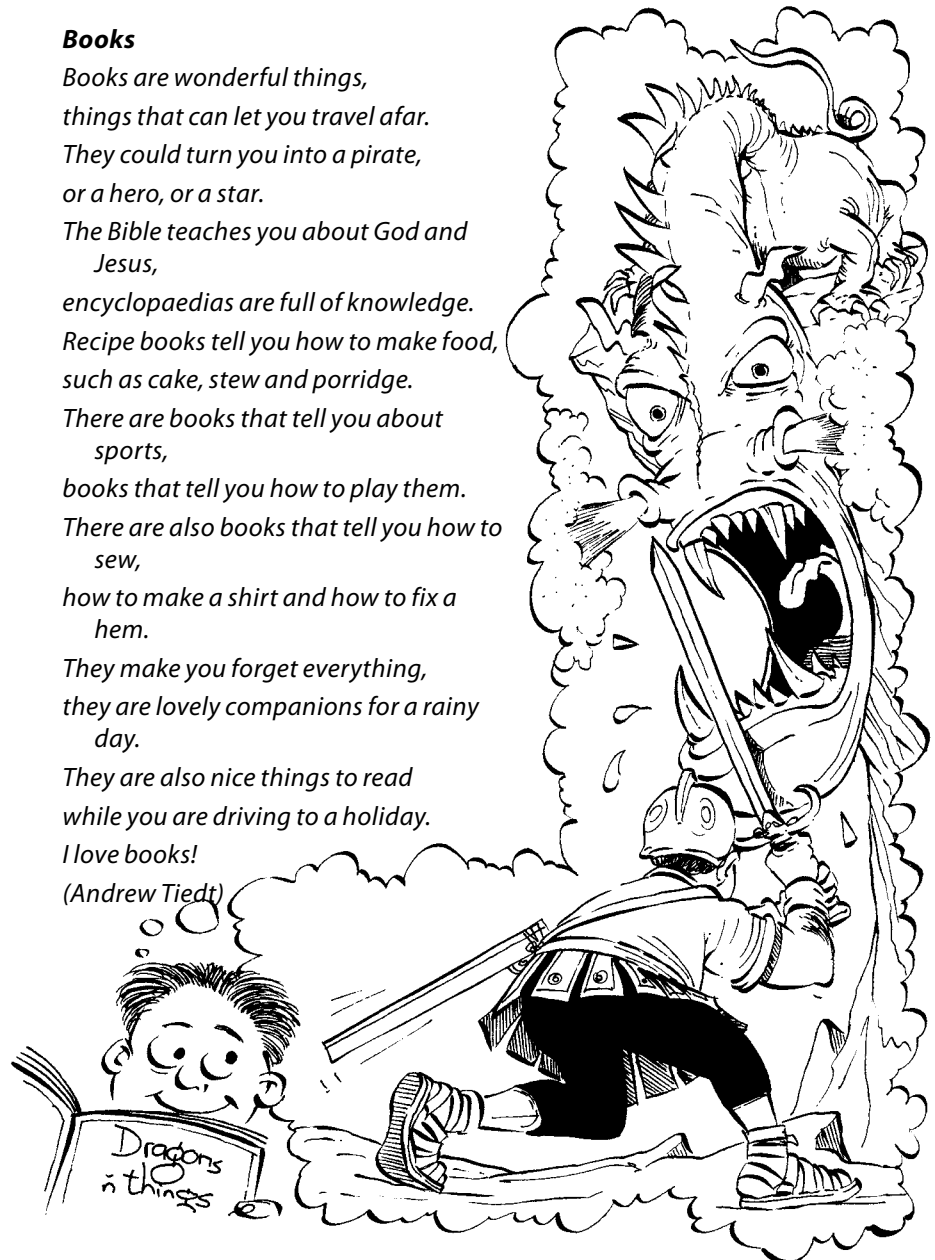
## What makes reading a meaningful experience?

Not all learners approach a reading task with a positive attitude. Their interest, motivation, and skill will vary greatly, depending on their previous reading experiences. One factor, however, stands out as very important: *The attitudes towards reading which learners bring to the classroom will have an important influence on how and what they will read in future.*

With support and guidance, most learners can experience how the books they read at school will open a new and exciting world of ideas and transport them far beyond the limited world of their everyday experience. In Activity 34 you will be working with the following poem that demonstrates this idea. It was written by a ten-year-old school boy in Cape Town.

### **Books**

*Books are wonderful things,  
things that can let you travel afar.  
They could turn you into a pirate,  
or a hero, or a star.  
The Bible teaches you about God and  
Jesus,  
encyclopaedias are full of knowledge.  
Recipe books tell you how to make food,  
such as cake, stew and porridge.  
There are books that tell you about  
sports,  
books that tell you how to play them.  
There are also books that tell you how to  
sew,  
how to make a shirt and how to fix a  
hem.  
They make you forget everything,  
they are lovely companions for a rainy  
day.  
They are also nice things to read  
while you are driving to a holiday.  
I love books!  
(Andrew Tiedt)*





As teachers, we should never take reading for granted:

- When learners come to class with a negative attitude, we have to take their struggle with reading seriously and help them experience reading as a *meaningful* activity.
- When learners have had good reading experiences, it is our responsibility to make sure that the reading experiences we give them in class continue to strengthen their positive attitude towards the written word.

### ACTIVITY 34

- 1 In his poem on page 122, Andrew describes many things that books can do for people who read them. Reread the poem. Pick out examples that will allow you to comment on his attitude to reading.
- 2 Now answer these questions:
  - a How does Andrew's attitude to books compare with Mike's?
  - b How could we go about generating or encouraging this love of books where it doesn't exist?
  - c How can we use this love of reading to teach that which is as yet unknown and beyond the learners' interest?
  - d Are there any differences between the written and spoken forms of this poem?

## The 'magic' of books

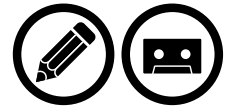
Unlike Mike, Andrew has clearly experienced a supportive learning environment that helped him to enter the world of reading and learn from it. He has experienced books as useful and exciting things. Andrew understands how they can assist him to learn, and how they can simply bring joy.

The poem also illustrates that the 'magic' of books is an important factor that helps children to experience reading as a meaningful activity. For Andrew, books are like friends that can turn him into a pirate, or keep him company on a rainy day or on a long journey. In their book, *On Learning to Read*, Bettelheim and Zelan claim:

*'What is required for a child to be eager to learn to read is not knowledge about reading's usefulness, but a fervent belief that being able to read will open to him a world of wonderful experiences, permit him to shed ignorance, understand the world, and become a master of his fate.'*

### ACTIVITY 35

- 1 Turn to Reading 15 and read the extract by Bettelheim and Zelan called 'The magic of reading'. Before you read the extract, carefully think about your own experience of learning to read.
  - a What motivated you to learn to read?
  - b Did you experience reading as a magical thing?
  - c Who supported you? Where did you struggle?
  - d What was the attitude of your parents to reading?
- 2 Read the extract by Bettelheim and Zelan and make notes about the factors that motivate children to read.
- 3 Now use Bettelheim and Zelan's language or discourse to redescribe your experience in these more formal terms.



Spend about 30 minutes on this activity. First read the poem. Then listen to its spoken form on your audiotape. You will find it at the beginning of Part 4 of your tape. Listen to all of Part 4. In it you will hear Ian Moll explain why reading is important in school learning, and Yvonne Reed give us some ideas about how we can teach people to read. Use these ideas to inform your answers to question 2. The poem is taken from the *Molo Songololo* magazine (Issue 86, July–August, 1994), p.16.



Spend about an hour on this activity. Read the extract on your own first, then meet with fellow learners and discuss Bettelheim and Zelan's ideas.

### **What did we think?**

We have all had unique experiences in learning to read. You may remember a favourite book, or have a fond memory of a special relationship with a parent or teacher that centred on books, or recall a less pleasant experience of anxiety or boredom in your first classroom.

While we have all had *unique* experiences, we have also all had some *common* experiences of reading. As we suggested earlier, we only learn to read if reading seems purposeful and meaningful. Reading must give children the feeling that *new worlds are opening* before them. Only then can it be seen as the key to unlimited knowledge.

Bettelheim and Zelan argue that a positive attitude to reading grows out of a child's experience of *how adults enjoy books*. Children who have never shared the enjoyment of books with anyone will not believe that reading is important. In the end, it is the 'wish to penetrate [...] the important secrets adults possess' that helps children to persist in the struggle of learning to read. Without this desire, as Mike's experience so clearly shows, the act of reading seems meaningless from the start.

This has important implications for teaching reading in South Africa. Many learners come from homes which have no books, and where parents have been denied (by our history) the joy of literacy. So they enter schools with no model of reading as a joyful and meaningful activity. At school, they often encounter teachers who also don't read and don't see any point in reading. Many studies have pointed to the fact that teachers don't read enough and don't encourage reading in schools. So, both at home and at school, reading isn't 'modelled'.



In order to teach reading, teachers need to start by actively extending their own reading activities. They should read more, read different kinds of things, and then communicate this personal world of active reading to learners. This will encourage children to see reading as something that is pleasurable and useful beyond the classroom walls.

Bettelheim and Zelan argue that the kind of encouragement teachers and parents often use with learners, namely that reading will help you get ahead in life, is a very weak persuasive tool. They say that 'usefulness' isn't something that motivates young learners. Instead, they suggest, we read (and children, in particular, read) because we are promised trips to magical lands. It is the fantasy that reading brings – the imaginative stories that books carry – that motivates us to read. This is what teachers need to communicate to learners, both in words and in actions.

Bettelheim has often been criticized for being too 'psychological' and 'magical' in his description of reading. For example, although he talks about the importance of reading parents, he does not elaborate the extent to which reading and writing are social activities beyond the rather private space of the family. The political and economic dynamics of the society we live in can have a powerful influence on our attitude to reading, on our opportunities for reading, and on the uses that we can make of reading in our everyday life.

What do you think?

**ACTIVITY 36**

- 1 Read this newspaper report on the first 'All Africa Conference on Children's Reading'. Do you recognize any of Bettelheim and Zelan's argument in this report?



Spend about 45 minutes on this activity.

**FIRST ALL AFRICA CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN'S READING FINDS TEACHERS LACKING**

# Literacy lovers needed

*Elinor Sisulu*

'Kader Asmal was a Boer. He died in the Anglo-Boer War that took place in Bloemfontein in 1968.' Many teachers would guess that this horrendously inaccurate statement was the response of a primary school child. This level of ignorance would not even surprise some. After all, how many school children know that Kader Asmal is our minister of education, and that the Anglo-Boer War was fought 100 years ago? What should shock teachers is that this response came from a second-year library science student!

The Kader Asmal response was quoted by Dr Lulu Makhubela in her presentation to the All Africa Conference on Children's Reading held in Pretoria on August 6 to 9. At the conference, a leading Ugandan publisher, James Tumusilme, told of a school in Nigeria where a student, when asked who wrote Macbeth, replied 'I do not know, but it was not me!' The teacher and principal also did not know who wrote Macbeth but agreed that it was not their student!

Naturally these anecdotes evoked much laughter among the conference delegates, but there was an underlying grave concern that many teachers and librarians do not read enough to acquire basic general

knowledge. If educators, who are expected to promote reading, do not read themselves, how can they teach children to love reading? This concern was echoed throughout the conference, which brought together teachers, teacher trainers, librarians, researchers, writers, publishers, literacy experts and policy makers from all over Africa and the world.

In his opening address to the conference, the first of its kind, Asmal said that millions of African children have been denied the right to basic education, of which literacy is the core. 'The lack of access to education robs these children of their chance to develop their natural abilities of reasoning, problem solving and creative thinking, and thus lift themselves out of poverty and ensure a better life for their own children.' Teacher-training programmes need to be upgraded so that teachers can take full advantage of the new curriculum and 'transform their classrooms into sites of genuine intellectual exploration and creativity.'

The importance of training teachers to teach children how to read was a key concern. Professor Onukaogu of the University of Ile-Ife in Nigeria bemoaned the fact that far too often teachers in Africa are ill-motivated and ill-equipped to teach reading. He argued that teachers in Africa are underpaid and neglected. 'Adequate facilities for

teaching are not made available to them. They never had any pre-service training in reading and its teaching, and in-service training and workshops are not provided to enhance their competencies and self-esteem.'

Teachers also need to know more about the literature of their countries, and courses in children's literature should be included in the curricula of teacher training colleges. Onukaogu suggested national awards for the best reading teachers: 'If we respect the reading teachers, if we enhance their well-being, so will they respect and enhance the well-being of our children. If we ignore our reading teachers, we do so at our own peril.'

'Every teacher is a storyteller,' declared one of the delegates. The significance of storytelling and oral traditions was a recurring theme of the conference. Mzingizi Manzezulu, a subject adviser in the Western Cape Department of Education, demonstrated ways of using storytelling to teach science. Australian writer Mem Fox argued that when learning to read children need teachers who will tell stories and read aloud often, teachers who are passionate.

The conference showed that there is no shortage of people committed to achieving literacy for all in Africa and turning African children into independent, life-long readers.

- 2 The article asks, 'If educators, who are expected to promote reading, do not read themselves, how can they teach children to love reading?' and claims that '[...] often teachers in Africa are ill-motivated and ill-equipped to teach reading.' Discuss these views in terms of Bettelheim and Zelan's ideas about reading.

# 4.4

## What kinds of reading support school learning?



Week 12 begins.

The All Africa Conference on Children’s Reading (Activity 36 on page 127) suggested that millions of African children have been denied the right to a basic education *of which literacy is the core*.

Literacy, however, is only the beginning of *school* reading. As learners progress through school, the act of reading should become more familiar to them. They should be able to enter the *world of text* with ease by the time they are in Grade 5 in order to use text books, reference books, and other reading material to help them succeed at school.

In South Africa, as in many parts of the world, this isn’t happening. Learners are moving through school without ever becoming comfortable readers. If texts and reading are at the core of school learning, then this fact will impact negatively on all their learning. They will struggle to solve maths problems, they will struggle to read Human and Social Studies textbooks, they will struggle to develop arguments in problem-solving activities, and they will struggle to pass exams.

### Why do teachers use textbooks?

As learners progress through school, learning and teaching become (and *must* become) more and more textbook and reading based. There are four assumptions that can explain why teachers increase the use of textbooks in the later years of school:

- Textbooks help teachers to teach.
- Learners use textbooks to learn course content.
- Textbooks present the content of a course correctly and coherently.
- Textbooks introduce learners to the discourse of academic learning.

You may immediately object to some of these assumptions, thinking, ‘But textbooks are biased, or boring, or not related to life.’ In some senses you will be correct, but this doesn’t mean that we should reject the principle that textbooks are important in learning! Let’s consider the four assumptions in more detail.

### ***Textbooks help teachers to teach but must be used creatively***

We’d agree with the first assumption, namely that textbooks are a very important resource for teachers. However, we’d also agree that textbooks are often used very uncreatively. Sometimes teachers simply use them to keep learners busy.

Textbooks are a very useful resource for teachers. They contain most of the critical content learners need to learn, and they are often well-structured and written accessibly. However, while they are a resource for the teacher, they cannot and should not be regarded as the teacher. Teachers need to use them creatively and soundly in their teaching.

### ***Textbooks carry course content but can be inaccessible***

This brings us to the second assumption. If learners can establish *meaningful* links to the textbook, they can use it to help them learn. Many learners in African and other developing countries have to use textbooks that are written in their second or third language. As a consequence, learners find it difficult to read and understand these books. Identification with textbooks is often made even more difficult by the so-called ‘euro-centrism’ of many textbooks. Instead of teaching the required content by using African examples, textbooks may only use examples that are

“  
*Literacy is only the beginning of school reading.*  
”

appropriate to the United States or Britain.

When learners cannot easily make sense of the language and structure of their textbooks, they rely on what they hear in, and remember from, class. Textbooks then become increasingly irrelevant to the learning process and may even present barriers, rather than bridges, for learning.

### ***Textbooks should present the content of a course correctly and coherently***

The third assumption is particularly problematic. Every textbook presents a ***particular version of the information*** that is available about a subject. In the past, for example, many South African history textbooks only presented a racist version of the development of our country and the rest of Africa. Although textbooks are being revised, the new books will also not be neutral and 'true'. They can't be.

Books are written by people, and all people ***construct their own*** version of the 'truth'; their own understanding of the world. That is perhaps why the new South African curriculum identifies the ability of learners to collect, analyse, organize, and critically evaluate information as a critical learning outcome. In the light of this outcome, textbooks, no matter how biased they are, can be used to introduce learners to the discourse of schooling. In other words, good teachers can still use poor and biased textbooks to develop in learners a critical attitude towards learning and towards texts of all kinds.

### ***Textbooks introduce learners to the discourse of academic learning***

The increased use of textbooks not only means that learners have to read ***more*** texts as they move from one grade to the next, but that they also have to learn to read ***different kinds*** of texts. As we suggested earlier, different text genres require different approaches to reading. (We read fictional stories differently to the way we read non-fiction texts designed for learning.)

Indeed, as learners progress through school, the activities of ***reading and learning*** become increasingly integrated to the point where very little learning occurs without reading. Even activities such as debating, group discussion, or conducting experiments rely on learners' reading abilities because all of these activities should be preceded by preparation through reading and followed up by reading.

Those learners who struggle with reading will increasingly also struggle in all other areas of the curriculum.

## **Different kinds of school reading**

What kinds of reading do learners need to be able to do in order to succeed at school?

### **ACTIVITY 37**

- 1 Look carefully at the diagram of 'the Road to Reading Pleasure' on the next page. Then answer the questions on page 129. The diagram is from G. Winkler, *All children can learn* (Cape Town, Francolin Publishers, 1999), p. 89.



Spend about 30 minutes on this activity.

“

As learners progress through school, reading and learning become increasingly integrated to the point where very little learning occurs without reading.

”



2 Now answer the following questions:

- a Which reading skills (other than basic literacy) are demanded by school learning across the curriculum?
- b According to the diagram, how can teachers help learners to acquire these skills and become confident readers?

### ***Schooling is an activity centred on texts***

At school the 'text' becomes the main context for learning. (Do you remember what the title of this section is?)

In Section Three we examined how schooling takes learning *beyond* the contexts of everyday life. We have also seen that books are important vehicles through which learners are transported beyond the contexts of everyday life. Books open up new *worlds* of knowledge and take people to places they cannot possibly go in reality.

We have also learnt that reading and writing assist in the cognitive development of learners who learn to become more disciplined and systematic in their thinking. At school, children *study written texts* ranging from highly formal discourse (such as a mathematics theorem) to texts that aim primarily to convey and evoke emotional responses (for example, the poem by ten-year-old Andrew on page 122, or the poem by R. D. Laing on page 39). Learners also *talk about texts*, whether these be books, worksheets, learning tasks, or their own writing.

The main point is this: almost all schooling can be characterized as *activity centred on texts*.

### ***School reading is circular and reflexive rather than linear***

The 'Road to Reading Pleasure' (Activity 37 on pages 127–129) shows how reading becomes an increasingly complex activity as learners move through school. As they get older and more experienced, they no longer read books only for the sake of following a story. Learning *through reading* entails an active process of *deconstructing parts of a text* and *reconstructing a new whole* for oneself from the text.

This kind of reading is not a *linear* process: it doesn't simply begin at the beginning and end at the end of the text. Instead, advanced reading is a much more *circular* and *reflexive* process. It involves starting at the beginning of a book (although not always), but instead of simply reading through it, we usually:

- skim the text quickly first, concentrating on the headings, and the beginnings and ends of paragraphs in order to get a general idea of what is in the text;
- use this information to decide whether we want to read the text, and where we will begin.

At times, our reading process may be directed at finding *specific information*. We might then only read a particular chapter, for instance. If we were reading for *deep understanding*, we would read and reread with careful attention to detail to ensure understanding. Sometimes we might also *memorize* the information we have read and understood. At other times we may be reading for *pleasure*, in which case we would begin at the beginning of a novel, for instance, and read quickly and without attention to detail until we get to the exciting conclusion.

School learners tend to spend more and more time reading as they progress, and teachers are thus able to rely more and more on reading to provide the *context* within which learning takes place. For example, we don't have to take learners to a river physically in order for them to understand about river pollution. We could, instead, get learners to read interesting and informative case studies and theoretical explanations of this phenomenon in textbooks in order to create a context for learning. The advantage of this kind of context is that it isn't limited to your local river; we can present learners with examples of a whole variety of different kinds of rivers and of pollution from around the world.

### ***School reading is done actively and independently***

For this to happen, however, learners have to develop into ***active and independent readers*** who can make meaning from what they read.

Active readers use many different strategies to help them make meaning from a text. For example, they ask themselves questions before they read, while they read, and when they have finished reading. Active readers also monitor themselves as they read, taking on the role of being their own internal teachers, asking themselves 'Do I really know what this is all about?' As we said earlier, developing a clear understanding will often involve going back, rereading, and trying to link different parts of the text to each other by using the bit that one has understood to try and understand those bits that just don't make sense.

The structure that the author has imposed on the text will help in this process. It is particularly useful to pay attention to the ways in which the connections between ideas are marked and to note whether an idea follows on from or extends an earlier less complex idea or whether it is a new and perhaps contrasting position.

For instance, words like 'first', 'second' etc. indicate ***a sequence***, while a word like 'however' suggests that the text will either provide an ***alternative explanation*** or a ***qualification*** to what has already been said.

***We*** make sense of text; the meaning of a text doesn't simply reveal itself to us! The world of reading and the meaning of a text do not exist ***unless we make them happen*** ourselves. ***Active engagement*** will enable learners to read independently and with purpose and enjoyment. They won't need a teacher or parent to force them to read.

“

*Active, independent readers aren't born, they are made.*

”

### **Developing active and independent readers**

But active and independent readers aren't born, ***they are made***. And teachers play a very important role in making these readers!

The following exercise will illustrate one way in which Intermediate Phase teachers can develop young, active, and independent readers. The short story is taken from a Grade 6 text that was developed to encourage learners to be active readers. An eleven-year-old boy, Peter Mkhali, originally wrote this story. We have chosen to use it here in order to illustrate how teachers can encourage learners to use their own writing for learning.

Read through the story. Think about the effect the ***questions in the text*** have on your reading.

#### ***The giraffe and the rabbit***

*When Peter Mkhali was in Grade 6, he wrote a story about two friends. His story teaches us that a friend sometimes makes a mistake, but when this friend says he is sorry, it is time to forgive him.*

#### **What do you think will happen in Peter's story?**

*Once upon a time a giraffe was grazing in the veld. Suddenly a rabbit jumped out of the bush and greeted the giraffe. The rabbit and the giraffe became friends and they went to have a drink of water.*

#### **Who will make the mistake? The rabbit or the giraffe?**

*Just as the giraffe was bending over to drink, the rabbit pushed it. The giraffe lost its balance and fell into the water. It went down the river shouting for help. The rabbit was laughing. Then he saw another giraffe and also pushed it into the river. Down the river the two giraffes went.*

*They were heading for a waterfall and the rabbit suddenly realized the danger. He realized his joke had gone wrong and he had to save them.*

#### **How did he try to save them?**

*He got a rope and threw it to the giraffes. They tied it around themselves.*



*The rabbit then called the elephant and together they pulled and pulled until the giraffes were safely on shore.*

*The rabbit said he was sorry. The giraffes forgave him and they were friends again.*

This story comes from G. Winkler, (Cape Town, Shuter & Shooter)

### **What effect did these questions have on our reading?**

The insertion of questions into a text is an example of a teaching method called *Directed Reading and Thinking Activity* (DR-TA). The method consists of four steps.

#### **Step 1: Guess**

Insert questions that encourage the learners to *guess what will happen* in the story ('What do you think will happen?').

This will probably direct readers to actively *notice*, for instance, the *title* of the story because it is often from the title that our initial expectations develop. We learn from the title that this is a story about a relationship between animals. This creates a sense of anticipation and expectation in the reader. A question like this may also work to activate the learner's *network of knowledge about texts and about the world*. In this case, *if* we are familiar with fables (stories which use animals as the main characters but which are really about human personalities and relationships) we would expect the rabbit to play a trick. We would also expect the story to have a moral or a lesson for us.

#### **Step 2: Predict**

Insert questions throughout the text to encourage learners to *predict what will happen in the next section* of the story ('Who will make the mistake?' 'How did he try to save them?').

These questions are like bridges between the known part of the story (what has happened so far) and the unknown (what will happen next). They encourage the readers to use the information they have to imagine and predict what is still unknown. In this sense prediction becomes a core element of the meaning-making process involved in reading. Another effect of the questions is that they create a purpose for reading. We want to read the next part of the story to see if our prediction was correct or not.

#### **Step 3: Read**

Encourage readers to read the text. This procedure is made easier by all the directed thinking we have done about the story so far. The questions function to break up the text into manageable sections, so we only have to read a little bit before we can stop and think about it again. This ensures that ideas are understood and integrated.

#### **Step 4: Revise**

Pose a question at the end of the reading process to help learners confirm, revise, or elaborate their predictions. While learners are doing this they are constructing the meaning of the text. If they 'made a mistake' and predicted something that did not happen, we have created an opportunity for learning. Their mistakes make them revise and elaborate their existing understanding of stories and what they can expect from them.

DR-TA's essential steps – *activating* and *discussing* what learners *already know*, and *predicting*, *reading*, and *discussing what happened* and *what was learnt* – can be approached in many ways. The method can also be used for many different kinds of texts and in different learning areas. It can be used in small groups or with a whole class.

You will already have recognized the use of questions, predictions or guesses, imagination, and interpreting mistakes as the central elements of learning, as discussed in Section Two. The power of the method, no matter how you use it, is that it closely follows the natural process of learning:

The method begins with what learners know (*equilibrium*) and they make predic-

Do you notice any elements of this strategy in the way in which this Learning Guide has been written? Although it is aimed at learners with a better level of literacy, is an academic rather than story text, and the writers didn't deliberately use this method, we do think that some of the assumptions about reading that underlie the DR-TA method are evident. DR-TA was developed by Stauffer in 1969. It has been around for a long time and has survived many changes in the educational world because it is a flexible method.

tions on the basis of that knowledge (*focus on the familiar rather than the unfamiliar – assimilation*). Once learners read the text and find that they ‘*made a mistake*’ in their predictions, they experience a state of *disequilibrium*. They can no longer simply *assimilate* the information into their existing *schemata* and have to focus their attention on the unfamiliar aspects of the text. By doing that they extend their schemata to *accommodate* the unexpected information or turn of events. The process of accommodation means they re-establish a sense of equilibrium and have learnt something new.



The DR-TA method illustrates very clearly how an active reading process can become an experience of learning.

When you worked through Peter’s story about the giraffe and the rabbit, did you notice that ‘understanding’ did not occur as the end result of the ‘mechanics’ of reading? In other words, understanding is not something that happens only after learners have *finished* reading. Rather, reading for meaning or understanding formed part of the reading process itself from the very beginning of the story. This is why the DR-TA questions *in* the text can be such powerful supports for the reading process. By teaching learners to internalize the questioning process and to predict the development of the text *as they read it*, we can help them to learn through reading.



Do you remember the reading by Dillon? You may well have struggled with it. We’d like you to now reread it using the new knowledge you have learnt about reading actively. You will need about an hour for this activity.

### ACTIVITY 38

- 1 You have already studied Reading 12 by Dillon in the context of Section Two. You will notice a section in the Dillon reading titled ‘Reading and studying’. Read this carefully.
- 2 Answer these questions when you have finished reading:
  - a What different kinds of questions does Dillon suggest should be part of reading for learning?
  - b Describe these different kinds of questions as part of the DR-TA method.

### Different levels of reading

Reading, clearly, isn’t a matter of passively receiving ready-made understanding from books. All reading, right from the start, is a highly active process.

The kinds of texts that learners encounter in their later school years require several levels of interpretation or meaning. We have identified four levels, all of which combine to make meaning possible:

- literal comprehension;
- interpretation;
- critical reading;
- creative reading.

We will briefly explain what reading and thinking skills are required for each one.

### **Literal comprehension**

The learner has to be able to *understand the meanings of words*, recognize the main idea, understand the sequence in which things are happening, and be able to recognize the cause-effect relationships in the text.

### **Interpretation**

This involves going beyond the actual information presented in the text. Learners must be able to make *generalizations*, predict outcomes, and construct relationships between different ideas in the text. At the simplest level, the skill of interpretation may lead us to make a statement like this, 'The writer's strong belief in predetermined learning objectives and her faith in standardized tests, like IQ tests, suggest that she would describe herself as a behaviourist'. In other words, we use existing information to predict and generalize.

### **Critical reading**

At this level the reader is expected to *make judgements* about the quality, value, or accuracy of the ideas in the text. This includes looking for bias or exaggeration in the way that the language is used. Critical reading may result in the following kind of statement being made, 'While the writer's description of learning is interesting, her suggestion that teachers are able to determine the outcomes of learning fly in the face of most contemporary research'. In other words, we assess the quality of an argument and come to a judgment about it.

### **Creative reading**

This involves the reader using the text to *generate new ideas* or develop new insights about a topic. At this level of reading we understand the ideas, we are able to use them to predict and generalize, and we have opinions about their validity. In addition, we can also use the ideas as a basis for developing new ones. Creative reading may lead us to make the following kind of argument, 'Both Vygotsky and Piaget are correct, but neither can tell us ... (X). Our research shows that by factoring in the effects of ... (Y), we can ... (Z)'. In other words, we use existing ideas to develop new ideas about learning, or about anything else we are studying.

The full possibilities for meaning in reading can only be realized through working at all of these different levels. We know that books are meaningless unless they are read. The act of reading is the act of creating meaning. So the meaning of a book is not in the book itself. It is the result of an *interaction* between the reader and the text. Since meaning is dependent on the activity of the reader's mind, the nature of the reader's activity will influence the nature of the meaning that is created.

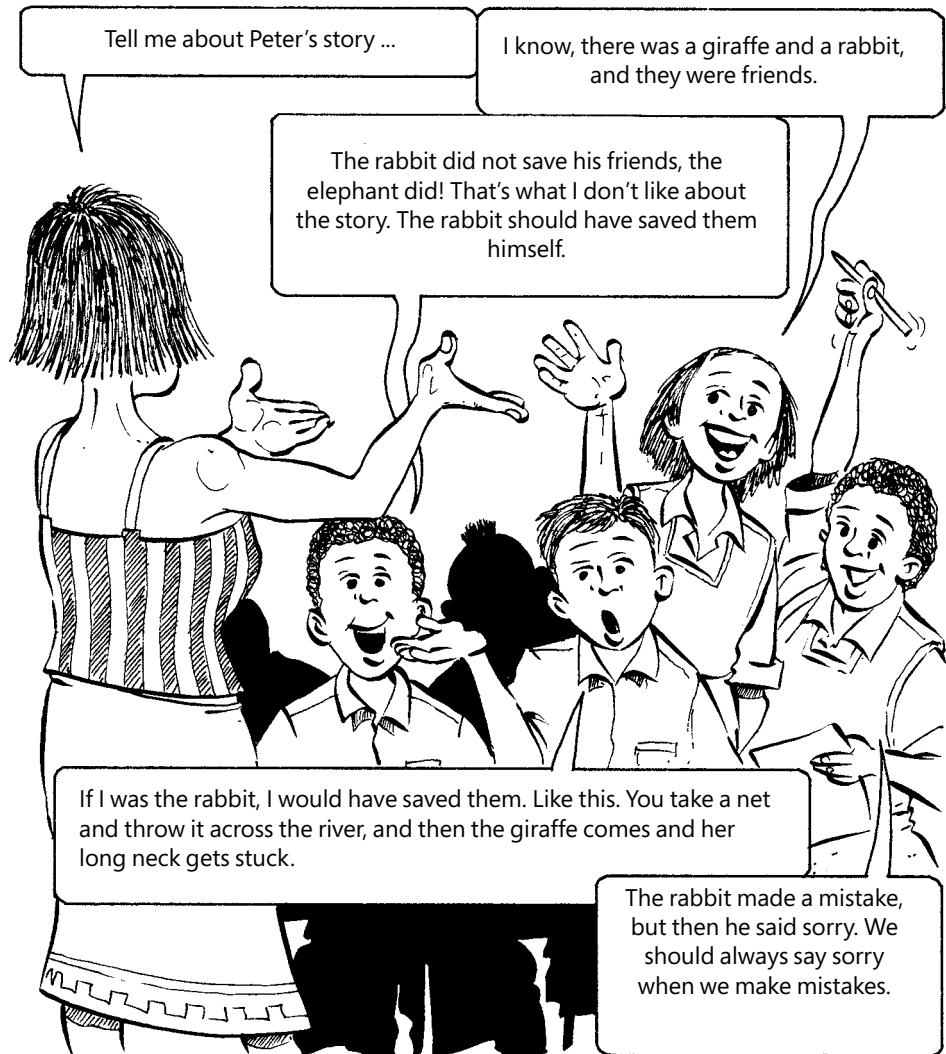
The following activity will allow you to explore this point.



Spend about 30 minutes on this activity.

### ACTIVITY 39

- 1 Look at the following illustration carefully. All four learners are making statements about the story of the giraffe and the rabbit.



- 2 Can you identify the different levels of meaning in the children's responses to the story?
- 3 Which child do you think gives the 'correct' meaning of the story? Explain your answer.
- 4 Why do you think many teachers encourage learners to think that there is only one correct interpretation of a book?
- 5 If there is no meaning in the story as such, why should the children bother to read it?

### What did we think?

The first learner reports on the *literal* content of the story while the second learner takes a more *critical* attitude. He identifies an issue in the story and makes a judgement about it. The third learner has a *creative* response. He thinks up new ways in which the animals could have been saved. The fourth learner *interprets* the story and looks for a moral or a lesson to be learnt from the story.

All four learners understand what is happening in the story, but they engage with the text in different ways and so come up with very different responses. As a group, these children jointly construct the meaning of the story by each engaging at differ-

ent levels. In order for the full meaning of the story to be developed, these levels are all important: without the literal meaning of what happens in the story, the more interpretative and critical responses would not be possible. And whereas a critical response is more important in relation to textbooks than perhaps to a story like this one, learners need to develop a critical approach not only to reading but also to all aspects of life and learning.

The levels of meaning that go beyond literal comprehension challenge many of our preconceived ideas about books:

- They raise doubts about whether it is enough, or even necessary, to teach reading through comprehension exercises.
- Because they show us that so much of a book's meaning lies in a learner's head, they suggest that teachers should not emphasize memorizing what's *in* a book.

The activity of the learner is now recognized as central. The outcomes that guide South Africa's new curriculum emphasize this active role for learners. For example, the specific outcomes for the Languages, Literacy, and Communication learning area encourage learners to:

- make and negotiate meaning and understanding;
- show critical awareness of language usage;
- respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural, and social values in texts;
- access and use information from a variety of sources and situations;
- understand, know, and apply language structures and conventions in context;
- use language for learning;
- use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations.

Even though the National Curriculum Statements developed as part of the Curriculum 2005 Review process describe the LLC outcomes in a slightly different form and language, you will notice that they remain very similar to those above.

These outcomes promote a critical approach to text and assert that reading is an interaction between reader and text.



# 4.5

## Learning to read better

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Earlier we looked at how textbooks are used for learning. We agreed that they are important sources of information and that learners need them to succeed at school.

However, we also know that many teachers either don't use textbooks in their teaching or they use them ineffectively, and many learners simply learn them off by heart. As the content and the demands of their courses become more complex, many learners feel stressed and anxious about reading books or using libraries to help them study. Even though learners may *want* to learn, the difficulty of textbook language makes reading tiring and, sometimes, almost impossible.

We know that successful reading is about 'cracking the code'. Let's take a closer look at this code and find out how textbooks are written.

### **How textbooks are structured**

In order to do this we will 'study' this Learning Guide and use examples from it to develop your understanding of the textbook code and the structure of text.

The information in textbooks is usually organized and presented in carefully-designed patterns. Alvermann has identified five kinds of text structures or organizing patterns found in most textbooks, no matter what the subject content of the book might be. They are:

- simple listings;
- sequences;
- comparisons;
- cause-effect patterns;
- problem solving.

We will briefly explain each pattern before we work with them in greater depth.

#### ***Simple listing***

This involves the presentation of information as a simple list of facts, often in order of importance. Sometimes lists are numbered or marked with bullet points. For example, what you are reading now is a simple listing. The purpose of a simple listing is to provide the reader with a short and clear overview of important information.

#### ***Sequence***

A sequence describes events that happened in a particular order. The sequence can be presented as a story line, a time line, or a 'before and after' situation. The teaching purpose of a sequence is to draw the attention of the reader to the process or change involved in an event. For example, Mike's description of his reading lesson on pages 118–119 is a sequence with a story line.

#### ***Compare and contrast***

This kind of text concentrates on differences and similarities between two or more things. Look at, for example, Donaldson's discussion of the spoken and the written word on page 112. The purpose of writing and organizing a text in this way is to sharpen the reader's understanding and definition of ideas.

#### ***Cause and effect***

Cause-effect patterns look at events and their causes or consequences. The infor-

mation can be organized in two ways. One way is to describe an event and then identify the factors that caused it. Another possibility is to describe an event and then trace the effect it had. The discussion of the learning potential of the DR-TA method on pages 131–133, for example, uses this pattern. The teaching purpose behind this kind of text is to help the reader see links between different events and to find reasons for the way in which the links occur.

### **Problem-solution**

This kind of text is similar to a cause-effect text, but concentrates specifically on problem-solution relationships between different ideas. Such a text should always clearly identify a problem that has to be solved. For example, our commentary after Activity 32 (pages 114–116) is structured like this and sets out to solve the problem ‘Why are the above statements not true?’ This kind of text is often used to encourage the reader to become a creative participant in finding a solution to a problem. Exercises and activities in textbooks are commonly written as problem-solution text.

You can see from the above examples that this Learning Guide uses more than one text structure. This is true of most textbooks in which you will find a combination of patterns, depending on the content or purpose of the different chapters or sections in the book.

We now want you to work with these text structures in some detail. By paying attention to the structure of a text, we can find clues to help us read and use textbooks meaningfully.

Work through the following activity on text patterns. Although it requires you to repeat a similar process each time, we encourage you to not skip any of the pattern exercises as each one establishes a *different kind of relationship* between ideas in the text. Once you have worked through the whole activity you will have deepened your understanding about the way textbooks work. You will also have *practised* a critical approach to reading text.

## **ACTIVITY 40**

### **Sequence**

- 1** Read our description of the DR-TA method again on pages 131–133 and then do the following:
  - a** Underline words in the text that signal that this passage is using a sequence structure.
  - b** As the text is sequencing events, you should be able to pick out the following information:
    - What is the first or initiating event?
    - What are the stages or steps?
    - How do they lead to one another?
    - What is the final outcome?
  - c** Draw a diagram of the sequence.

### **Compare and contrast**

- 2** Read the discussion by Taylor and Vinjevold in Section Three (page 82) and then do the following:
  - a** Underline words in the text that signal that this passage is using a compare-and-contrast structure.
  - b** If the text is comparing things, you should be able to pick out the following information:
    - What things are being compared?
    - How are they similar?
    - How are they different?
  - c** Summarize the information of this section in a table like the one below.

These ideas are from D. E. Alvermann, *Content Reading and Literacy: Succeeding in Today's Diverse Classrooms* (Boston, Allyn & Bacon, 1998), p. 208.



This is a long activity. It will take you at least 90 minutes to complete. Take a break after the first two exercises if you are feeling tired.

Here are words that signal a sequence or time order. Use them to guide you:

- first, second, third;
- next;
- initially;
- finally;
- before, after;
- when;
- now.

Here are words that signal a comparison or contrast. Use them to guide you:

- on the other hand;
- like, unlike;
- however;
- less than, least;
- more than, most;
- other;
- differently, difference.

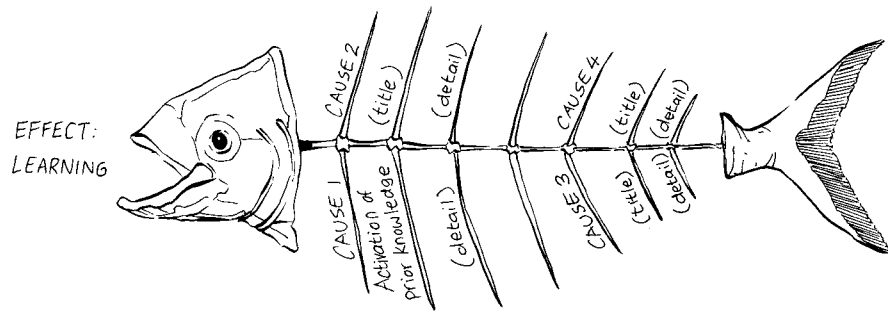
reading readiness	active reading
<b>motivation</b>	
.....	
<b>purpose</b>	
.....	
<b>questions</b>	
.....	
<b>attitude</b>	
.....	
<b>interest</b>	
.....	
<b>attention</b>	
.....	

**Cause and effect**

- 3 Read our commentary on Activity 9 on pages 44–45.
  - a Underline words in the text that signal its cause and effect structure.
  - b What are the causes of mistakes?
  - c What are the effects?
  - d Summarize the information from the passage in the diagram below.

Here are words that signal cause or effect. Use them to guide you:

- because;
- since;
- therefore;
- if ... then;
- as a result;
- consequently;
- nevertheless;
- thus.



**Why text structures are important**

At the beginning of this section we quoted an extract by Donaldson that described the nature of the written word. In the extract, she suggested that the written word requires us to become ‘aware of language in its own right’ because ‘those very features of the written word which encourage awareness of language may also encourage awareness of one’s own thinking and be relevant to the development of intellectual self-control’.

Dillon proposed a similar strategy by suggesting the use of ‘questions about the self’s process’ while engaged in reading and studying.

Activity 40 required you to pay attention to signal words for particular text structures. In other words, following Donaldson’s argument, you had to pay attention to a particular feature of the written word. The signal words, however, don’t **only** point out (or signal) a certain kind of text. They **also** establish a relationship between the ideas in the text. Consequently they affect the way in which we think.

For example, by setting up learning as the **effect** of making a mistake, we are able to think about mistakes as the **cause** rather than the **absence** of learning. The cause-effect structure of the language has determined the structure of our thought.

By understanding text structures we can begin to recognize the relationships between parts of a text and become aware of our own thinking while we read. This awareness is the essence of intellectual self-control and will help us to be active and independent readers, able to use a text effectively in service of learning and teaching.



# Learning to study better

## 4.6

Earlier we observed that many people use the words 'reading', 'studying', and 'learning' as if they all mean the same thing. We found out that although text-related learning happens in both everyday life and at school, school learning in particular requires a lot of reading.

Later we discovered some similarities between reading as a meaning-making process and learning. We also learnt why reading is such a powerful tool for learning. Because it is so important to learning, we investigated different ways of reading and showed how reading-for-learning can only happen when we become aware of the nature of the written language and develop a critical attitude towards the text. As the famous writer and educator, Paulo Freire, explains:

*'Studying is a difficult task that requires a systematic and critical attitude and intellectual discipline acquired only through practice.'*

As teachers it is our responsibility to introduce learners to the practice and discipline of study. In order to do this well, we need to understand what the act of study really is and how it can be encouraged.



Week 13 begins.

This phrase is from Reading 14. Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator who lived from 1921 to 1997. His ideas were very influential in South Africa, first in the radical Christian groups and the black consciousness movement and then in the development of people's education in the late 1980s.

In Activity 16 (Section Two, page 61) we thought about how learning is (and is not) like banking. Paulo Freire used this metaphor to capture the old idea that learners are passive recipients rather than active constructors of knowledge. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he made a distinction between **banking** education on the one hand, and **critical** or **dialogic** education on the other. He urged that educators should stop thinking of teaching and learning as being like depositing money in a bank, or depositing facts in the head of a learner, and rather think of it as an active, critical process which can emancipate learners.

In his article in the Reader, Freire takes this notion further in relation to the acts (one might say **activities** and stress that they are **active**) of reading and studying.

### ACTIVITY 41

- 1 Turn to Reading 14 'The act of study' from Freire's book, *The Politics of Education*.
- 2 Compare 'banking education' to studying with a 'critical vision'. (A hint: use what you learnt about the compare-and-contrast text structure to answer this question.)
- 3 Would the DR-TA method of reading fit in with Freire's ideas about study? If so, explain how. If not, explain why you don't think so.
- 4 What does Freire say about the relationship between the learner and the world? In other words, what is the point of studying?



Spend about 90 minutes on this activity. Read carefully. Use the ideas about reading and text structures you have learnt to inform your reading. See whether any of Freire's ideas are useful to your own 'act' of study.

## Why do we study?

Freire claims that the act of study is founded in a curious attitude towards the world. If learners are curious about the world, they will **want to understand** it and will use all kinds of resources to find out more about it.

Reading and studying books are useful ways of finding out more information, but the information is not important on its own. It only becomes important if it is linked to real questions that emerge from our initial curiosity about the world. This is why he encourages us to take our own questions seriously, so that 'we as good readers [can] concentrate on analysing the text, looking for a connection between the main idea and our own interest'.

By using our own questions to guide us from the known to the unknown, we take on the role of the subject in the act of study. We are not studying in service of 'education' but are rather using education to develop our own thought. Studying is thus a way of making other people's thoughts our own by 're-inventing, re-creating, and rewriting' them in the light of the real questions we ask about our world. Therefore the 'one who studies should never stop being curious about other people and reality'.

In other words, Freire believes that the relationship between the learner and the **world** gives purpose and meaning to the relationship between the learner and the **text**. Freire's words are a great challenge to learners and teachers alike. He poses questions like:

- How do we stay curious about the world when so much of our time as learners is spent feeling bored and frustrated in class?
- How do we stay curious about the world when we spend years at school 'absorbing' other people's ideas about the world rather than actively and creatively interacting with our own?

But Freire doesn't argue that we give up learning about other people's ideas! Instead he says we cannot really study **unless** we actively make links between the texts we read and the context we live in.



The relationship between the learner and the text not only draws life from the relationship of the learner to the world but can also change this relationship in quite radical ways.

One way to keep the curiosity of learners alive is to allow them to spend time at school talking with others about the questions and ideas that truly interest them, and to make these questions the basis of a disciplined study that involves both the spoken and the written word. To study and learn actively, we need to talk about and debate the insights that we gain in reading in relation to our own contexts.

In other words, we need to study the world and other people's words, but we need to do so actively and dialogically. We mustn't simply absorb these ideas uncritically, as a bank 'absorbs' money!

Freire allows us to understand how reading – the act of study – opens up new ways of understanding the world. It introduces the learner to the possibility of critical, and even radical, change.

This is why Freire argued that literacy, critical reading, and critical study are so

important. Sometimes a text that may not initially *appear* to have much relevance or interest for learners' lives can offer significant new ways of describing, understanding, and explaining everyday events once it is understood.

For example, look back at the discussion of 'the University' on Robben Island in Section Three, pages 75–77. By reading books and talking about theoretical ideas written many years ago by people from other countries, the prisoners of Robben Island developed new political understandings and explanations of events within their own experience; understandings which they would not otherwise have gained.

### ACTIVITY 42

- 1 Turn to Reading 17 'Developing communities of reading and learning' by Brown and Campione. Carefully read the section entitled 'Higher-order thinking skills in reading'.
- 2 What, according to the writers, is an 'intelligent novice'? What skills does an intelligent novice need?
- 3 Do you think these authors would agree with Freire's definition of the 'act of study'? Give reasons for your answer.
- 4 Think of your own teaching. What more would you have to do to develop your learners as intelligent novices?



Spend about 50 minutes on this activity.

# 4.7

## Texts, reading, and OBE

These are the seven language outcomes listed in Department of Education, *Report of the Technical Committee to Assist the Department of Education in the Development of Standards* (Pretoria, 1997), pp. 28–41.

As we said earlier, the new South African curriculum suggests that learners should, by the end of their schooling, be able to:

- make and negotiate meaning and understanding;
- show a critical awareness of language usage;
- respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural, and social values in texts;
- access and use information from a variety of sources and situations;
- understand, know, and apply language structures and conventions in context;
- use language for learning;
- use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations.

### The role of reading in the new curriculum

Reading and writing are not explicitly mentioned in these seven outcome statements. This omission has become a hotly-debated issue amongst teachers. Have OBE and Curriculum 2005 somehow forgotten about reading and writing?

In the area of early literacy education, there has certainly been some hint of this. In 1998, the new outcomes-based curriculum was implemented in Grade 1 classrooms. In preparing teachers for the change, many official guideline documents were issued. They fleshed out the specific outcomes – about making and negotiating knowledge, about critical literacy, and about communication – into detailed guidelines for lesson planning.

As a result many teachers moved towards more constructivist and integrated forms of teaching. However, very few of these guideline documents called for the *deliberate* teaching of reading. Reading and writing were relegated to two amongst a myriad of skills learners had to attain rather than as *central processes* in learning. The assumption was that if learners were presented with tasks involving reading and writing, they would construct the skills of reading and writing for themselves. Proponents of this view argued that their reading would be better than before, because they would learn it spontaneously in the course of interesting activities and not be turned off by boring reading instruction.

The result was that some teachers started to believe that reading instruction would no longer be necessary, or even that it was 'banned' by the new curriculum. Here is an extreme example of this kind of thinking:

A delegation of worried principals from a cluster of junior primary schools in western Soweto posed the following to their District Director as an agenda item for a meeting in October 1997: 'the suspension of principals if we do not teach phonics/reading'. In the meeting they told their director that certain teachers, after attending a teachers' union seminar on OBE, had informed them that phonics and reading programmes were part of the legacy of apartheid education, and that the new curriculum would no longer contain them. Obviously disturbed, the principals sought official reassurance on the matter from the department.

Questions and debates about early reading in these terms have continued to trouble many teachers. In fact the confusion became so severe that by early 2000, the Department of Education found it necessary to intervene and assert (some might say reassert) its commitment to the fundamental importance of reading in the learning process.

The new Director-General argued the following:

*'Reading, in its broadest sense, is key to the development and sustainability of our fledgling democracy. The notion that the outcomes ... do*

*not promote, expect, or ensure that learners will be able to read and write is a “myth”. The learning programme statement on literacy refers to a wider concept of literacy, including: language literacy, cultural literacy, visual literacy; media literacy; numerical literacy; and computer literacy.’*

## Why reading should be taught explicitly

Section Four has examined the central role of reading and writing in learning, in schools, and throughout contemporary society. It examined how written texts (books, journals, magazines, web sites etc.) provide the opportunity for learners to develop an awareness of language and a concomitant awareness of their own thinking. We saw the importance of teaching good reading foundations in children’s earliest encounters with the written word, and we examined the ongoing importance of literacy development throughout the educational process. Reading takes us beyond our existing knowledge, and successful learners read more and more texts of ever-increasing complexity as they progress through school.

Our view is that reading and writing are **fundamental** to learning in educational contexts. Not only must the teaching of reading be improved, but the practice of reading and writing must appear **explicitly** as a critical learning outcome at all levels as OBE matures.

We would argue against the idea, found in much South African thinking and writing about OBE, that children will construct the skills of reading and writing spontaneously. Our view is that good, **explicit teaching** of reading is essential to the successful early acquisition of literacy. Here is a particular case of a young learner which illustrates this point well:

*‘In Grade 1, the teacher taught Ashok the alphabet. She made the students learn the sound of each letter for weeks. She made them write each letter.*

*For the first two months, the chalkboard was covered with the alphabet. Children copied each letter several times. Ashok learnt all the letters. Teacher and children paid attention to the textbook which had a letter, word, and picture per page. Ashok learnt immediately the b of bird, the a of apple, and the t of table. He failed to understand when the teacher added “ird” to b for bird. The teacher did not have time to notice or understand Ashok’s point of view.*

*When Ashok went to Grade 2, he was asked to read a book. He said “b of bird”, “a of apple”, “t of table”, reading letters off the page in this way. The teacher got annoyed with him and said, “Listen carefully to other children and read like them.” Ashok listened, but he couldn’t understand where he was making a mistake. He felt the others read just like him. Somehow he got through to Grade 3. Now he read by combining letters and vowel sounds. The teacher rarely asked him to read. Children sitting near him on the mat read the whole chapter. He didn’t feel bad about it. He memorized a whole poem and during a revision of lessons in the last weeks of Grade 3, he read the poem without opening at the right page. He was happy but the teacher was angry. The differences between his and his teacher’s points of view were becoming sharper.*

*Grade 4 started. The first page of his new geography book, a new subject, said, “Our district is uneven and rocky ... its construction is like a plateau.” Many children in the class had learnt to read fluently. They stood up and read, and then copied it into their notebooks. When Ashok tried to read slowly, the teacher would become impatient. The same situation existed during science lessons. In a month the teacher got so fed up with Ashok that she stopped saying anything to him. Ashok felt that the teacher didn’t care any more. After the holidays, he didn’t go back to school.’*

This quotation is from a paper by Thami Mseleku, ‘Reading and Tirisano – Government’s Vision for Reading in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ presented to the ERA Working Conference on Reading (28–29 February 2000).

This is adapted from a paper by M. M. Clay, ‘How children learn to read: an international perspective’ presented to the All Africa Conference on Children’s Reading (Pretoria, August 1999).



Take some time to reflect on the issue being raised here.

### STOP. THINK.

Before you continue, think about this story. How does it illustrate the point that reading must be explicitly taught and isn't spontaneously learnt?

How does the story end? Well, Ashok dropped out of school because he couldn't learn how to read accurately for himself. In fact, as we saw, he constructed a 'reading' practice of his own which remained trapped in his ***misunderstanding*** of what the task entailed. (Do you remember the discussions on misunderstanding and making mistakes in Sections One and Two?) He dropped out because the teacher failed to teach him new ways of reading. She failed to provide him with a pathway from the known to the unknown that would allow him to learn from, and overcome, his mistakes.

Clay (the writer of this story) explains that the lesson to be learnt from Ashok's story is that:

*'if children are confused [about reading], then expert teaching is needed to pull them out of it. ... [the problem] will not sort itself out as the child gets older. On the contrary, the child will, willingly and with effort, build error upon error until there is a huge, seething ant-hill of error.'*

Many teachers, we believe, are wrong when they say that children construct their own knowledge of reading in the course of outcomes-based activity. They underplay the crucial role of reading ***instruction*** and, by doing this, limit the learners' reading abilities for life. Reading is critical to good learning and like all learning requires teaching ***and*** an active learning attitude by learners to be successful. Removing either makes good learning impossible.

# Conclusion and key learning points

# 4.8

## Reassessing the half-truths

### **STOP. LISTEN. THINK.**

Relisten to Part 4 of your audiotape. Then go back to the half-truth statements at the beginning of this section on page 111 and decide if you still agree with your original responses:

- Have any statements changed their meaning for you? In what way?
- Can you now see some truth in statements you initially thought were incorrect?



Use what you have learnt in this section to develop your arguments both for and against these different positions on reading. Use the half-truths as a checklist to confirm what you now understand and what you are not yet certain about.

## Key learning points

This section has investigated the relationship between learners, text, and the world.

We have argued that the links between the reader and the text are critical for the reading process, and that the knowledge the reader brings to the text is as important as the information on the page. We also saw that at school, textbooks are often the context for learning and that the use of school textbooks requires learners to be active and independent readers. We then took a closer look at the way in which textbooks are written, and explored how the structure of a text organizes and directs the way we read it.

We examined Freire's critical view of reading as dependent on our curiosity about the world and as a powerful force in changing our engagement with the world. Building on his ideas, we suggested that schools need to develop 'intelligent novices' who are able to take on the questions of the world.

Finally, we argued that teaching reading is an explicit and deliberate act. We suggested that the dangerous half-truth emerging in South Africa – that reading can be learnt spontaneously and therefore that teaching reading is outdated – could doom millions of learners to be poor readers for life.

### ***Here is our summary of this section's key points:***

- Reading is an activity of the mind requiring learners to 'crack the code' of the written text to generate meaning.
- Reading becomes meaningful when the reader can make links between his or her personal experience and the experience encoded in the text.
- Reading can be hard work and too many learners have a negative attitude towards it.
- Children are eager to learn to read when they believe that books are the key to a new world of experience.
- The attitude of adults towards reading influences the attitude of children towards books.
- Teachers need to read widely and actively themselves in order to establish a context of reading in the classroom.
- Learning through reading requires an active engagement at several different levels of meaning making.

“

*The act of study should not be measured by the number of pages read in one night or the number of books read in a semester. To study is not to consume ideas, but to create and recreate them.*

”

This quotation comes from P. Freire, *The Politics of Education* (Massachusetts, Bergin & Garvey, 1985).

- Different kinds of text require different approaches to reading, but all texts require active reading.
- Prediction and questioning are key reading skills.
- A critical approach to text is an essential skill for school learning.
- All books follow certain text patterns that establish specific relationships between different parts of the text.
- The structure of a text can influence the way we think about the ideas presented in the text.
- Teachers need to introduce learners to the ‘discipline’ of study and encourage them in its practice.
- The act of study is founded in a curious attitude towards the world.
- Reading can produce further curiosity and a critical attitude to the familiar world.
- The early skills of reading should be taught explicitly.