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Beyond Learning to Read

**An evaluation of a short reading intervention
in the Ilembe District of Kwazulu-Natal**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is my own work and the opinions expressed and conclusions drawn are equally my own. The work of others, published and unpublished, is acknowledged in the text. This work has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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June 2007

Abstract

This research evaluates the effectiveness of a reading intervention based on the idea that primary school *teachers* should read stories aloud to learners on a daily basis. The intention was to address the problem of learners' poor reading skills, in particular their inability to read for meaning. The reading intervention formed part of a series of workshops that were held in the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal, during which teachers were introduced to this approach.

The whole language, 'real books' reading aloud approach was explained and demonstrated and teachers were also given a brief opportunity to practice it themselves. Teacher attitudes and practices related to reading were surveyed prior to the intervention using a questionnaire and teachers completed a workshop evaluation form at the end of the workshops. Interviews at two schools after the intervention, provided an opportunity to see what effect the intervention had on actual practice. In addition informal observation both of reading conditions in these schools, as well as in Ilembe schools more generally, proved helpful. Many teachers lack a proper understanding of children's literature and how it can be used to develop a love of reading in children. Mother tongue literacy was encouraged by advocating the use of Zulu fiction for reading aloud, in the lower grades in particular.

This research reveals that although most teachers do try to provide learners with opportunities to practice learning to read, many seem to emphasize reading in English from the beginning, to the detriment of literacy development. Most also do not provide opportunities for learners to engage with books in a meaningful way. As this research shows, it is possible to change teachers' classroom reading practice by raising levels of awareness and by demonstrating how to read stories aloud. However, much intensive follow-up work is required in order to ensure that teachers properly understand the importance of including reading for meaning as part of their reading pedagogy. Teachers should also understand the distinction between reading and language teaching.

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List of Abbreviations

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ELITS	Education Library Information and Technology Services
EHRD	Educator Human Resource Development
HOD	Head of Department
IASL	International Association of School Librarianship
LRM	Library Resource Material
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
SLDP	School Library Development Project
UNISA	University of South Africa

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Background and context

Reading is such an important life skill that whether or not people can read, profoundly affects their lives. However schools appear to be struggling to teach children to read. The reading skills that children need, to be successful, are not being developed as they progress through school. This has serious implications because it means that they are then unable to function effectively in a modern society. Why are children coming out of our school system with such poor reading skills in spite of all the attention that this problem has received? What has gone wrong and what can be done to try to solve the problem?

As a lecturer at the Edgewood College of Education I was initially only concerned about what I saw as a lack of reading support in the Intermediate Phase because many schools do not emphasise the importance of teaching reading as part of an ongoing process of reading skills development. A lot of attention is focused on teaching children to read in the Foundation Phase after which teachers seem to assume that no further reading teaching is required. Teachers in the Intermediate Phase expect children to be able to read and do not appear to have any way of dealing with the problem if they do not. However I came to realise that this was only part of the problem and that the approach to reading teaching in the Foundation Phase is also problematic because it seems to concentrate almost exclusively on the mechanical skill of decoding. It neglects the more important aspect of reading: that of teaching children to understand what they read, which should be part of normal reading teaching. This communicative aspect of reading is simply not part of most teacher reading practice.

Although there may also be serious concerns about the way in which children are being taught how to learn to read using phonics, I was interested in looking at what should be happening outside of this limited emphasis on a skills based approach to reading teaching. 'Beyond learning to read' therefore refers to an understanding of reading that recognizes the importance of reading for meaning and sees an engagement with stories as an end in itself. All children should have the opportunity to experience reading as an enjoyable activity that: "...involves not only the cognitive powers of the child's mind but also his imagination and his emotions" (Bettelheim and Zelan, 2001: 139). Harrison (1992) says it is correct to place meaning, enjoyment and the stimulation of the imagination at the heart of reading and says that children have a need to have rich, early literacy experiences. This

aspect of reading should be included in teacher reading practice because without it, I believe that children will be limited in their reading development and that means that they are less likely to become skilled readers.

2. Focus of study

The focus of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a very short reading intervention that formed part of a series of fourteen workshops with primary school teacher librarians and teachers in the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal. Schools are required to establish Reading Programmes, supported by all educators, as part of the implementation of the Education Library Information and Technology Services (ELITS) *School Library Policy*. I was working as a library advisor for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and together with two other colleagues, was instrumental in organising ELITS workshops in Ilembe that were intended to help schools to implement the policy.

We decided to divide the workshops into three sections:

- Library organization and management
- The reading programme
- Information skills

The intention was to provide schools with practical advice, not only on how to set up and manage a library suited to the conditions teachers face in schools, but also to demonstrate how to use library resource material effectively in the classroom ie. reference, non-fiction and fiction material. We also wanted to make sure that learners had access to these books.

Two teachers from each school attended the workshops, one of whom was designated as the school's teacher librarian. They were all class teachers. The teacher librarians were not qualified and had simply been given this additional responsibility by their principals as required by the policy. A few were studying to become teacher librarians through a recent Education Department bursary scheme. The workshops were run over two days, essentially the mornings, with each of us being responsible for one of the sections. This meant that we each had a two-hour session. I was responsible for the session that was devoted to the establishment of the reading programme. My intention was to show teachers how to use *fiction* material to develop reading skills and to explain how this could form the basis of the school's reading programme. I made it clear that this is a responsibility of all teachers in the primary school, not just of the teacher designated as the teacher librarian.

My main aim was to make primary school teachers aware of the importance of helping children to read for meaning. I hoped to do this by providing them with a reading strategy based on the idea that *teachers* reading fiction/stories aloud to children is a valuable approach to use to develop the ability to read with understanding. This approach would not only help children to read for meaning but would also help them to develop a love of stories and interest in reading, regardless of their age. I explained that teachers should use this approach *in addition to* their normal reading teaching practice because teachers reading stories aloud is just one way in which reading for meaning can be emphasised. Because schools are required to establish a reading programme, I felt that this could be used to introduce a 'reading stories aloud approach'.

Quite apart from the fact that this reading aloud approach to reading teaching is theoretically sound, there are strong practical reasons why it seems sensible to use it. Given that schools do not have much, if any, suitable fiction and that even when they do, it is going to be a long time before teachers feel ready to allow learners to borrow books, this approach seemed like a good place to start to give learners immediate access to enjoyable fiction. Teachers can borrow books from a public library and only need *one* copy to read aloud to large numbers of learners. Given also that teachers are generally not providing the kind of nurturing literacy environment that learners need, reading stories aloud could provide a single focus, relatively uncomplicated approach to reading teaching that they might find easier to implement. This is another reason why it would be a good place to start.

My suggestion was therefore that teachers should read stories aloud for fun for 30 minutes every day, in all primary school classrooms, from Grade R – Grade 7 and that this would form the school's Reading Programme. In order to try to ensure that teachers implement this reading aloud approach, I structured my reading programme workshop session to include:

- Providing information about the reading process
- Explaining how to obtain fiction material
- Explaining the importance of reading mother tongue fiction aloud, particularly in Grade R and the Foundation Phase
- Explaining the advantages of teachers reading stories aloud
- Providing a reading aloud demonstration
- Providing a brief opportunity for reading aloud practice, in groups

This reading section of the ELITS workshops is what constitutes the short reading intervention that is evaluated in this study.

3. Motivation/rationale for research project

I have always had an interest in reading and as an English teacher I particularly enjoyed teaching literature. When my children were small (and not so small) I made sure that I read a range of good children's books aloud to them. My experience as an English lecturer at Edgewood College of Education, working with student teachers, provided an opportunity to further develop my interest in the use of literature in English teaching. We used a literature-based approach to teaching English, with both first and second language students and although this approach was later criticised by some in the English Department at the University of Natal, I think because it was seen as outdated, I became more and more convinced of its value if used properly.

Over the years at Edgewood I became aware of a steady decline in the language competence of first language students. I also came to realise that many of the old 'model C'¹ schools both primary and high, were placing less and less importance on the value of reading suitable literature and that the old practice of reading stories aloud to children in the classroom was becoming something of a rarity outside the Foundation Phase. Although there are many factors contributing to what I see as a decline in literacy standards I believe that the lack of emphasis on reading stories for enjoyment in the classroom has contributed to this decline.

Second language students at Edgewood were struggling with learning in a language not their mother tongue and with the legacy of a disadvantaged education system that suffered from a lack of adequate resources. Many of these students had not had any exposure to fiction material apart from their set works. They were also the product of an approach to teaching that did not allow for the development of the literacy skills necessary for meaningful engagement with the texts that they were exposed to. The link Pretorius (2000) makes between academic success and reading resonated with what I was experiencing as an English lecturer.

After teaching a methodology course on 'Teaching of listening and speaking skills' I was reminded of the value of reading stories aloud, as well as the value of purposeful listening. It occurred to me that reading stories aloud could be used as an approach to develop reading for meaning skills, not only with very young children but right through primary school and beyond! When Howe, (2003) presented a paper on '*Creating a story hour that*

¹ Historically white, middle-class, advantaged schools

contributes to reading comprehension' at the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) International Conference in Durban, which stressed not only the importance of reading stories aloud to children but also the important connection between listening and reading, it confirmed for me the value of this approach.

More recently my experience as a library advisor in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education has shown me the urgent necessity of an intervention that can make a real difference to enriching the literacy experiences of learners in primary schools. Most schools do not have suitable collections of fiction material and even when they do teachers do not seem to appreciate their value or know how to use them effectively.

Lyster, (2003: 47) referring to the role and importance of fiction says that "[a] key aspect of reading, especially fiction, is its power to draw readers in and engage them. It is this power of stories which is central in children's literacy". She goes on to say that though there are differences with regard to the best methods to teach reading there is little debate about the importance of fiction in the process of reading acquisition for children. The more children read the better they become at reading (Smith cited in Harrison, 1992; Pretorius, 2000) and since reading the right stories aloud for enjoyment is, in my opinion, one of the best ways to hook children into reading, it made sense to me to try this approach.

My personal experience led me to believe that there is a desperate need for a practical, workable approach to improve our children's reading skills. If we look at the macro context in South Africa we see that there is a nationally recognised reading crisis. The situation is so bad in fact that the national Department of Education published a quite extraordinary open letter in the *Mail and Guardian* (2006) addressed to all primary school principals pleading with them to 'Teach our children to read'.

...our assessments of how well our children read reveal that a shockingly high number cannot read at the appropriate grade and age level. Many simply cannot read at all. We cannot allow this to continue. We are therefore challenging all primary schools to improve the reading skills of all their learners.

Clearly if something is not done to improve the way in which reading is taught our children will continue to find it difficult to succeed in school. One could go so far as to say that our country's future is at stake if we do not.

... the basis of inequality in the classroom, and hence in the society, is in students' differing capacities to independently learn from reading, which is the fundamental mode of learning in secondary and tertiary education." We can agree too, with Tony Ehrenreich when he says: "This country will be torn apart unless we tackle the problem of growing inequality." One contribution that teachers at all levels of the system, and in all areas of the curriculum, can make to overcoming inequality is to focus strongly and persistently on developing learners' capacity to read and to learn from reading (Rose cited in Morrow, 2005: 5).

It would appear therefore that learners' inability to read effectively not only results in their failing to do well in school, it also contributes to a growing inequality in our society.

An article given to me by a colleague became the catalyst for the development of my ideas on the importance of teaching children to read for meaning. *What they can't read will hurt them* (Pretorius, 2000) drew attention to the link between poor academic achievement and poor reading skills in South Africa and makes the distinction between learning to read, where the emphasis is on decoding and comprehension is often neglected, and reading to learn which requires comprehension. "Decoding is a necessary reading skill but it alone does not constitute reading: comprehension is the *sine qua non* of reading" (Pretorius, 2000: 34). Early literacy teaching in most KwaZulu-Natal schools emphasises the skills needed to decode words and tends to neglect reading for meaning, which results in children who are quite often fluent readers but who do not understand what they are reading. This is commonly known as 'barking at print'. Teachers tend to stop teaching reading as soon as children have learned to read. Although the skills necessary for independent reading do not occur spontaneously in most children, these are not actively taught (Pretorius, 2000).

Problems with learning to read are also particularly acute for learners who have to study in a second language and who come from an oral rather than a reading culture. Not only do they have to be bilingual, they also have to be biliterate; able to read and write in both languages (Pretorius, 2000; Mitjila & Pretorius, 2003; Lyster, 2003). Successful learning relies on the ability to read (Pretorius, 2000: 39). Skilled, independent readers are able to read effectively for meaning. If reading for meaning is not actively taught and if reading problems are more acute for a large portion of our population because they are second language learners, we should be thinking about how these issues can be addressed? The obvious place to start, in my opinion, is in the classroom. What can *teachers* do to address this problem? What changes could and should be made to their reading methodology?

Teachers reading stories aloud regularly in the classroom is a relatively simple, practical, workable approach for teachers to include as part of their reading teaching methodology. It has the potential to improve reading skills and therefore school achievement. Children should have stories read to them regularly in Grade R, the Foundation Phase, the Intermediate Phase, and beyond. This is particularly important when children come from homes where there are no books and no reading support. It is this idea that I wanted to get across to teachers and I was ideally placed to do so.

As an education advisor attempting to improve the quality of education in the classroom, in this case specifically to do with reading, this research would be useful. It should also be of interest to the Education Department. As an individual, reading has been an area of concern to me for some time. I wanted to know if teachers would be interested in the reading aloud approach, if they thought it could work and if they were prepared to try it out in the classroom. The evaluation was undertaken to determine whether teachers were willing and/or able to implement this reading approach and if not, why not? The findings would assist me as the researcher and as a department advisor, to assess the reading intervention and make improvements to achieve the desired outcome. The findings would also help to clarify what should be done in follow-up workshops.

I have not encountered any studies in KwaZulu-Natal that specifically focus on reading stories aloud as part of a reading strategy in schools. Reading stories aloud is encouraged in the Foundation Phase but it does not appear to be widely or regularly practiced. For teachers in the higher grades reading stories aloud to their learners for enjoyment I think, is a rare occurrence. Even the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture ELITS Reading Policy (2004), does not mention anything about the value of reading stories aloud to learners in the classroom.

4. Key research questions

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the short reading intervention designed to give teachers the understanding and skills required to implement the reading aloud approach effectively, I had to identify teacher attitudes and practices in relation to reading. The intention was to change attitudes to reading teaching by introducing teachers to this particular approach and by providing them with practical ideas of how to read stories aloud to learners regularly in the primary school classroom. It was hoped that teachers would implement these ideas, thereby improving their reading teaching practice. The effectiveness

of this intervention could then be evaluated and those factors that either aided change or acted as barriers to change could be identified.

Three key research questions were therefore identified:

- What are teacher practices and attitudes to reading?
- How effective is the intervention?
- What are the aids or barriers to change?

5. Theoretical framework

Reading for meaning is a central concern of this study, as is the use of literature in reading teaching. I have identified teachers reading stories aloud in primary school classrooms as a useful reading teaching approach to use because it helps learners to understand what is being read to them. This is because the message of the text can be conveyed through the person reading aloud, thereby avoiding the problem many learners have with decoding. It gives children the freedom to focus on understanding the story instead. Reading aloud is also a way of providing ongoing reading support, which is particularly important in a second language context.

Children have the opportunity to enjoy the stories being read to them even though they are not reading these themselves, especially if teachers are skillful in their questioning technique and encourage discussion. The skills required for meaningful reading are developed because there is a transfer of skills between listening and reading. Reading *stories* aloud not only makes it easier for children to engage with meaning, it also helps them to experience reading as an enjoyable activity, something that is extremely important if we want them to learn to love reading. Reading to children in their mother tongue, especially in the lower grades, will also provide important literacy support.

This whole language approach to reading provides the opportunity for children to use context to help them read for meaning, especially if literature/stories are used to do this because, as Bettelheim and Zelan point out: “It will give [them] strength to master the difficult task of learning to read and become a literate person” (2001:139).

This study therefore draws on psycholinguistic and psychodynamic perspectives of psychology for its theoretical framework. An understanding of the reading process, how we read and how we learn to read, is essential because how we understand this process

determines the way in which we approach reading instruction in our schools and our attitudes to reading. This study therefore also looks at behaviourist and cognitive perspectives of psychology. Learning to read is not easy and there is a lack of agreement about how it should be taught.

Reading is an enormously complex process involving perceptual, cognitive, affective and social factors. The imparting and acquisition of the skill of reading is the central project of basic education of both children and adults. The complexity and importance of reading has resulted in inconclusive volumes of research and in methodological debates which continue to rage (Lyster, 2003:38).

The two competing methodological approaches that have created such a storm are the phonic approach, that emphasises skills, and the whole language approach, that emphasises meaning. The divide is between those who believe that reading is part of a behaviourist theoretical framework, because reading is about teaching skills, and those who believe that reading is part of a psycholinguistic theoretical framework because reading for meaning and engagement with text is what reading is about. Although there appears to be no end to this debate, there are many who accept the need for a balanced approach to reading acquisition. A psychodynamic theoretical understanding is useful to explain the power of story as well as the value of reading for enjoyment.

These concepts are explained in the next chapter as part of the literature review (Chapter Two). I start by looking at the two competing methodologies and attempt to explain why the two camps appear to be intractable. I then argue for a balanced approach to reading instruction and look at the role of the teacher, before finally drawing some conclusions. I go on to review the literature that has helped me to formulate my thinking and develop my argument about the value of using a reading stories aloud approach as part of reading teaching. In Chapter Three I explain the research methodology that was used, based on the conceptualization of the research, discuss the instruments used in the collection of the research data, explain the sample design, sampling techniques employed and the criteria used in the choice of sample size. I then go on to discuss data collection methods and fieldwork practice, data capture and analysis, as well as looking at the limitations of the study. Chapter Four is concerned with the analysis and presentation of the research findings. The study ends with my conclusions and recommendations in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature that has informed my thinking about providing a reading intervention that could help to improve children's reading development. I first of all examine the theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter One, before going on to review some aspects of the South African reading context that I believe are relevant to my area of research. This includes a look at the emotive mother tongue literacy debate. I then provide a detailed argument for reading aloud. The literature review therefore provides the 'evidence' to support the reading approach used in the reading intervention.

1.1 Literature overview:

- Theoretical concepts
- Aspects of the South African reading context
- The argument for reading aloud

2. Theoretical concepts

The debates over a behaviourist, phonics approach versus a psycholinguistic, whole language approach, were so heated during the 1990s that they have been called 'The reading wars'. Lyster (2003: 39) points out that: "The key differences between them indicate contrasting conceptions of how learning occurs as well as competing philosophical orientations."

2.1 A behaviourist approach to reading teaching

Many teachers use a transmission education model based on a behaviourist approach to teaching and learning. This is reflected in the teaching of reading. The phonic approach to teaching children to read is a skills-based, structured approach to reading teaching that falls into a traditional, transmission model of education. This style of teaching tends to encourage rote learning and dependence. Phonics is the relationship between letters and the sounds associated with them (phonemes). The phonic method teaches children that certain letters or groups of letters correspond with certain sounds (Lyster, 2003: 40). Children memorise the sounds and symbols and then read by attaching the correct sounds to the symbols they encounter on the page. It is taught by direct instruction using drill and choring which comes from a behaviourist approach. The phonic approach, sometimes called a bottom-up approach, was the dominant method until the 1960s (Lyster, 2003). It

essentially views learning as the acquisition of a set of sub-skills then combines them to form the whole skill (Lyster, 2003: 40).

The underlying premise of this method is that once the code has been “cracked”, learners will gradually be able to read new words and new texts independently (Lyster, 2003: 40).

2.2 A psycholinguistic theoretical understanding

The psycholinguistic or whole language method arose during the 1960s to challenge the hegemony of the phonic method (Lyster, 2003: 40). Reading is seen as a transaction between the mind of the reader and the language of the text, in a particular situational and social context (Weaver, 1994). Thus reading means bringing meaning to a text in order to get meaning from it. Perhaps most crucially, learning to read means learning to bring meaning to a text in order to construct meaning (Weaver, 1994: 42). Weaver says that she prefers to use the term socio-psycholinguistics to characterize any approach that emphasizes the construction of meaning, drawing upon individual’s prior knowledge, experience, background and social contexts (Weaver, 1994: 57). Reading is not merely a psycholinguistic process, involving a transaction between the mind of the reader and the language of the text. Reading is a socio-psycholinguistic process, because the reader-text transaction occurs within a social and situational context (Weaver, 1994: 29).

2.3 A whole language reading approach

Whole language is a psycholinguistic approach to reading. It is seen as top-down because it relies heavily on information stored in the memory rather than on information derived from close attention to every word on the page. Children use context to build up meaning. The first proponents of this method were Keith and Yetta Goodman and Frank Smith. It arose out of a recognition that it was psycholinguistically naïve to attempt to divide language into so many discrete and isolated components in teaching children to read and write. A whole language approach suggests that reading should be taught in a more integrated, holistic way rather than as a set of discrete and isolated skills (Savage, 1994: 8). “...Goodman views the reading process as a “psycholinguistic guessing game” in which thought and language interact” (Athey, 1988: 48).

The basics of this method are that learners learn to read by reading meaningful sentences and then groups of sentences and that the emphasis is on the reader gaining meaning from the text. Meaningful wholes are the units of learning and subskills are acquired through inference rather than taught overtly (Lyster, 2003: 40). The fundamental tenet of this method is that a person learns to read by reading (Lyster, 2003: 41).

Harrison argues that ‘when research turns to policy, argument gives way to rhetoric’ (2001: 4). This could be said to be true of the *Wisconsin Policy Report* (Shug, 2001: 5) which argues in support of Direct Instruction that favours a return to a more traditional, skills-based approach to reading teaching. However the report does provide a useful description of both whole language and literature-based approaches to reading. These approaches are seen as taking children’s interests as their crucial starting point and assume that mobilization of these interests via imaginative, age-appropriate activities will be more effective than deliberate, teacher-centered instruction in helping children learn to read. Proponents discount or deny altogether the importance of phonics instruction, claiming that it is fraught with inconsistencies and that it displaces the more important goal of reading for meaning. Instead they see themselves as engaged in literacy education and espouse a philosophy of education that reflects respect for the freedom and imagination of young children and for the autonomy of classroom teachers. They view reading as natural and believe that the alphabetic principle can be attained by exposure to literature and that context is the primary factor in word recognition.

The policy report dismisses these approaches as “...this grandiose, self-congratulatory view of the teacher’s task” (Shug, 2001: 5). Even so this model of reading has enormous appeal because it puts meaning before skills and advocates the use of ‘real’ books. Those who espouse it tend to argue passionately in its favour. In its pure form however it does have weaknesses. Their view of reading as natural and their assumption that “phonetic rules will be inferred” (Lyster, 2003: 41) have proved to be flawed.

Weaver believes that whole language is a philosophy of education and that it requires a shift from a transmission paradigm to transactional paradigm and that whole language teaching requires a shift in teachers’ belief systems (Weaver, 1994: 411). It is a philosophy that sees reading as an active rather than a passive process and learning as an active, constructive process.

Whole language teaching requires a shift from a transmission concept of learning to a transactional concept ... According to the behaviouristic psychology that underlies the transmission model, learning is said to result primarily from habit formation and simple association; hence a great deal of time is spent practicing skills and memorising information ... Cognitive psychologists point out that complex processes and enduring concepts are learned far differently (Weaver, 1994: 341).

2.4 A real books approach

When literacy instruction is based on the whole language method, story books other than primers are central to the learning of reading from the beginning. Advocates of the whole

language approach sometimes use the term, “real books approach”, to distinguish it from approaches which use basal readers. A related and commonly used term is a “literature-based approach” or a “real literature approach” (Lyster, 2003: 42).

A philosophy of teaching and learning underpins the term ‘real books’ because it is indicative not only of the books to be read but also of the methods to be used and of the teaching and learning environment to be provided. The provision of real books and shared readings is an important feature of a real books approach. The books; the child; the teacher and the interaction centred on a book, which brings together the learner and the teacher, are crucial elements (Campbell, 1992: 1).

The books that provide the basis for the child’s readings have been referred to as ‘real books’, as a contrast to those books which many children refer to as ‘reading books’ and which teachers and parents know as ‘scheme books’ or basals. The important feature of such real books or stories is that they are meaningful to the child. And they are meaningful because there is a real story to tell, the language is natural rather than controlled, and the reading is aided because predictions can be made by the reader and or listener (Wade, 1990 cited in Campbell, 1992: 3).

In the USA, Goodman (1986, cited in Campbell) utilizes the term ‘whole language’ to encompass a relatively similar philosophy of teaching and learning. ‘Whole language’, ‘story books’, ‘literature-based learning’ or ‘meaningful books’ might have been better terms to use than ‘real books’ (Campbell, 1992: 1).

Campbell refers to the notion of the power of stories to encourage and facilitate children’s reading development (1992: 3) but says that this is not the only factor. He cites Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) who say that children will have learnt a great deal about reading before they are reading in the conventional sense of that word and says that all of that knowledge about language, print and the environment will provide a basis for the child’s exploration of books. If the books are predictable, natural texts then the child’s active involvement with, and reconstruction of, the book will be aided (Campbell, 1992: 3).

For most children in the context of this study, the preparatory reading background to which Campbell refers is absent. This means that teachers have only the power of story to rely on, in order to encourage reading development. It therefore becomes even more important in this context, to choose real books with ‘predictable natural texts’ and to make sure that teachers use these books effectively to interact with their learners. Campbell (1992: 4) mentions the importance of home-school links and the role of the parent as a major

contributor to the child's literacy development both before the child starts school and once enrolled. Again, when you consider that for most children in this context, this is non-existent, one gets a very real sense of the enormity of the problem and the need for an approach to reading that is going to at least give these children a chance to become functionally literate.

Campbell (1992) believes that shared readings are an important part of the real books approach and cites both Meek (1982) and Smith (1978) who argue that the book, the child and the teacher are all important factors needed to encourage reading development. It is here that the teacher's role becomes important (Campbell, 1992: 3). The purpose of shared reading, as part of a real books approach, as Campbell describes it, is to provide *children* with the opportunity to practice their own reading skills. The teacher becomes an active participant as part of this process and not a passive listener (Campbell, 1992: 3). I see *teachers* reading stories aloud as a form of shared reading using 'real books'. The book, the child and the teacher are all important, with the teacher a very active participant. The children become both purposeful listeners and active participants. When teachers read aloud, using 'real books', in a way that enhances meaning, it gives children access to the story and enables them to enjoy and interact with it in a meaningful way. I believe that this is particularly helpful in a context where many children are unlikely to read and understand 'real books' on their own.

Lehman and Scharer (1996) talk about the value of using open-ended questions during book discussions. Children's contributions are valuable in a shared literary experience and we should recognise their capabilities for analytical, interpretive, and evaluative thinking, their attention to detail, their curiosity and desire to learn, and their ability to get in touch with their personal feelings. Children are capable of more than we give them credit for, especially having to do with literature and imagination. Talking together offers a reader more perspectives than reading alone and that enhances critical, literary thinking (1996:34).

Barrentine (1996) explores the idea of interactive read-alouds where students play an active rather than a passive role. Teachers pose questions throughout the reading that enhance meaning construction and also show how one makes sense of text. Students offer spontaneous comments as the story unfolds. This interaction not only allows students to engage with the reading process but also provides the opportunity for them to voice their personal and aesthetic responses to the stories read aloud. The dialogue during read-aloud events, supports students as they construct meaning based on the story and their personal experiences. These meaning-centred interactions engage students with literacy information

and demonstrate strategies that they can adopt for use when reading independently (Barrentine, 1996: 36 & 43).

Interactive read-alouds encourage children to verbally interact with the text, peers, and teacher. This approach to reading aloud provides a means of engaging students as they construct meaning and explore the reading process (Barrentine, 1996: 36).

Campbell (1992: 2) points out that many teachers regard a real books approach as a very demanding one which requires subtle and sophisticated teaching strategies and a prior careful planning of the classroom environment. To be truly effective, teachers reading aloud using 'real books', does require 'subtle and sophisticated' teaching strategies. However teachers can use this approach at a simple level, relying on children's enjoyment of the story. It also does not require careful planning of the classroom environment to support literacy events (Campbell, 1992: 4). Although such literacy events should be a dominant feature in all classrooms (particularly in the Foundation Phase) the reality is that they are the exception rather than the rule within the context of this study.

2.5 Reading pedagogy and type of text

The pedagogy and consequently the type of text chosen, is related to an understanding of the nature and purpose of reading. There is a high correlation between underlying approach and choice of texts. Proponents of the phonic method choose and use contrived texts, while whole language proponents choose and use story books (Lyster, 2003: 46).

The terminology used to describe different kinds of reading approaches and texts tends to vary. Savage (1994:4) describes a literature-based reading approach as a programme that uses children's literature, or trade books, as the central core for language instruction where literature is an integral, rather than an incidental, part of teaching pupils how to read and write. Trade books are used extensively as instructional tools. These are picture books, storybooks, novels, and informational books found in bookstores and on library shelves that are written to be sold to the general public. They are not designed primarily for school use in the way that textbooks are. Teaching is therefore centred on authentic texts written for meaningful purposes. Lyster (2003) provides a more detailed definition of storybooks.

Storybooks are known as real books, trade books or picture books. They are books written for young readers and have as their first priority the carrying of meaning. Because they are written with no instructional intent, they are sometimes not simple enough for beginner readers to read alone and have to be read aloud by an adult. These books are at the heart of a "literature-based" or "real books" curriculum (Lyster, 2003: 45).

In other words a literature-based or real books approach uses fiction. An ELITS brochure describes books in this category as being the product of the author's imagination, though in some cases the background, story and characters could be based on true events or real life. These books are read for fun, relaxation and pleasure (ELITS, 2005). Those who use a skills-based, phonics reading approach on the other hand, favour the use of contrived texts and basal readers for reading instruction.

Contrived texts are those which are written with the primary purpose of teaching reading. Language is strictly controlled, and phonics often forms the foundation of the text. The primary purpose is not to tell a story, but to give children the opportunity to recognize words. Quality varies considerably, with some contrived texts successfully introducing meaning, humour and interest (Lyster, 2003: 43).

Grundin (cited in Lyster, 2003:43) claims that this is not reading at all, because reading is the process of making sense of printed language which presupposes that there is some sense to make in the language in the first place (Lyster, 2003:43).

Lyster, (2003 :44) cites Hudson (1988) who criticizes controlled vocabulary books because they offer little opportunity to develop the use of syntactic and semantic cues. This means that in the absence of cohesive, forward moving narratives in these books, the real purpose of reading does not emerge for beginner readers.

Basal readers or primers are used for literacy instruction based on the phonic method. They are graded readers consisting of carefully controlled phonetically-based passages of text (Lyster, 2003: 41). Story books other than primers do not have a role to play in the initial stages of learning to read. Basal readers are regularly criticized for: insipid stories, lack of conflict and character development, contrived language, and low interest (Lyster, 2003: 42). Whole language proponents regard basal readers as unreal and inappropriate and believe that the consequences of using such readers are that they do not encourage reading, but actually put people off reading (Lyster, 2003: 42). Although the quality of stories used in basal readers has improved they are still rejected by those who advocate a pure whole language approach because they impose a pre-determined sequence for learning to read onto the child (Lyster, 2003: 44).

Clay (1991, cited in Lyster, 2003: 45) believes that it is important that children are exposed to different types of texts right from the initial stages of learning to read. This she says is because texts influence children's expectations of what books are about, and if they are

only exposed to one type, such as contrived texts, they will develop incorrect hypotheses about books and reading. Although phonic and whole language methods are seldom used in their pure form (Lyster, 2003: 42) the emphasis in the rural district of Ilembe is on the phonic method using contrived texts.

2.6 The argument for a balanced approach

Land (2004) argues that many children taught to read using the phonic approach have reading and learning problems that frequently prevent them ever actually reading.

The new approaches to teaching reading, however flawed they may be, are sincere attempts to teach in a way that will help new readers learn to read for meaning. There are problems with an exclusive emphasis on phonics as this can result in “barking at print”; going through the motions of reading, looking at the print on the page and translating the print into words. Many educationalists have laid the blame for this meaningless reading at the door of the phonic approach to teaching reading. They maintain that approaches that emphasize the link between print form and meaning, rather than the link between print form and sound, result in the learner reading meaningfully from the beginning (Land: 2004).

Although she acknowledges that the Goodmans, who advocated a pure whole language approach to the teaching of reading, did a lot of damage, she says it is important to look at the strengths in both approaches.

Lyster warns us to be mindful “of the pedagogic casualties of strict adherence to extreme and purist approaches” (2003: 41). She says because of these dangers and as a result of more sophisticated research into the reading process itself that: “Increasingly a middle road between the two extremes has been advocated ...” (Lyster, 2003: 41). Harrison (1992); Savage (1994); Weaver (1994); Richgels (2003) and Rayner, K., Foorman, B.R., Perfetti, C.A., Pesetsky, D. and Seidenberg, M.S. (2002), all support a balanced approach because they see strengths in both approaches. Speigal (1992, cited in Savage, 1994) calls for building bridges between traditional, direct instruction and more holistic, literature-based programmes by combining the best of both and says that teachers need to see how direct teaching of reading skills/strategies can be made part of literature-based instruction. Children can use both context and phonics when they encounter words they do not know (Savage, 1994: 21 & 22). Research looking at exemplary teachers found that they were influenced by whole-language principles but also frequently taught skills, both in context and isolation. These teachers show us the wisdom of a balance of approaches to literacy instruction (Richgels, 2003: 796).

Harrison (1992) in a chapter called *The Reading Process*, argues that the so-called 'psycholinguistic' theories of the reading process can no longer be accepted as fully adequate explanations, and must be integrated into a more complete description which takes account of the new research into processing of information during reading and into how children learn to read. He believes that those who advocate the use of 'real' books (as opposed to the often boringly repetitive, contrived texts written for beginner readers) are correct to place meaning, enjoyment and the stimulation of the imagination at the heart of reading. He endorses the need for children to have rich, early literacy experiences, but he also stresses the importance of phonemic awareness as part of a reading approach. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and categorise sound. It is now thought that this is a vital part of the reading process. Thomson (2004) says that phonemic awareness is the key goal before pure phonics. Although 'real book' advocates particularly dislike what cognitive psychology says about reading because it tends to decontextualise the reading process, and because they dislike a 'skills' view of reading, Harrison nevertheless says that we should draw on the enormous advances in our understanding of the reading process which have been gained as a result of recent research in cognitive psychology.

On the one hand Harrison (1992) points out that because psychologists define and give close attention to one aspect of the reading process and call this a 'skill', it does not mean that this 'skill' should be developed in a decontextualised way. He argues that we need to have a deeper insight into our current understanding of the psychology of the reading process and of how children learn to read because this will not only offer a better theoretical rationale for our pedagogy, which will give us a stronger defence for a 'real books' approach, but will also give us better tools for handling those cases in which children do not make a good start (Harrison, 1992: 5). He refers to a major government sponsored US review of the research into early childhood reading instruction (Snow et al., 1998) which he says fully supports a 'real books' approach.

On the other hand however, he also believes that most children will benefit from the explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships and that we have to recognize that there are some aspects of learning to read which involve skills and that our teaching is more effective if we are aware of these (Harrison, 2001: 21).

... approaches to teaching reading which ignore the need for children to develop phonemic awareness and an understanding of letter-sound relationships must be inadequate (Harrison and Coles, 2001: xvi & xvii).

He examines the reading process and says that evidence currently suggests that for fluent readers the visual processing of text is both fairly complete and very fast.

The current view, therefore, is that for fluent readers in normal reading rapid, automatic, context-free word recognition is what occurs most of the time, with fixation duration largely related to the relative word frequency of different words. This model does not deny the use of context as an aid to comprehension, nor is phonemic decoding ruled out, but these are both assumed to be aids to word recognition that are often unnecessary for fluent readers. It is in this respect that reading is now regarded as an *interactive-compensatory* process. (Harrison, 1992:10).

Harrison (1992:10 - 13) refers to a celebrated paper by Keith Stanovich where this view was put forward. If word recognition is rapid as it is in good readers, it frees up processing resources for comprehension. When automatic word recognition is inaccurate or fails, the 'compensatory' mechanisms come into play. The implications of this are that accurate, rapid word recognition is really important in fluent reading. While a child is learning to read the 'compensatory' part of the reading process is vital. They should use all the tools available, including intelligent guesswork, during the process of learning to become a fluent reader. We do not begin with accurate, error-free word-attack skills. This is not a goal in its own right. The *purpose* of reading is to gain meaning, not simply to recognize words rapidly.

As well as having experience of a social context in which books are valued, Harrison says that beginner readers need to have knowledge of how the world, language, story and books work. He refers to the work of Bradley, Goswami and Bryant in this area (1992: 20) whose research findings show that children's knowledge of nursery rhymes predicts success in reading and spelling and says that Smith was right when he said we learn to read by reading. It is phonemic awareness that allows us to do this (Harrison, 1992: 21).

Artley (1996) points out that the 'word perception' programme is merely a *part* of the total reading programme, an important part that serves as a *means* to interpretation rather than as an *end* of reading instruction and that the primary function of reading is to create meaning. Although the article was written in 1955 we appear to have forgotten this important understanding. Artley stressed the importance of teachers developing a favourable attitude toward reading, in children who are beginning to read, and says that from the beginning reading must be 'an interesting, pleasurable, meaningful experience'.

Because the child's concern is with the meaningful unit he comes to see that reading is fun – a pleasurable experience. Some would take issue with me

on this point and say that we need not be concerned with making reading fun. They contend that children might as well learn early that learning to read is a matter of blood, sweat and tears. Yet, I will defend to the last the point that unless children see early that reading is an avenue to new and exciting experiences they are not going to turn to it in their free time nor use it as a source of information (Artley, 1955: 12).

Gambrell (1996) supports this view saying that the most important goal of reading instruction is to foster a love of reading and that teachers play a critical role in helping children develop into readers who read for both pleasure and information. She refers to research that suggests that classroom cultures that foster reading motivation are characterised by a teacher who is a reading model. They also provide a book-rich classroom environment; opportunities for choice; familiarity with books; social interactions about books; and literacy related incentives that reflect the value of reading. She goes on to say that one of the key factors in motivating students to read is a teacher who values reading and is enthusiastic about sharing a love of reading with students. She stresses that one very important way in which teachers motivate students to read is by being an explicit reading model.

The debate about how to teach reading continues because the controversy is about philosophical differences between traditional and progressive approaches. Progressives value student-centred learning and teacher empowerment and argue that this is consistent with the teaching of phonics (Rayner et al. (2002). Unfortunately the reality in many South African classrooms is that a 'real books' approach is not understood and that the emphasis is on the explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships at the expense of meaning.

2.7 Psychodynamic theory

There is another aspect of reading that should be considered and this has to do with what motivates us to read and the purpose of reading. A psychodynamic theoretical framework may be helpful in understanding this aspect of reading. This is Rohmann's (2002) definition:

Psychodynamic theory is a general approach to psychology that emphasizes motivations and the interaction of emotional processes in behaviour and personality. It delves into the dynamic interrelations of unconscious forces (it could be argued both personal and collective). It presents the idea that the mind contains more than we are aware of and that where consciousness is thought of as rational, systematic, analytical, in search of meaning; the unconscious is said to be illogical, oblivious of space and time, and indifferent to contradiction and ambiguity. It differs from other modern psychological perspectives, such as behaviourism and cognitive psychology; it is not amenable to empirical testing and it assumes an emphasis on early childhood development occurring in certain fixed stages, based on Piaget,

whose fundamental insight was that learning proceeds from previously assimilated learning acquired through interaction with the environment. This revolutionized both child psychology and educational practice (Rohmann, 2002: 323).

2.8 The purpose and nature of reading

In examining the reasons for the lack of agreement regarding effective instructional methods Lyster (2003) makes an interesting distinction. “The key questions underlying many methodological debates are ... not related to how we read, but why we read ...” (Lyster, 2003: 38).

Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan (2001: 137) in an article entitled *The magic of reading*, say that the reason many give for learning to read is that it makes us more useful citizens and workers. Although they don't deny that this is true they argue that it can never serve as a motivation for learning to read. They talk about why it isn't useful to justify reading in terms of its usefulness. Children read because it promises them an entry into an exciting fantasy world. They are motivated by the magic of reading. “Reading is about opening up a world of imagination and joy” (Bettelheim & Zelan, 2001: 138).

Because literacy alone does not make a nation of readers it is necessary to inspire a passion for reading, so that we “seek out books for pleasure and information, not just in response to some education requirement or checklist” (Wilson, 2004: 47). “Reading is becoming utilitarian. It is done to extract information... It is not undertaken for pleasure” (Gibbons, 2004: 4). The word ‘enjoy’ is not often used to describe the reading process. In the article Gibbons draws attention to the negative effect of constant testing and the use of excerpts as comprehension material. It can be argued that reading ‘whole’ books is the best way to develop children's understanding, empathy, imagination and creativity and that teachers and their classes need time to enjoy books together (Gibbons, 2004: 4).

One of the points raised at the South African Children's Literature Conference (2003) was that there is a “need to concentrate on the *desire* to read” and that “[c]oncentration on the mechanics of reading has been to the detriment of reading for pleasure” (Dubazana and Macgarry, 2003: 4). The primary purpose of reading, especially in the initial stages, should be on reading for enjoyment. However in many schools, the purpose for reading is ‘utilitarian’. Reading for pleasure does not feature. The obvious solution is to introduce reading for pleasure, because that is how to develop the desire to read. Children will want to read if they can see that reading is fun. It is this aspect of reading that has appeal. Reading is not just a functional means to an end. Important though this is, it is also an end

in itself. There are those who believe that learning to read is pointless unless a reader comes to value, enjoy and in some sense possess the books and stories they read (Harrison, 2001).

Whole language proponents of reading tend to be passionate advocates of this approach because stories have power. Fiction plays a vital and central role in the development of literacy in children (Lyster, 2003: 47). We get some idea of why this is from Ousbey's description.

A child is reading. She has tied a torch to the bed-head so that the light focuses on her book and does not disturb her younger sister, asleep in the bed next to hers. She is so absorbed in the reading she seems to have created a kind of force-field around herself, a palpable energy which holds her tightly inside the world the story-maker has created (Ousbey, 1992: 35).

What is the force at work here? What is it that captures the reader to the extent that they become lost in a book, so absorbed that they are oblivious to the outside world? It is the sort of reading that occurs when the story is good enough to engage the imagination of the reader (Ousbey, 1992: 29). Readers get pleasure and enjoyment from engaging in stories and in allowing other worlds and other experiences to become part of their own. Once you get inside a book it can take you anywhere.

Harrison & Cole (1992: ix) refer to what they describe as Ousbey's convincing argument that it is impossible to overestimate the importance of good literature, and his conviction that children make astonishing progress in reading when their imagination is stimulated by good books. Children have a psychological need for such experiences and teachers should be encouraged and supported in assisting children to find them through literature (Ousbey, 1992).

Bettelheim and Zelan (2001) believe that our emotions and imaginations should be engaged when we learn to read and that as human beings we have a psychological need for magic, mystery, play, daydreaming, imagination and creativity. A good storybook allows the reader to become involved with the plot and the characters. Readers have to give more of themselves to a book they are reading than they do when watching television or a film and this extra engagement is repaid in our becoming more absorbed (Whitehead, cited in Harrison, 1992: 13).

People make the incorrect assumption that "intellect and imagination do not mix" (Dove, 1997: 159). She believes that "...you need reverie. Daydreaming. The watchful soul in the relaxed mind" (Dove, 1997: 161) and would probably support Einstein's assertion that

'imagination is more important than knowledge' (Cited in Ousbey, 1992: 30). Reading literature engages this human side of ourselves.

Not surprisingly then, fantasy is a form of literature very popular with children. Bettelheim (cited in Savage, 1994) draws our attention to the fact that fantasy is not only an important part of children's reading experiences; it is an important part of their lives. According to psychologists, fantasy provides an important means of helping pupils deal with their emotions, their dreams, their fears, their conflicts, their worlds.

Fantasy helps the child develop imagination. The ability to imagine, to conceive of alternative ways of life, to entertain new ideas, to create strange new worlds, to dream dreams, are all skills vital to the survival of humankind" (Savage, 1994: 37).

Psychodynamic theory is not amenable to empirical testing precisely because it emphasizes motivations and the interaction of emotional processes in behaviour and personality and because it delves into the dynamic interrelations of unconscious forces. A storybook approach to reading that develops children's imaginations does not fit readily into a system that depends on testing children in a more quantifiable way. Ousbey expresses this 'misfit' slightly differently:

The trouble with words like 'pleasure', 'enjoyment', 'humour', 'celebration', however, is that they do not fit easily into the discourse of current educational debate (Ousbey, 1992: 37).

Heale, (1998) asserts that no child has ever fallen in love with reading from being given a textbook (the same argument can also be applied to most class readers) but that unfortunately many learners encounter few books other than textbooks (Heale, 1998). Many children therefore learn to read without learning to love reading. He believes that children need to be led to books and that they have to be shown that reading books is an enjoyable experience (Heale, 1998).

Flanagan (1980: 59 - 63) makes an interesting distinction between the *mechanical* and *communicative* aspects of reading, believing that children need meaningful encounters with books. Reading schemes and techniques emphasise the mechanical. Teachers' dependence on graded readers or 'boxed material' imposes considerable constraints on children's expectations of what books are about and how they are written. When the reading exercise is purposeless it is also meaningless. One can only measure the reader's comprehension of the material if it is seen in relation to the purpose. Comprehension is the 'got it' part of

reading *not* the ‘doing part’ and it relates to the whole so that it is useless to teach reading skills in isolation. Flanagan (1980) explores the part played by talking in reading saying that children must talk about their reading.

Vygotsky said that our ability to make meaning is first developed in discussion with others. This gradually develops into an ability to think, feel and value for oneself (Flanagan, 1980: 62).

She refers to two findings. The one suggests that for reading to be effective it is necessary to ponder and reflect on what is read and that group discussion aids this kind of reflection, and the other makes the observation that discussion is essential to the process of pupils formulating for themselves their present understanding (Flanagan, 1980: 62 & 63). She also refers to Toffler who believes that group discussion is essential to intellectual growth and that talk from open-ended questions leads to logical and intelligent evaluation – critical reading of the highest form (Flanagan, 1980: 63). Although this article dates back to 1980, the points made are still relevant.

Ousbey (1992) believes that it is impossible to overestimate the importance of good literature and says that children can make astonishing progress in reading when their imagination is stimulated by good books. What is more, he says that children have a *psychological* need for such experiences, and that teachers should be encouraged and supported in assisting children to find these experiences through literature. In fact Cunningham (1997) argues that we can only truly understand ourselves through reading.

2.9 The teacher is key

Ultimately however, the teacher is the key factor in determining how successful a particular methodology or approach will be because good teaching is more important than approach. Savage (1994: 21) points out that quality instruction comes from inspired teaching that does not originate in a particular philosophy, theory, approach or programme. Whitehead (cited in Harrison, 1992: 25) found that the one factor that was more important than any other in developing avid readers was the teacher and sometimes it was just one in the whole school. The teacher was identified as “an important provider of encouragement, enthusiasm and resources. A teacher’s enthusiasm and encouragement are the greatest gifts they can share with the children they teach, for without them any amount of resources and knowledge may be potentially barren” (Harrison, 1992: 25).

2.10 Drawing conclusions

What are the pedagogic implications of accepting a balanced approach to the teaching of reading that includes a psychodynamic theoretical understanding of the nature of reading? It is clear that current reading teaching practice in most South African classrooms is not using a reading approach that "... attempts to bring together an emphasis on literature, meaning-making and enjoyment in learning to read" (Harrison & Coles, 1992: viii). A reading teaching strategy that fails to include a 'real books' approach is unlikely to be successful in making sure that learners become skilled, independent readers, which is the desired outcome.

According to Carter (2000: 1) the changing concept of reading as a set of skills to be learnt in a certain order, to an interactive process involving the reader, the text and the context, has led to efforts to determine instructional processes that enable learners to foster literacy growth. However there is not much evidence of this in classrooms in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Most South African schools still use the traditional, skills-based, phonics approach, based essentially on a behaviourist understanding that emphasize the decoding aspects of reading instruction and tend to neglect meaning. Phonics is explicitly taught through drill and choring. Learners can sometimes become fluent readers but they often read without real understanding. Teaching reading by relying solely on a skills-based approach, using contrived texts, in this decontextualised way is not effective. Unfortunately when schools have used this skills model and have seen reading primarily as a skills development process for so long, any departure from this is likely to be treated with suspicion or uneasiness (Savage 1994: 20). It is much easier to continue with something that is familiar.

Regardless of its 'technical merit' an instructional approach, whether in the field of reading or any other field, can only be justified as part of an overall educational philosophy. The subskills approaches dominating reading instruction in American schools are clearly rooted in a behaviourist philosophy, where concerns about the learner's mind or spirit are dismissed as irrelevant (Grundin, 1994: 77. cited in Lyster, 2003: 40).

If the *purpose* of reading is to gain meaning, not simply to recognize words rapidly (Harrison, 1992: 12) reading must be taught in a contextualised way. For young children meaning is all important. A book for them is a journey towards meaning, making sense of the world. Grundin's concerns about the learner's mind or spirit being dismissed as irrelevant should be taken seriously. It is the learner's mind and spirit that has to be engaged in the classroom, otherwise effective learning will simply not happen. However,

in spite of the importance of the inclusion of storybooks as part of reading teaching, schools seldom use a real books approach.

A balanced approach to reading teaching is possible, accommodating both a behaviourist, skills-based approach and a psycholinguistic, whole-language, 'real book' approach to reading. Reading skills do not have to be developed in a decontextualised way. It is important that the explicit teaching of reading skills is seen as a means of providing children with the tools that are necessary for the much more important task of reading for meaning. Moreover it is important to remember that children are individuals who do not all learn in the same way. One size does not fit all. Fluent readers simultaneously utilize a number of strategies in order to interpret texts and that depending on which strategy or strategies are regarded as most dominant, different conclusions are drawn about the most effective way to teach reading (Lyster, 2003: 39). We therefore require a reading methodology that offers children a number of different ways of learning to read. Teachers should understand that 'decoding' is a necessary reading skill but that it alone does not constitute reading because comprehension is the 'indispensable condition' of reading (Pretorius, 2000: 34).

The phonics and whole language approaches to the teaching of reading reflect the philosophical differences between traditional and progressive approaches to reading. A progressive approach such as Outcomes Based Education (OBE), values student-centred learning and teacher empowerment. A traditional approach relies on the transmission of knowledge and skills and is teacher centred. Many teachers are used to a traditional approach and find it difficult to change their teaching to fit the new policy.

If we teach reading using a skills-based approach (such as phonics) but ignore reading for meaning, and if we teach reading by emphasising meaning but ignore the teaching of the skills needed to decode words, then with either approach, there will always be children who do not learn to read effectively. Children are individuals and they learn to read in different ways. What has emerged from this debate and from recent research by cognitive psychologists is an argument for a balanced approach to reading acquisition.

2.11 Implications for this study

This study does not focus on the mechanical aspect of teaching children to read. It is concerned with looking at how to teach children to read for meaning. Using fiction/real books, to read aloud to children is one way to do this. It combines reading for meaning, with enjoyment in learning to read, and frees children from having to use their resources to

process information in order to recognize words. Energy can be focused instead on understanding the story. This will also allow children the freedom to give expression to their emotions and imagination.

Reading stories aloud requires teachers to shift from a traditional, transmission model of teaching to a transactional one. It also requires a change from a behaviourist to a psycholinguistic reading teaching approach. In addition, it is important to recognise that reading for enjoyment, using children's literature or 'real books', probably falls outside of many teachers' experience. Although these could be stumbling blocks to the implementation of this approach, it is possible that the teacher's enjoyment of the story, and desire to share it with learners, might be enough to overcome this.

Given our South African social context and the lack of a supportive literacy environment, we have to develop instructional processes that will provide the conditions that children require to enable them to engage meaningfully with books. Children need all the help they can get in order to become skilled, enthusiastic, self-motivated readers.

3. Aspects of the South African reading context

Pretorius, (2000: 33) refers to a headline in the Sunday Times (16 July 2000) that proclaims South African children as the 'dunces of Africa' and goes on to argue that on the basis of findings from local research, academic underperformance in South Africa stems mainly from poor reading skills. A recent article entitled *South Africa's children cannot read* (Mail & Guardian, 2007) refers to a Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) that was conducted in 40 countries. South African pupils achieved the lowest score with almost 80% not developing basic reading skills by the time they reach Grade 5. The figures were even higher for those children writing in the other nine official languages (excluding English and Afrikaans). Between 86% & 96% did not manage to attain even the low benchmark. (See Appendix J)

This section of the literature review looks at:

- Reading and academic success
- The lack of effective strategies to address the reading problem
- Two studies carried out in this field in a South African context
- The problem of English as the language of teaching and learning
- The social context

3.1 The link between reading and academic success

South African students at all levels are proving to be unskilled readers (Pretorius, 2000).

One of the reasons for the positive relationship between reading and scholastic success lies in the nature of reading and the kinds of linguistic-cognitive process necessary for skillful and meaningful reading. Another

reason lies in the role that reading materials (for instance storybooks...) play in learning in the contemporary world (Pretorius, 2000: 36).

Reading researchers make a distinction between the two main components of reading, namely decoding and comprehension (Pretorius, 2000: 33). In order to be proficient independent readers, learners must be able to do both efficiently. 'Learning to read' (decode) is difficult enough and many children do not master this successfully but reading for meaning (comprehension) is perhaps even more difficult. The transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' is not an easy one and does not always happen automatically (Pretorius, 2000: 34). Added to this is the fact that many teachers stop reading aloud to children as soon as they have learned to read, but before they have fully mastered the skill of reading. This is a critical phase in the reading development of a child. "If neither their home nor their school environment provides sufficient reading practice and exposure to books, a slump can occur in their reading" (Machet & Pretorius, 2003: 47).

It is important that teachers, other professionals and families do not stop reading to children at the point when they are just beginning to be able to read for themselves. ... Many less than confident young readers lose heart at this point ...(Whitehead, 1996: 86).

"Once children have been taught to read (that is, decode) in the early grades, reading as a language and information-processing skill is largely taken for granted" (Pretorius, 2000; 34). Pretorius goes on to say that "little intensive and sustained effort goes into developing comprehension skills" and that "[s]chools that emphasise reading skills beyond the early grades are the exception" (Pretorius, 2000: 34). This means that many learners do not develop the reading skills they need in order to become independent readers.

...to read independently ... is unlikely to emerge spontaneously in young children; rather it has to be learned through experience of reading with others over time. ...Likewise... (l)earning formal knowledge from reading involves independently recognizing and interpreting meanings... this (also) does not emerge spontaneously... (Rose, 2003: 4).

Researchers argue that reading is probably the most important skill for second language students in academic or learning contexts. However, although they learn to decode printed information, little attention is paid to the meaning of the text. They are also seldom exposed to storybook reading as children, and they have very little experience of the printed word before they start school (Pretorius, 2000). The children who usually do well at school are the ones who read a lot and who understand what they read. For example, children who are exposed to storybook reading before they go to school tend to have larger

vocabularies, greater general knowledge and better conceptual development than their peers. They learn to read and write more easily and quickly (Pretorius, 2000: 35).

In addition second language students often come from schools where resources are sparse and often poorly managed, so very few schools have adequate collections of narrative texts with which to attract children to the pleasure of reading, and to ensure that the decoding-comprehension interaction is accomplished. Furthermore the nature of the texts that pupils are required to read, changes from mainly narrative to the more conceptually difficult expository types of text thereby adding to the difficulties of those struggling to learn in a second language. Although language is the medium through which reading occurs, language is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for skilful reading. Learners who find reading difficult and frustrating lose motivation and read less, setting up a negative cycle. Poor readers are poor processors of information and this inhibits their academic success. Children who start off poorly in reading, rapidly become even more disadvantaged relative to other readers and the gaps become greater with increasing age (Pretorius, 2000).

Matjila & Pretorius, (2003. 3) tell us that "...reading is an ability that must be acquired and practiced through extensive exposure to written language" but we know that many learners do not get this and that even when resources are available, learners often have to be forced or bribed to read. Becoming a skilled reader takes time and a lot of effort because it is a difficult, complex process. Learners therefore need plenty of ongoing encouragement and support in order to master it successfully.

Many learners associate reading with effortful learning and are not inclined to read for pleasure. Yet it is through reading for pleasure that learners develop the reading skills that enable them to deal more easily with the more serious task of reading to learn (Matjila & Pretorius, 2003: 21).

3.2 The lack of effective strategies to address the reading problem

Although the South African government recognizes the importance of reading and has initiated a number of campaigns to establish a culture of reading, one of the recent examples being *Masifunde sonke*, these have not been a success (Baatjes, 2003; Keyser & Lyster, 2001). Baatjes, (2003) highlights the need for literacy education and a reading policy in South Africa. He argues that a national policy is needed that focuses specifically on reading but he says that what is lacking is the political will which is associated with the mobilization of resources. He makes the point that reading instruction is not readily available for learners in the higher grades and that it is incorrectly assumed that learners acquire basic literacy by the end of Grade 3 or 4 and goes on to say that more should be

done by the Department of Education to promote and encourage reading in schools. He believes that the development of a reading policy should incorporate the implementation of educator training programmes and the mass provision of books and reading support material. The biggest challenge is putting policy into practice (Baatjes, 2003). Keyser & Lyster (2001: 5) point to the government's failure to harness the most obvious target group in their *Masifunde sonke* reading campaign: the educators, even though they would be relatively easy to target and organise through existing structures.

3.3 Two South African studies

Two studies concerned with the promotion of reading and literacy development, that have been conducted in a South African context are, 'The Family Literacy Project' and a 'Promoting Reading' workshop. The first is an ongoing project working with learners from disadvantaged communities who have limited access to storybooks and lack a stimulating literacy learning environment. One of the components of the project is an out-of-school literacy enrichment programme. Findings so far indicate that learners were starting to acquire 'book behaviours' (Pretorius & Machet, 2003).

The second is a case study of a 'Promoting Reading' workshop. Keyser & Lyster (2001) conclude that a one-day workshop with educators can make a difference and that the demonstration and practice of techniques was the most effective aspect of the training workshop. What they found was important was the focus on practical skills and the provision of hard information. They go on to say that teachers in South Africa are generally under-trained, often de-motivated and do not particularly value reading. They believe that if efforts to promote reading are to be successful, teacher attitudes need to change; South African indigenous languages need to be validated; teachers need to be equipped with specific and practiced classroom skills and supplied with resources. They also point out that although the new curriculum implicitly favours a whole language approach to the teaching of reading, the majority of teachers continue to use phonic-based approaches, which rely primarily on drilling and chanting.

3.4 The problem of English as the language of teaching and learning

Although our South African constitution acknowledges the right of citizens to mother tongue instruction, the reality is that English is the language of teaching and learning in many South African schools, even in the early grades. Teachers and parents are anxious to make sure that learners become proficient in English because they equate the ability to speak, read and write in English with a magical key to success (Land, 1998/9: 9).

Lyster points out: “It is ... difficult if not impossible to use a whole language approach ... with learners who are not orally fluent in the language of instruction” (2003: 41), while Matjila and Pretorius (2003) argue that given the reality of the dominance of English, we should promote biliteracy. They agree that learning is easier in one’s primary language but nevertheless warn that switching to learning in one’s home language is not automatically going to improve matters because the problem is essentially about literacy. Because learners ultimately need to be biliterate, perhaps one of the best ways to get there is to promote bilingualism, which according to Lockett (1990) has no negative effect on cognitive development or on linguistic proficiency in the long run. There is an argument for allowing children to gain a solid grounding in their first language, referred to as cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP), but as soon as possible to begin to acquire basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) in the second language. The conclusion is that bilingualism should be promoted from as young an age as possible (Lockett, 1990: 9).

Foundation Phase teachers in particular are wrestling with this biliteracy/bilingual problem, and how they deal with this issue has serious consequences for learners as they move through the schooling system. Should teachers teach *biliteracy* from the beginning or should teachers focus on mother tongue literacy first. Should bilingualism be encouraged?

3.5 The argument for mother tongue literacy first

“...it is common cause that initial literacy instruction is most effective in the mother tongue...” (Lyster, 2003: 41). Basel in SAFIKA (1998/9: 17) says that “...learners should be made literate in their mother tongues initially, before moving into the learning of a second language.” However teachers complain that when learners then switch to English they are unable to cope. This is a thorny, emotive issue.

Lyster (cited in Basel, 1998/9: 17) refers to Mozambique’s failed attempts to short-cut literacy in the mother tongue. She says that it is more difficult to express concepts in a second language and that discussing concepts in a second language prevents the development of linguistic and analytical abilities in the mother tongue. Jaurequi (cited in Basel, 1998/9: 18) argues that from a pedagogical point of view, mother tongue literacy is better because it takes less effort to learn to read and write in the mother tongue, since the task concentrates on the acquisition of literacy skills and not on the learning of a second language. She also says that once reading skills have been acquired in the mother tongue [e.g. Zulu], they do not have to be relearned [in English]. This is because reading skills

that are developed in one language can always be transferred to another language (Pretorius, 2000: 37).

[I]t takes a long time for somebody to become literate in their mother tongue and even longer to acquire fluency in a second language. It is also not advisable to try and speed up the process by skipping over mother tongue literacy and only offering literacy in a second language (Lyster, 1990, cited in Basel, 1998/9: 17).

Learning to read and write is a difficult process, especially for children who do not come from a print rich environment so it is not a good idea “to learn to read and write at the same time as one is learning the language in which one is reading and writing” (French, 1980: 47). It is asking too much of most children. Chiwome and Thondhlana (cited in Basel, 1998/9) point to a major drawback of non-mother tongue instruction and that is that an insufficient mastery of English results in rote learning, a practice that is rife in our schools.

Pretorius (2000) draws our attention to the fact that learners change to English before they are fully literate in their mother tongue. They then proceed through a disadvantaged educational system that does not promote reading skills but relies instead on an oral transmission of information, on rote learning and verbatim recall that is often imperfectly understood. This immediately puts them at a disadvantage. Smyth (cited in Matjila & Pretorius, 2003: 5) argues that learners should be given the opportunity to develop academic language proficiency in their home languages so as to provide a sound conceptual and linguistic basis for future learning. There is therefore strong evidence to support the claim that learners should be made literate in their mother tongue first, rather than in English.

A pilot study conducted by Matjila & Pretorius, (2003) examined the reading abilities in Setswana and English of Grade 8 learners and their literacy practices and attitudes. They asked two questions: ‘How well do our learners read?’ and ‘Can they read equally well in the languages in which their bilingualism is being promoted?’ They say that the findings suggest that many of our learners are struggling with their reading, in both their home language and in English and say that the findings also support the argument that although reading and language proficiency are related, simply knowing a language does not guarantee that one can read effectively in that language. Reading is a specific meaning-construction skill that must be developed through extensive exposure to books. They conclude by saying that the findings indicate that the Grade 8 learners are not exposed to enough reading (Matjila and Pretorius, 2003: 19 & 20). Learners are therefore entering

high school without the kind of literacy skills that enable them to use reading as a powerful tool (Matjila and Pretorius, 2003).

If being proficient in a language does not guarantee that one can read in that language because language and reading are unique abilities (Matjila & Pretorius, 2003: 3), a distinction has to be made between the teaching of reading on the one hand, and teaching a second language on the other. Matjila & Pretorius, (2003) maintain that the problem is essentially about literacy rather than language. If this is the case then attention should focus on how best to teach children to read. As we have seen there is a strong argument for mother tongue literacy first. Using mother tongue literature to teach reading for meaning, together with a whole language approach, would be a useful way to do this.

The implication of this for teachers using the read aloud approach, is that ideally stories should be read and discussed in the mother tongue until learners are fully literate and only then should teachers switch to English as the language of teaching and learning. That is not to say that learners should not be exposed to English before this happens but that the primary focus of *initial* literacy teaching should be on mother tongue literacy and not on learning English as a second language. This is something that can be implemented in the primary schools if teachers understand how important it is, and if there is a will to do it . Schools should make sure that there is an adequate supply of mother tongue fiction books suitable for learners in the early grades. Although the pool of Zulu fiction is limited there are some good books available, and a conscious effort should be made to use as many of them as possible.

Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern (2003) argue that the presence of books in other languages sends a clear message about the status that schools and teachers attach to these languages. On this basis English appears to be highly valued, perhaps because as (Land, 1998/9: 9) points out, it is seen as “a magical key to success” and mother tongue, in this case Zulu, would appear to be undervalued. When schools do have a collection of fiction material, the books are mostly in English. Achieving literacy in one’s mother tongue first should be a priority. As much as many would prefer it to be otherwise, as Lyster (cited in Basel, 1998/9) has pointed out, there is no ‘short-cut’.

Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern (2003) also suggest that using bilingual books could help to foster literacy development for second language learners. In addition, where schools either do not have a Zulu fiction collection or have a very small one, but do have English fiction, teachers could read stories in English and make extensive use of code switching when

learners do not understand. Teachers in the lower grades could also translate directly from English storybooks as they read aloud.

Although our primary emphasis should be on mother tongue literacy, it is important to remember that literature can also be used to develop language skills, both mother tongue and second language, even though language and reading are unique abilities. Savage (1994: 375) asserts that the effectiveness of using literature in reading programmes for pupils whose first language is not English has been clearly demonstrated. He cites Elley and Mangubhai (1983) who tested the hypothesis that repeated exposure to high-interest, illustrated storybooks would produce rapid second-language learning. They placed hundreds of high –interest trade books written in English into classrooms in rural schools in Fiji. The effects of this ‘book flood’ showed that pupils who were exposed to literature progressed in reading and in listening comprehension at a dramatic rate, demonstrating the role that English literature can play in helping pupils learn English as a second language.

In another study Roser, Hoffman, and Farest (1990 cited in Savage, 1994) used children’s literature as part of a traditional language arts program for limited-English-speaking pupils from economically disadvantaged environments. They described their results as ‘very positive’ and declared that these students responded in the same positive ways as any student would – with enthusiasm for books, with willingness to share ideas, and with growth in language and literacy (Hoffman and Farest, 1990 cited in Savage, 1994: 375).

These studies suggest that English literature can be used to develop both literacy and language skills in those for whom English is a second language. Merchant (2001: 203) says that both monolingual and bilingual readers use the same reading strategies and concludes that there is no evidence to suggest that specially designed language and reading programmes, for those with English as an additional language, are any more effective than good primary practice in the teaching of reading. “Interest and enjoyment can overcome technical difficulties in reading” (French, 1980: 50). As well as developing mother tongue literacy, a literature-based, whole language approach could be used to develop English second language skills. What emerges from this is that attention should focus on the *quality* of both literacy and language teaching. It is also important to recognise that these are not the same thing, although literature can be used to teach both.

3.6 The social context

Compounding the reading problem still further is the link between literacy and disadvantage because low levels of literacy are linked to poverty (Pretorius & Machel,

2003:14). Whitehead (1996: 96) refers to the “close links between poverty and low literacy levels on reading ability” and according to Wilson (2004: 48) we have “sorely underestimated the role of environment in helping or hindering the development of reading and writing habits.” Many learners in the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal come from an environment characterized by both poverty and low levels of literacy and this hinders their reading and writing development.

3.7 Conclusion

Taking all these factors into account, how teachers teach literacy when children start school, is of crucial importance. The focus in the Foundation Phase should be on teaching children to read and write in their mother tongue. It is possible for children to learn a second language at the same time, but they should not be expected to read and write in that language until such time as they have mastered sufficient literacy skills in their mother tongue. For children from poor, illiterate backgrounds this could take much longer than one would normally expect.

4. The argument for reading aloud: ‘Reading aloud in school is not a frill’

As we have seen, using a ‘real books’ approach to teach children to read helps them to read for meaning and to experience reading as an enjoyable activity. Although there is a generally accepted understanding that reading stories aloud to children from an early age is beneficial for their development and provides a sound foundation for success at school, many children start school without having had this experience. They are also unlikely to have stories read to them once they get to school, even though this should form an essential part of literacy methodology, at the very least in Grade R and the Foundation Phase.

All teachers, in both the Foundation and Intermediate Phases, should read stories aloud on a regular basis. This will foster a love of reading and at the same time develop much needed reading skills. It is also a particularly helpful approach to use with second language learners because if children’s listening skills are greater than their reading skills up to the ages of 10-11 and longer for remedial purposes (Howe, 2003: 1) then it makes sense to continue to read aloud to children beyond the initial stages.

Children love listening to stories being read. This is not some revolutionary new discovery; it has been known for a long time and in enlightened schools it is an integral part of the primary school curriculum, but for some reason this practice is either not properly understood or is being forgotten in a ‘post-book’ world. Even those who are good readers enjoy listening to a well-read story. Freeman (1992: 2) sums up the value of reading aloud

when she says: “Reading aloud in school is not a frill.” We need to be reminded of the value of reading stories aloud to children.

4.1 Listening is easier than reading

Many children find reading difficult, and although they have to read in order to improve their reading skills, they are not inclined to read on their own. A practical and worthwhile way to overcome this problem is for teachers to read aloud to children.

...for many children, listening to a story is a lot easier than reading...listening can be an experience that surpasses reading and it is after all, where all story originates (Macpherson, 2004: 13).

This is because “with all the distractions of deciphering text, holding the book, turning pages etc taken away, the child is left with the sound of the words and the pictures in their mind. Understanding the text and improving vocabulary become effortless” (Macpherson, 2004: 13). Eccleshare (2003) refers to well-founded research, which shows that “people who visualise what they are reading are able to comprehend and remember more effectively than those who do not visualise. Children who listen to, rather than read books are released from the labour of decoding language, and this frees them to visualise more effectively”(Eccleshare, 2003:11).

Reading comprehension develops through exposure to storybook reading, initially mediated by an adult, and then increasingly through individual storybook reading ... (Machet & Pretorius, 2003: 14).

Learners are better at listening comprehension rather than reading comprehension right up to Grade 8, and beyond for poorer readers (Matjila & Pretorius, 2003). Reading aloud can therefore be used with much older children to help them to read for meaning.

4.2 An aid to understanding

Effective reading aloud aids understanding. “[W]hen teachers read to students they enhance students’ understanding and their inclination to read independently” (Ivey, 2003; 812). Addressing the teacher she says: “It is your knowledge about the world and your experiences that enable you to bring life to text” (Ivey, 2003; 813). Savage believes that it is expression that allows the reader to transmit full meaning to others (1994: 273).

Whitehead (1968) talks about the importance of creating in children a love for literature as a basic part of the educational process and believes that a literature programme should be

an intrinsic part of the total reading plan. One chapter of his book is devoted to explaining to teachers how they can effectively read such literature aloud.

It requires a teacher's voice - vital, warm, expressive - to transport the child - listener into the book, story, or poem itself, stir his emotions, stimulate his mind, and make the characters and scenes as real as the people and places he knows in real life (Whitehead, 1968: 88).

The practice of reading literature aloud to children in this way appears to have been largely forgotten.

Reading aloud is a skill that requires practice in order to capture and hold the attention of the audience. That means careful preparation and the ability to read fluently with understanding and expression.

Reading aloud well is an art which every teacher can master if she truly believes in the value of the activity, if she has a working knowledge of the techniques of the craft, and if she is aware of those books and stories that are most apt to meet the needs and interests of the children under her tutelage. When the teacher chooses *appropriate selections, properly interprets* them, and is conscious and considerate of her *audience's interests and needs*, the children will develop a lasting appreciation for literature (Whitehead, 1968: 90).

Much of this is unfamiliar territory for many teachers. Dennis Bailey (2002) in a newspaper article entitled, *Teaching teachers to read*, says that part of the problem is that the educators who teach learners to read, hardly ever read themselves and says that we need to arouse the appetite of teachers for books. He also says that the objective of teaching reading as a life-long skill must be institutionalized if we are to build a nation of readers. Teachers who have not had much, if any, experience of reading for pleasure might find reading children's books aloud in class an accessible and fun way to start. When they are reading stories aloud to their learners and demonstrating that this is an enjoyable, shared experience, they become powerful reading role models whether they read much outside the classroom or not.

4.3 Making the reading process visible

Because many learners in South Africa have not had the right kind of exposure to books and reading, either before they start school or in the primary school, they are entering high school without the literacy skills they require for effective learning. Jeanne Chall (cited in Matjila and Pretorius, 2003) argues that the reading abilities acquired through the *senior* primary school years are crucial to later academic success and says that if adequate reading

skills are not acquired during this period, then learners have difficulty using reading as a powerful learning tool.

Many teachers are not teaching the reading skills that are necessary for learners to be able to read effectively. Most children require help to become skilled readers and they are not getting it. Reading for meaning should be emphasised from the beginning, when children first start learning to read and this aspect of reading should continue to be emphasised once children have learned the mechanical skill of decoding. When parents and caregivers read stories to children before they start school, if they are lucky, it is the communicative/reading for meaning aspect of reading that is being developed. This is what is important. Because many children do not have stories read to them before they start school, it is up to teachers to make up for the lack of a rich home literacy environment. This is a very important responsibility and it is not too late to provide it when learners arrive at school for the first time. Children need exposure to books as soon as possible, as well as plenty of opportunities to practice their reading skills because research shows that the more you read the better you become at reading (Pretorius, 2000; Harrison 1992).

Reading aloud could help children who do not come from a reading culture. Howe (2003) believes that this approach is especially important for language deprived or English second language children. Learners who find reading difficult and frustrating lose motivation and read less, setting up a negative cycle. Teachers reading stories aloud could help to break this cycle. Hearing stories being read, even if they are not reading themselves, will help learners to become better readers. Learners who listen with a purpose develop comprehension skills and concentration. For unskilled readers storybook reading is not only a pleasurable activity but also an important learning tool (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 26).

4.4 Meaningful engagement with text

Reading involves the processing of text knowledge and that requires “cognitive information - processing abilities that promote the construction of meaning during the reading process” (Pretorius, 2000; 36). It is an active process that must actively involve the learner. The process involves “inferring, understanding, integrating and evaluating information...” (Pretorius, 2000: 37). To do this successfully children have to draw on their prior knowledge, experience, background and social context (Weaver, 1994). Because this is a difficult complex process, even for fairly skilled readers, many children require more time than they are given at school in order to master it successfully. “If children were not required to become independent readers until middle primary then most if not all children

would be ready for it” (Rose, 2003: 9). Most learners need help to process information and construct meaning. The skills necessary for skilled reading should therefore be developed as part of an ongoing process, so that learners are able to read increasingly difficult texts.

What is the process? The ‘reader’ has to infer/decide, based on evidence and reason, what message they think the text is conveying. This understanding is integrated/combined with the reader’s prior knowledge to form a whole. This combined understanding is then evaluated/assessed in order to form an idea of its value as information. Lyster (2003: 38) describes reading as involving perceptual (the reader’s ability to interpret what is read), cognitive (the reader’s ability to acquire new knowledge through thought), affective (the reader’s mood, feelings and attitudes) and social factors. This is how meaning is constructed. It is a process that learners have to internalize in order to read independently. Providing learners with the opportunity to practice this process, by allowing them to engage in an interactive way with the stories that are being read aloud, will help them to develop the particular cognitive skills required for reading for meaning. Teachers can help learners to process information and construct meaning by making the reading process visible in this way. This will help learners to master the skills they require to be independent readers.

It is important for teachers to provide a safe environment for this kind of discussion and interaction. When children are being asked for their opinions there are no right or wrong answers. They are not being ‘tested’. Also knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them, helps to develop learners’ ability to understand what is being read. Teachers must learn how to do this effectively in a way that makes the reading sessions a shared, pleasurable experience for both learner and teacher. This is the process that requires “subtle and sophisticated” (Campbell, 1992: 2) teaching techniques to be really successful.

One of the reasons why there is a reading problem in our schools is because our approach to reading teaching is unbalanced. The emphasis is on teaching phonics, even though reading for meaning is essentially what reading is all about. However, it is this aspect of reading that is largely missing in many of our schools. This is in spite of the fact that, because of a disadvantaged social context, children need intense literacy support not only when they start school but all the way through primary school, if they are to have any hope of entering high school with the literacy skills required for effective learning. Using storybooks (fiction; children’s literature) to read aloud can help children to develop the skills they need to read for meaning. It will also encourage them to read on their own.

4.5 Teacher agency in reading aloud

As has been highlighted earlier, the role of the teacher in reading teaching is of vital importance and this is particularly true of the reading aloud approach. Teachers have the potential to improve the quality of their reading teaching. Howe (2003) identifies a number of strategies for effective reading aloud. Reading aloud must be an enjoyable literary experience for both learner and teacher. The teacher must create an environment that is comfortable and stimulating, and promotes active listening (Howe, 2003: 2). She must select age-appropriate books, stories and poems and pre-read every selection before reading it aloud. She must develop reading strategies that enhance listening and comprehension and encourage reading for fun and she says it is important that the teacher enjoy the stories and the experience of reading aloud (Howe, 2003: 2 & 3). "I would expect all teachers of literacy to be passionate lovers of books and tireless campaigners for sharing books with children of all ages" (Whitehead, 1996: 96).

Many teachers regard reading as a leisure time activity and not as a legitimate classroom activity. "Reading is not a luxury or pleasure activity in which learners can indulge... Reading is the means whereby learning occurs" (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 27).

Teachers should be made aware of the fact that the language and information - processing skills required for reading, cannot be taken for granted, and that the complex process of reading for meaning must be actively taught. They should also be made aware of how important the transition phase is from 'learning to read to 'reading to learn' in order to ensure that newly acquired reading skills are consolidated, reinforced and extended. Above all they need to know that reading stories aloud in the classroom is a valuable, legitimate and necessary activity that will help to achieve this. It is good teaching practice and teachers can be shown how to do this successfully.

If we want children to read they have to fall in love with reading. They are unlikely to do this unless they have contact with real books (fiction/children's literature). Enthusiasm for books is contagious so if teachers have a positive attitude towards such books and reading, their learners will have too.

4.6 A model of reading behaviour

Teacher's reading aloud to pupils (if done well) provides them with a model of fluent oral reading (Savage, 1994: 275). Modeling could also be used to *indirectly* teach correct pronunciation in a second language context, where stress is important, not dialect and accent. Howe (2003) also refers to Vygotsky's theory that literacy develops in social

contexts with modeling and guidance from adults. Reading stories aloud in the classroom provides the social context and the opportunity to do this. The teacher becomes a reading role model.

4.7 Language outcomes and reading aloud

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS, 2002) languages outcomes require the development of the following skills: listening; speaking; reading and viewing; writing; thinking and reasoning; and language structure and use. The development of listening skills tends to be forgotten but it is an extremely important skill and must be taught. (See Appendix: E).

Teachers reading stories aloud and discussing them with learners, encourages them to think about and critically engage with the issues and themes in the stories they read and helps to develop learners' ability to think and reason. Learners can also be shown how to use the illustrations in storybooks to help them understand the text. By hearing a language read aloud learners are exposed to its structure and the way it is used. In addition, ask learners to write about their own experiences relating to the stories they read, and their thoughts and feelings about these stories, and all the NCS languages outcomes will have been covered.

4.8 The link between reading and listening skills

Research has shown that reading skills can be developed through listening. Howe (2003: 2) says that reading aloud works because listening is a learned skill and the skills involved in listening are essentially the same as reading skills. The child can focus on meaning rather than the mechanics of reading. This allows children to listen to books that would normally be too difficult for them to read on their own. In addition children's interest in books and reading is stimulated by reading stories aloud to them. Children who are read aloud to "become absorbed in story" (Macpherson, 2004: 13) and are more likely to move on to reading books on their own. "Lifelong enjoyment of reading is directly related to daily reading" (Taberski, 1998: 4).

Another reason to focus on the development of listening skills is because practice in developing this skill improves ability in the other three language areas, namely speaking, reading and writing (Howe, 2003: 5). Research shows that there is a relationship between listening comprehension and reading comprehension (Howe, 2003: 5). Reading and listening comprehension skills, such as main idea, details, sequence, and so on, are similar in many ways. This means that these skills can be taught through listening and can then be applied to reading. Listening also indirectly influences writing because stories children 'read' then become models for their writing.

Reading aloud to children helps them develop and improve literacy skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening, ... And since children listen on a higher level than they read, listening to other readers stimulates growth and understanding of vocabulary and language patterns” (Trelease, 2000).

Listening is the most basic and most used of the language modes (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 99). The other language modes are talking, reading and writing. Listening is the first language mode children acquire and provides the basis of the other language arts (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 70). From the moment we are born we use listening to begin the process of learning to comprehend and produce language. More time is spent listening, about 50%, than reading, writing or talking. Despite its importance, listening instruction has been neglected in elementary classrooms (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 99). It has been called the ‘neglected’ ... language art (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 70). Listening skills have to be actively developed because listening is more than just hearing (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 72). They are not synonymous terms; rather hearing is part of the listening process, which involves receiving, attending and assigning meaning (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 99).

Hoskisson and Tompkins (1987: 99) talk about a student’s need to attend to the speaker’s message and say that this varies with the listening purpose. Reading stories aloud not only emphasizes the importance of reading for enjoyment, it is also an important way to share literature. Researchers have learned that students can listen to 250 words per minute, 2 to 3 times the normal rate of talking (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 72). This means that listeners can become distracted during listening. By using *stories* to read aloud, listeners are more likely to attend to the speaker’s message. Reading aloud can therefore help to improve concentration.

4.9 The benefits of reading aloud

The benefits of reading stories aloud to children before they start school and in the early years of schooling are well documented. “Listening to a story being read or told from a book by a caregiver was strongly related to early reading success at school” (Pretorius & Machet, 2003: 2).

Research consistently shows that time spent reading and discussing stories provides children with opportunities to develop language activities that support literacy. Storybook reading provides opportunities for children to engage in extended discourse on a topic, it gives children access to world knowledge and conceptual development, and it provides exposure to vocabulary and syntactic structures not often encountered in other types of social interaction and communication (Machet & Pretorius, 2003: 14).

In a newspaper article *Reading storybooks at home leads to success at school*, Lilli Pretorius (circa 2002) provides a comprehensive list of the benefits of reading storybooks to children. (See Appendix: A) She concludes:

By reading storybooks to your children on a regular basis you will provide them with a rich language input, and this in turn will affect the quality of their own language development. From this input numerous interrelated language and cognitive skills develop, which together form the foundation for success at school (Pretorius, circa 2002).

Howe (2003: 1) also looks at the benefits of reading aloud. She refers to research that indicates the benefits of reading aloud and sums it up as follows:

- Reading aloud correlates with child's success in school
- Reading aloud builds the knowledge base needed for eventual success in reading
- Reading aloud creates a pleasure connection between the child and print
- Reading aloud enhances language comprehension and literary appreciation
- Listening skills are greater than reading skills until ages 10-11
- Use of read-aloud strategies improves student involvement and participation
- Cross modal transfer of skills between listening and reading

“The general conclusion is that reading aloud develops listening comprehension and language skills that children utilize when reading by themselves” (Howe, 2003: 236).

4.10 Reading aloud as a teaching strategy

Although listening to literature for enjoyment is reason enough to read aloud to children (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 90) reading aloud can also be used as an approach to reading teaching. For highly skilled readers, reading is more efficient than listening and they can read long texts with accurate understanding (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 48) but this is not the case for unskilled readers. Although decoding is often mistaken for reading, it is the comprehension aspect of reading that must be developed (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 10). It is also not just the act of reading a story that is important, but the *way* in which the adult (teacher) interacts with the child that is of benefit, because some ways of reading are more beneficial for the child's language and literacy development than others (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 23). It is important to *engage* the child in the story (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 23) and to understand that an adult's enthusiasm for storybook reading influences its effectiveness (Machet and Pretorius, 2003: 27).

Rose (2003) talks about using repetition and scaffolding as useful techniques to help learners to access the meaning of text. Repeated reading not only helps children to learn to read but also has an impact on school success (Taberski, 1998: 4). Researchers have found that children benefit in specific ways from repeated readings of stories (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 87). For a start children love familiarity. They gain better control over the text and are better able to comprehend what is being read. This understanding encourages discussion, and prompts comments rather than questions and the comments are more probing, which suggests greater insights into the story. Learners are able to engage with detail and word meanings (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 87). Reading favourite stories may have similar benefits for older students as well (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 88). Repeated readings are likely to work well in disadvantaged classrooms because this would assist in the process of accessing meaning.

Listening and *thinking* skills can be improved through active listening. Reading aloud can therefore also be used as a directed listening and thinking activity. Learners can make predictions about the story by asking questions about what might happen and as the story is read students can confirm or reject their predictions through reasoning and proving (giving reasons to support their predictions) (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 89).

When you read silently, ... (y)ou do whatever it takes to create an understanding of the text. You ask yourself questions, hypothesize and predict, make connections to what you already know and to what you have read, relate the information to personal experiences, and keep a check on whether or not you truly understand as you read. Engaging students in these processes with you as you read to them not only helps them think about the text but also tips them off to how they can read more thoughtfully on their own." (Ivey, 2003: 813)

Reading aloud allows for reflective discussions and the development of higher level thinking skills. Discussions help learners to think about the story and student involvement leads to greater learning. Teachers should guide discussions with questions that prompt students to think more about the story. The emphasis should not be on factual recall questions (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 91). Teachers' questions can help students to think critically and probe more deeply into the meaning of the story thus developing higher level thinking skills. Learners also need to learn how to justify their responses.

Teachers should ask inferential questions that are designed to "free the students from the tyranny of correct responses" (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 97) and should link the stories to their students' own experiences. These skills are important because 'critical

listeners become critical readers' (Howe, 2003: 4) but these skills are difficult to teach and depend on the ability of the teacher to help learners respond to the text. The teacher's questioning technique is therefore critical if this is to be successfully achieved. Therein lies the rub because many teachers are unable to do this effectively. Teachers could also use reading aloud as a technique in the intermediate grades in order to promote thoughtful reading and content learning (Ivey, 2003: 812).

4.11 The question of resources

Research shows that the ratio of books to learners is linked to reading ability and academic success (Trelease, 1982: 3) but access to books is problematic for many learners from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Reading aloud is one way to deal with this problem. It is possible to develop an outstanding read-aloud programme in an impoverished school district because it is not about cost.

“Reading to children costs nothing! No matter how poor the community, it costs nothing for a teacher to read to a class. They take their library card, borrow a book, and then read to the class. Money has nothing to do with it” (Trelease, 2000: 3).

Although it could be argued that it would be difficult for teachers in rural areas to access public libraries, my experience of working with, and talking to teachers, suggests that this is possible. In addition, as an ELITS advisor, I actively encourage schools to use their Norms and Standards allocation to buy library resource material, as required by the ELITS School Library Policy. This is money allocated to a school, which they can use to buy Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM). This is meant to include library resource material, though in the minds of many, LTSM means textbooks. Because a teacher only has to have one copy of a book, it is possible to have a variety of exciting titles. Not many schools have adequate collections of suitable storybooks. The problem is one of convincing principals that they are required to establish a library budget and spend a portion of their Norms and Standards money in this way. Schools are used to spending large sums of money buying textbooks for each child, not library resource material. A reading aloud approach helps to overcome the problem of a lack of resources because the teacher only needs *one* book which can be read to a large class. Because children should not develop more than one skill at a time (Eccleshare, 2003) they do not each need a copy of the book. Children should not follow the words as the story is being read. Reading aloud in this way will therefore provide the opportunity for children to visualise the story for themselves.

4.11.1 Choosing the right books

Selecting the right books to read aloud is obviously important. Teachers should choose books that they like and that they think will appeal to their learners. Jim Trelease, author of *The read aloud handbook* (1982), suggests four ...criteria of good read-aloud books. They should be:

- (a) Fast-paced to hook children's interest as quickly as possible
- (b) Contain well-developed characters
- (c) Include easy-to-read dialogue
- (d) Keep long descriptive passages to a minimum" (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 86).

The criteria for selection should be the child's enjoyment and good, well written stories that are entertaining and age-appropriate. (See Appendix: B for Phinn's list of criteria.)

4.12 Conclusion

Research provides us with convincing evidence that reading aloud to children is beneficial for both their reading and language development. The link between listening and reading skills allows teachers to use an approach to reading that children enjoy. Add to this the benefits of reading aloud in a second language context and it should be enough to convince them that this is a worthwhile approach and should form an integral part of the school curriculum, especially in the primary school. This understanding should therefore result in better reading practice. It is particularly important that teachers understand the value, not only of reading stories aloud to children from the time they arrive at the school gate in Grade R or Grade One, but that they also understand the value of continuing to read stories aloud to children once they have learned to read. This is necessary in order to promote a culture of reading and to facilitate the transition to reading to learn.

Teachers should be encouraged to develop the skills required to make reading stories aloud in the classroom a successful teaching technique. Ivey's question, "Is reading to students just a substitute for student independent reading, or can it be a valuable link to it?" (Ivey, 2003: 814), is easily answered. Reading aloud is a valuable link to independent reading and in my view, would go a long way to help to prevent many of the reading and language problems children experience. I cannot think of a more enjoyable classroom activity than sitting and listening to stories being read aloud in a way that captures interest and attention, mind and spirit, so that the listener/reader becomes lost in the powerful magic of the storybook. "[C]hildren think they are just listening to a story!" (Howe, 2003: 240). They are in fact doing much more.

5. Possible counter arguments to reading stories aloud

In an interesting book called *Freakonomics* we are told that Levitt (2005) approaches economics in a notably unorthodox way. He seems to look at things not so much as an academic but as a very smart and curious explorer and believes that the conventional wisdom is often wrong (Levitt and Dubner, 2005: x & 13). The aim of the book is 'to explore the hidden side of...everything' and the authors assert that there is nothing like the sheer power of numbers to scrub away layers of confusion and contradiction if you learn to look at the data in 'the right way' (Levitt and Dubner, 2005: 14). Levitt says that people may lie 'but that numbers don't'(Levitt and Dubner, 2005: 17).

In the chapter on 'What makes a perfect parent', Levitt and Dubner (2005) refer to a 'monumental project' called the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) undertaken by the U.S. Department of Education in the late 1990's. It sought to measure the academic progress of more than twenty thousand children from kindergarten through the fifth grade. We are told that the subjects were chosen from across the country to represent an accurate cross section of American schoolchildren. It produced 'an incredibly rich set of data' which they say could tell some surprising stories if the right questions are asked of it. Using a statistical technique called regression analysis, they claim that the data can be made to tell a reliable story that can demonstrate correlation but not cause. One of their results show that parents regularly reading to a child, does not affect their test scores and that it isn't so much a matter of what you do as a parent, as who you are (Levitt and Dubner, 2005: 172 & 175).

This would seem to suggest that reading stories aloud to children is not beneficial for their reading development. However Krashen (2005/2006) has responded to Levitt and Dubner's claim by saying that the sample used for the research produced a 'ceiling effect'. Scores were bunched near the top which means that it is impossible to determine if those read to more did better than those read to less because so many children in the sample were read to a lot. He concludes that the Levitt & Fryer study on which Levitt & Dubner's claim is based, cannot give us any useful information about the relationship between reading aloud and school success.

Freakonomics does not cite the considerable amount of research that shows that read-alouds do help, studies that do not suffer from the same methodological problem that Levitt & Fryer's study does (Krashen, 2005/2006: 1).

Krashen (2005/2006: 2) refers to experiments in which one group of children is read to considerably more than another and says that read-alouds have been a consistent winner in this research. Although Krashen acknowledges that *Freakonomics* has many virtues he says that Levitt & Dubner's error is serious because it dismisses a practice that both readers and children enjoy and that has a powerful and positive influence on literacy development.

One can also question the nature of the tests that were used to establish test scores. Ousbey (1992) refers to schools being particularly concerned with accountability, testing and competition and cites Kieran Egan who reminds us that when we deal with children's fantasies we are dealing with "the early forms and early developments of the most profound and fundamental concepts that we use to make sense of the world and of experience" (Ousbey, 1992:37). So the knowledge which comes first to people and which remains most deeply ingrained is not knowledge of 'how to do': it is of the fundamental categories upon which we learn increasingly to make sense of anything in the universe and in human experience (Egan cited in Ousbey, 1992: 37).

This is not something that is amenable to empirical testing. Neither is critical reading which Flanagan describes as the apex of the reading hierarchy and which she says involves that element which cannot easily be regimented or ordered (1980: 63). Also many of the benefits of reading aloud might only emerge later, as was the case with a study of children of adoptive parents (Levitt and Dubner, 2005: 176).

Another counter argument is that some might argue that this kind of reading takes up too much time in an already crowded timetable. My response to this is that reading is a priority - there is a national reading crisis - and must be given time ahead of other subjects if necessary. Reading is a foundational skill that involves more than the ability to decode. Learners who are unable to understand what they read cannot succeed in school. Time cannot be used as an argument. What could be challenged is the reading approach itself. Schools should make time on their timetable for teachers to read aloud. In the primary school there should be a dedicated period every day devoted to reading aloud and discussion, and high schools should allocate one period per week or per cycle to do the same.

Others might argue that reading stories aloud to children stops them reading themselves. This is a misconception. This approach *encourages* children to read books themselves. The enjoyment they get from hearing the stories read aloud makes them want to read. Teachers reading stories aloud is in no way a substitute for children reading on their own.

Listening to a story being read aloud is a bridge to independent reading. It is a means to an end as well as being an end in itself.

Yet others might argue that it is unrealistic in an age of electronic media and visual bombardment, to focus on teachers reading stories aloud to children. It is precisely because we live in such an age, the information age, that reading skills have to be nurtured and reinforced. Whether you are reading a book for enjoyment, or reading information on the internet, you have to be able to read and understand what you are reading. It is also important to be critically aware of what you are reading. Asking questions and discussing the stories that are read aloud with learners, helps to develop this skill.

It is possible that teachers will think that reading stories aloud in the classroom for fun is not a legitimate classroom activity. This could be because the benefits of reading aloud are not immediately visible (Machet & Pretorius, 2003) or it could also be that what is being learned is not easily quantifiable (Ousby, 1992). I agree with Artley (1996) about those who would take issue on this point. Teachers need to understand the reading process, and that the primary function of reading is to create meaning. They should be reassured that reading aloud is good teaching practice, and reminded that children's literacy skills have to be developed and nurtured 'before, during and long after' they have learned to decode, particularly if those learners are in a difficult second language context. If this support is not provided, they are not going to become efficient readers.

Many could argue that schools do not have the resources that are required to implement this reading approach. As we have seen, reading aloud is one way of overcoming the lack of resources in schools, although this is not a solution. Learners need a rich literacy environment which means that they should have access to a lot of books. Keyser and Lyster (2001:1) refer to research that shows that "flooding" poorly resourced schools that have poor scholastic achievement, with suitable reading books and introducing a compulsory reading period, had a significant effect not only on language ability but also surprisingly, on numerical ability, even without teacher development. The most successful results were attained in schools where teacher development accompanied the provision of books.

6. Conclusion

We can exploit children's enjoyment of stories and their psychological need for this kind of experience, to encourage and motivate them to read. If children find reading dull and difficult they will be reluctant readers. The desire to read can be kindled by teachers reading children's literature aloud for enjoyment as part of a school's reading programme.

Enticing children into reading in this way will help them to develop the skills that they need for meaningful reading. Because teachers are the key to the success or failure of this approach, it is important that teachers also enjoy the stories and the experience of reading aloud. If teachers are aware that reading is not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself, they are more likely to accept a reading aloud approach.

In classrooms where teachers honour literacy, they provide activities that entice children to want to read (Morrow, 2004: 6).

Although learning to read is an important part of the total reading programme, it is nevertheless as Artley (1996) says, only a *part* that serves as a *means* to interpretation rather than as an *end* of reading instruction. Teachers have to understand this.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

1. Methodology framework

The reading intervention was an attempt to change teacher reading practice by the inclusion of a whole language, 'real books' approach to reading that relies on teachers reading aloud regularly in the primary school classroom. In order to do this I had to determine teacher practices and attitudes to reading prior to the intervention and then evaluate the intervention to ascertain how effective it had been. This study therefore draws on an interpretive approach to Social Science research because it seeks to understand and describe, in a meaningful way, teacher practices and attitudes to reading, as well as the effectiveness of a reading intervention (Neuman 2000: 85). It uses evaluation research as the methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of the short reading intervention.

The distinction between basic or academic research and applied research is one of degree – it is more a question of perspective and intention. More applied research, such as social problems research, takes a certain problem in the social world as its point of departure. Its primary purpose is to solve a social problem or to make a contribution to real-life issues (Mouton, 1996: 105). This study uses an interpretivist approach to social science research. Interpretive social science can be traced to German sociologist Max Weber (cited in Newman, 2000: 70) who argued that social science should study meaningful social action, or social action with a purpose. It is often called a qualitative method of research (Neuman, 2000: 71).

[T]he interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct and detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain social worlds (Neuman, 2000: 71).

Neuman (2000: 71 - 75) provides a useful description of Interpretive Social Science. The interpretive approach adopts a practical orientation. As an interpretive researcher I wanted to learn what reading teaching methodology was considered meaningful or relevant to primary school teachers in Ilembe and what their reasons were for thinking this way. The Ilembe District is largely a 'deep' rural area, characterized by unemployment and poverty,

with most learners coming from homes with little or no literacy support. This district forms the 'social context of action'. Teachers' construct meaning and create interpretations about how to teach reading through their daily interaction with learners in this context, and this forms their 'social reality'. Important questions are: What do teachers believe to be true? What do they see as being relevant to reading teaching? How do they define their approach to reading teaching? Common sense told me that something was not right about the way in which teachers approached reading teaching. I suspected that most had a very limited understanding of how to teach reading and that their reading methodology did not include reading stories aloud to their learners.

Evidence in interpretive social science cannot be isolated from the context which means that appropriate meaning can be assigned to an act or statement, only if the social context in which it occurs is taken into account. It is also important for me as the researcher to have a sympathetic understanding of this context and of teacher actions. This research does not try to be value free. The researcher's proper role is to be a "passionate participant" (Guba and Lincoln, cited in Neuman, 2000: 75), involved with those being studied.

Interpretive social science sees the nature of social reality as fluid and created by human interaction. In the context of this study it is a description of how a group's meaning system - in this case teachers - is generated and sustained in relation to the teaching of reading. Those being studied believe that their reading approach feels right (Neuman 2000: 85). Neuman (2000: 75) sums up the interpretive approach saying that it is the foundation of social research techniques that are sensitive to context and that use various methods to get inside the way others see the world.

Because the intention of this reading intervention was also to change teacher reading pedagogy by providing teachers with the understanding and tools they need to improve their practice, and because it was hoped that this improvement would benefit and change society in some small way, this study can also be seen as a critical approach to research. It is informed by theory that hopes to 'unveil illusions' in that teachers should be made aware that reading is about more than its usefulness and mechanical instruction. It begins with a value position that teachers are not doing enough to teach children to become skilled, independent readers. The School of Education Training & Development (2004: 12) definition is that this kind of research will bring about change that will benefit the oppressed and that it does more than simply describe or understand the way the world works. It attempts to change society so that it becomes a more equal and democratic place for everyone. This is perhaps a useful moment to remember what Ehrenreich (cited in

Morrow, 2005: 5) said about the contribution that teachers could make to society. By focusing on developing learners' capacity to read and to learn from reading, teachers will help to overcome a problem of growing inequality, otherwise "this country will be torn apart".

People working within an interpretivist approach believe that the world is changeable and that it is people who define the meaning of a particular situation. (School of Education, Training & Development, 2004: 13). The link between the interpretive and critical approaches to social science research is that if teachers' reading reality is 'fluid and created by human interaction' (Neuman 2000: 85) as a result of the teacher training they have received, then it is amenable to change. It can be changed. Critical researchers differ from others less in the research techniques they use than in how they approach the research problem, the kind of questions they ask and their purpose for doing research (Neuman, 2000: 81 – 82). They are concerned that their research *empowers* people to change the society in which we live. (School of Education, Training & Development, 2004: 51). This reading intervention was designed to empower teachers by giving them the skills and understanding they require in order to teach reading effectively. Although the intervention was intended to empower teachers, this study cannot be considered empowerment evaluation because the teachers themselves have not been involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention (Mouton, 1996: 161).

Teaching children to read certainly is dangerous, for a child who is an independent reader is a powerful person, and much more likely to be a challenging critic of what he or she reads, and may well learn from books that teachers and authors can be wrong. Once we teach children to read, and give them independence, we cannot teach them how to respond to what they read; we give up that right. Teachers have known for some time what always comes as a surprise to politicians: real education *is* dangerous (Harrison, 1992: 25-26).

The three worlds framework (Mouton, 2001) is a useful way to understand the development of this research process. This study arises out of 'World One', which is the world of everyday life and lay knowledge. As such it reflects the social and practical problems of everyday life and I have outlined in the rationale section the personal journey in relation to reading, that led me to the point where I decided to enter 'World Two' in order to explore in greater depth the troubled issue of how to teach reading. This is the world of science and scientific research. Once I had entered this social scientific world I located my research firmly within Psychology as a body of knowledge and set about attempting to; understand the theoretical framework that informs it, identifying the research

methodology that I would use and designing the research process in order to answer the key research questions. This study does not have any pretensions about entering 'World Three', the world of meta-science and its different ways of understanding the world.

2. Key aspects of evaluation research

What is evaluation research? It should be noted that I am using the term evaluation research rather than evaluative research. Bless and Higson-Smith, (2000: 154) describe evaluation research as: "Social research designed to investigate whether a particular project or intervention has met its stated objectives and how the effectiveness of that project might be improved." When the methods of social science are used to assess the design, implementation and usefulness of social interventions, this type of research is called evaluation research (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000: 49). Beals (2003) describes evaluation research as a powerful tool for education researchers. She says that it is through evaluation research that the process of reflection and learning-in-action can occur for many practitioners in the field of education: from policy to classroom and teacher practice.

Any attempt to change the conditions under which people live (no matter how simple, or who is responsible for them) can be thought of as a social intervention. One of the central concerns of social research is action. Evaluation research aims to test interventions to see how effective they are and therefore represents an important means of linking action and research in a constructive manner. Comprehensive and integrated programme evaluation, which uses diagnostic, formative and summative evaluation, maintains ongoing effectiveness, facilitates flexibility in response to changing circumstances and ensures credibility and the ongoing existence of programmes (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000: 55).

During diagnostic evaluation, background circumstances highlighting the need for an intervention as well as the forces that are expected to influence the intervention, are identified (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000: 55). This can be said to be true of this research. I identified a problem arising out of a particular context and tried to anticipate 'the forces' that could influence the intervention so that the reading intervention had some chance of being successful.

2.1 Formative and summative evaluation

My study has elements of both implementation and outcome evaluation ie. both formative and summative aspects. It is evaluating the outcome of a short reading intervention that

has been designed to meet a need and that is sensitive to the context. The intervention itself was part of a formative process in that I adjusted my presentation to suit conditions although this did not interfere with the substance of the workshop. As the workshops progressed I found myself spending less time on trying to convince teachers of the value of the approach - they appeared to like and accept it - and concentrate more on how they could overcome the problems of implementing it eg the lack of resources, their own teaching approach and possible resistance from other colleagues and principals.

It is formative also insofar as the research refers to those aspects of the reading intervention that appear to be most effective in helping teachers to meet the goals of the intervention. These were things like practical demonstrations and opportunity for teacher practice, as well as sensitivity to the teachers' context by trying to provide practical, workable solutions to problems that might be encountered. It is summative in that it seeks to know how successful the intervention was in achieving its goals, how effective it was, and in the attempt to identify those aspects which were the most effective (Bennett, 2003: 64).

2.2 Models and approaches in educational evaluation

The majority of evaluation studies draw on more than one approach or model in educational evaluation (Bennett, 2003: 16). Lawton (1980, cited in Bennett, 1983) developed a taxonomy of six models of education evaluation. The two most contrasting models are provided by the classical research model and illuminative evaluation (Bennett, 2003: 40). These models of educational evaluation are characterized by a specific approach to evaluation design or to a particular set of circumstances to be evaluated. (Bennett, 2003:17)

This study has features of both. The illuminative model uses the more descriptive approaches originally developed by Parlett and Hamilton (1972, 1976) and often takes the form of a case study (Bennett, 2003: 18). My study has elements of this model of evaluation. Parlett and Hamilton (Bennett, 2003: 26) argue strongly against classical approaches to evaluation because they say the notion of matching groups for experimental purposes is impossible in education settings, first, because there are so many potentially important variables that would need to be controlled, and second, because it is impossible to determine in advance what all the relevant variables might be in any particular situation. They suggested an approach that allows innovations to be studied in context, without the need for parallel control groups, which is what this study does. Such an approach, they contend:

... takes account of the wider contexts in which educational innovations function ... its primary concern is with description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction (Bennett, 2003: 26 & 27).

However my study does not set out to generate hypotheses and theories from *within* the data that has been gathered, which is what illuminative evaluation seeks to do, nor is it strictly, a case study.

Bennet, referring to applied research, which involves the testing of theories and hypotheses, says that it could be argued that any new programme aimed at improving practice is an hypothesis about teaching, and evaluation involves testing that hypothesis (Bennett, 2003:15). Applying this very broad view of the classical research model, I have generated an hypothesis that says that it is possible to improve teachers' reading methodology by introducing them to a workable reading approach to use in the classroom and I am 'testing' it by evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention. However I did not use an empirical, quantitative approach arising out of a positivist paradigm to do this because my study is located within social science research. I cannot predict the outcome of the 'tested' data. The subjects of the research are people, in this case teachers, and they do not behave in predictable ways. As the researcher I cannot stand apart from the subject of the research, in order to provide the same kind of objective distance that a natural science researcher can. Because the researcher 'interprets' data relating to people not objects, the data cannot be 'objective' as is expected of a scientific approach. (School of Education, Training & Development, 2004: 42)

Two key concepts in illuminative evaluation are the instructional system and the learning milieu (Bennett, 2003: 27). The instructional system is an idealized specification of a programme (intervention) which includes a set of pedagogic assumptions (assumptions about teaching and learning) and details of techniques and equipment. The learning milieu is the network of cultural, social, institutional and psychological factors which affect the environment in which students and teachers work together. Parlett and Hamilton (Bennett, 2003: 27) argue that the concept of this learning milieu is central to evaluation as it is necessary for analyzing the interdependence of learning and teaching, and for relating the organization and practices of instruction to the immediate and long-term responses of students. Both these concepts have relevance in this research. I have developed a reading approach based on a set of pedagogic assumptions and it was designed with an awareness of some of the cultural, social, institutional and psychological factors that affect the

environment that forms the context of this research. The ‘students’ in this case of course are the teachers.

A key issue of concern with the illuminative approach is the influence that those conducting an evaluation have over the nature of the data collected. This places into question the reliability and validity of the data and the extent to which both the data and the interpretation are ‘objective’ rather than reflecting the views of the evaluators, which in this case is myself as the researcher (Bennett, 2003: 28). These issues will be addressed when I discuss the data collection approaches and techniques.

It is worth noting that Hargreaves (1996, cited in Bennett 2003: 37) argues that teaching should become a research-based profession and accuses researchers of producing ‘inconclusive and contestable findings of little worth’. There are some who would agree that much educational research is ‘unscientific’ and that it fails to ‘deliver the goods’ in terms of making recommendations for practice which can be implemented with confidence (Bennett, 2003: 36). Bennett points to recent trends and developments in educational evaluation that appear to be going back to the more experimental approaches to evaluation.

On the other hand, Bennett (2003: 39) cites a report by Shavelson and Towne, (2001) that considers the merits of a number of approaches to research and evaluation and they conclude that, “approaches which generate more descriptive and explanatory findings also have an important part to play in educational research and evaluation”. This research does not attempt to draw on ‘the experimental techniques of the natural sciences’, Hargreaves’ (1996, cited in Bennett, 2003: 36) criticism of ‘unscientific’ education research notwithstanding. It seeks instead to ‘generate more descriptive and explanatory findings’ in the hope that these might provide some useful insights into the education endeavour, in particular to reading pedagogy. This study therefore uses a qualitative, interpretive approach for the reasons that have already been outlined.

Trochim (2006) refers to four kinds of evaluation strategies. It is useful to look at each of these in relation to this study.

1. Scientific-experimental models which are about testing hypotheses.
2. Management-oriented systems models, which emphasise comprehensiveness in evaluation, placing evaluation within a larger framework of organizational activities.
3. Qualitative/anthropological models that emphasise the importance of observation, the need to retain the phenomenological quality of the evaluation

context, and the value of subjective human interpretation in the evaluation process. This category includes 'naturalistic' or 'Fourth Generation' evaluation; the various qualitative schools; critical theory and art criticism approaches; and the 'grounded theory' approach of Glaser and Strauss.

4. Participant-oriented models which emphasize the central importance of the evaluation participants.

I have already discussed the first of these. The second evaluation strategy that uses a management-oriented systems model is useful for locating this study within a larger education organizational structure and provides an interesting perspective. The reading intervention occurred at a school and district level within a district, provincial and national framework. Although the intervention took place in a particular context, the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal, within what was then the ELITS regional sub-directorate, there is no reason why, from an education organization point of view, this reading intervention could not be replicated in other districts, either as part of ELITS or as part of the Educator Human Resource Development sub-directorate (EHRD). Learners' poor reading skills, is a national, not a localized problem.

As we have seen, this study is located within the third class of strategies, in particular in a qualitative model that is based on the value of 'subjective human interpretation' in the evaluation process. I am using the term 'naturalistic' as it relates to a qualitative understanding of evaluation. This study is not a participant-oriented model because the teachers who were part of the intervention have not been involved in the evaluation of the intervention.

Battles rage between these different strategists, with each claiming the superiority of their position (Trochim, 2006). My study supports Trochim's common sense view.

In reality, most good evaluators are familiar with all four categories and borrow from each as the need arises. There is no inherent incompatibility between these broad strategies – each of them brings something valuable to the evaluation table. In fact in recent years attention has increasingly turned to how one might integrate results from evaluations that use different strategies, carried out from different perspectives and using different methods. Clearly, there are no simple answers here and the methodologies needed will and should be varied (Trochim, 2006).

2.3 Levels of evaluation

Oakley, Pratt & Clayton (1998: 36) refer to three levels of evaluation namely: direct effects, wider effects and impact. They say that in the first instance it is important not to confuse 'impact' with 'effect' saying that the latter refers to the more immediate outcome brought by an intervention, the former to longer term change. They refer to impact assessment as the last stage of a monitoring and evaluation process and say that it is rarely reached. This is not an impact study. The research does not attempt to discover the impact of the intervention. For example it has not measured learners' reading ability before and after the reading intervention in order to discover whether the intervention had an impact on their reading ability. It has attempted instead to find out if a short reading intervention can change teachers attitude to reading and their reading pedagogy. This study is therefore concerned with the first level of effectiveness, evaluating the direct effects of the intervention. The information gathered could be used to help with decision making about how to follow-up on the intervention and how to improve on it.

2.4 Qualitative research study

This research falls within a qualitative research framework. Mouton (2001: 161) describes qualitative (or 'naturalistic') approaches as involving the use of predominantly qualitative research methods to describe and evaluate the performance of programmes in their natural settings, focusing on the process of implementation rather than on (quantifiable) outcomes. Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories. (School of Education, Training & Development, 2004: 142)

Qualitative research tends to be associated with words as the units of analysis rather than numbers, and description rather than analysis. It is associated with small-scale rather than large-scale studies, holistic perspective rather than specific focus, researcher involvement not researcher detachment, and emergent research design rather than a predetermined research design (Denscombe, 2003: 232-235).

My study is associated largely with words although there is quite a strong quantitative/number element in the reading questionnaire and to a lesser degree in the workshop evaluation. I describe the effectiveness of the reading intervention but also provide analysis. It is a small-scale study. I have not isolated variables and focused on specific factors. Instead I have seen things 'in context' and as related and interdependent. Whether or not teachers adopt the reading aloud approach depends on a number of factors and variables and it would not be helpful to the study to exclude them. I need to know what

they are. As the researcher I am very much involved in the study. This is one of the limitations of this study. My research design emerged out of my experience and a particular context. I identified the need for a reading intervention, which arose partly as a result of my experience of working in schools that had been disadvantaged during apartheid, and which still carry that legacy. The design of the reading intervention emerged out of an understanding of that context. I was concerned about providing a reading intervention that could work, given the circumstances. Once I had a clear idea of how to do this I put together my research design. This meant that the *kind* of research problem ultimately determined the *logic* of the study. The nature of the research problem therefore determines what will constitute *adequate* evidence (Mouton, 1996: 72).

In order to look at the problem of how to improve teacher reading practice this had to be a qualitative research study, which involved the use of predominantly qualitative research methods to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of the reading intervention. I used a number of research techniques and instruments to do this. Although this is a qualitative study, the research instruments include *quantitative* questions, especially the reading questionnaire, where only 8 of the 30 questions are qualitative. The workshop evaluation is mixed and the interviews and observations are qualitative. My research falls broadly within the ‘naturalist’/ ‘interpretivist’/ ‘qualitative’ paradigm as set out in Oakley’s (2000) summary table. (See Appendix: C)

2.5 Undertaking an evaluation

Bennet (2003: 61) has a chapter devoted to planning and doing an evaluation and has a useful list of questions. It is worth bearing these in mind.

- What is being evaluated?
- What form will the evaluation take?
- What practical issues need to be taken into account?
- What questions will the evaluation address?
- What use will be made of the findings?
- What types of data will be collected to help answer the evaluation questions?
- What techniques will be used to gather the data?
- Who will gather the data?
- What ethical considerations need to be addressed?
- How will the evaluation be reported?

2.6 Evaluation techniques

Bennett (2003: 6 & 7) draws attention to the close link between innovation and evaluation in education and says that education innovations need to be evaluated by asking questions that can inform decision making. She points out that it is important to note that people use different evaluation terminology and have different perspectives on the nature and purpose of evaluation. For the purpose of this study I am using the term intervention, not innovation or programme. Bennett (2003) points to two main reasons why evaluation is undertaken and they are to determine the effectiveness of a new programme once it has been implemented, and to gather information for improving the programme as it is being developed. Evaluation therefore involves learning about an intervention through gathering information and linking this to decision making. This study involves evaluating a reading intervention by collecting and analyzing data, reaching some sort of conclusions about the data and using the findings to make recommendations.

There are a variety of evaluation methods and there is debate about theoretical issues which focus on the value of different approaches to evaluation and the nature and purpose of the data collected (Bennett, 2003: 62). Evaluation is most effective when a multi-method approach is adopted: in other words, an approach that draws on a variety of perspectives on evaluation and also employs a range of research strategies and techniques to gather different forms of data (Bennett, 2003: 1). The techniques of evaluation can be used to assess the effects of an intervention (Bennett, 2003: 8).

This evaluation aims to provide a balance between a description of the reading intervention and the rationale behind it. This requires a level of judgement in order to analyse/ assess the effects. What has to be determined, is what effect the intervention has had and what the reasons are for this. The evaluation focuses on the objectives of the intervention and the extent to which they have been realized, but it is also responsive to issues that may arise (Benntt, 2003: 10 & 11).

3. The reading intervention

3.1 Background to the reading intervention

The reading intervention should be seen in the larger context of our work as ELITS advisors, which is to implement the ELITS School Library Policy by helping schools to establish libraries. Many schools tend to think of a library as the physical space, a large room with proper shelving, furniture etc, which they expect us as ELITS to provide together with some books, so that they will have a library. Schools also sometimes refer to a collection of books arranged in a storeroom as a 'library', but on closer inspection we would discover that these very often were unsuitable donated books, teacher reference material and textbooks. Schools/teachers generally do not understand that a library is a collection of suitable reference, non-fiction and fiction material, which should be used in an integrated way by all teachers to teach the learning areas, as required by the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) which is the policy that relates to the curriculum.

I used the opportunity, presented by the requirement to implement the ELITS School Library Policy, to introduce reading stories aloud as part of a reading teaching strategy in schools. Schools are required by the policy to establish Reading Programmes. I suggested that primary schools do this by devoting 30 minutes every day, to reading stories aloud to learners. I was not aware of any research that had been carried out in the province on the use of this approach to reading teaching, and I was interested to find out if this was something that could be implemented. The evaluation was undertaken both out of interest for myself as an individual researcher and as a department official.

I worked very closely with two other colleagues and together we planned to conduct a series of ELITS Workshops, designed to help schools to implement the policy in each of the wards in the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal. We started by identifying the schools that would act as the centre of a ward cluster and host the workshops. The district was divided into 14 wards and we wanted to make sure that a core group of schools in each ward had the opportunity to attend the workshops. The policy offers guidelines on how schools can establish libraries given the constraints, such as a lack of resources and trained teacher librarians in substantive posts. In helping schools to do this we discovered that essentially what we were doing was in-service teacher training because teachers need to be shown what to do with the books when they get them, and how to use them otherwise, even when they are given suitable books, they very often remain unused in their boxes.

The workshops were divided into three sections, one of which was on the implementation of the Reading Programme. The other two sections of the workshops were on library organization and management, and information skills, which largely consisted of showing teachers how to use encyclopedias. We each took responsibility for one of the sections. The reading section was designed to show teachers how to use fiction to develop reading skills and to give teachers guidance about how to establish a reading programme in their schools, as required by the policy. This was the reading intervention.

We decided to concentrate on primary schools rather than high schools because that is where the need is greatest for a reading intervention. We chose one school in each ward that had received a small collection of books and then undertook a series of informal, initial visits early in 2005 to the schools we had identified, in order to check that they were suitable workshop venues and also to set up the workshops. In two instances we decided that the schools were too difficult and remote to get to and another school was suggested as a more suitable venue, although it had no 'library' collection.

We asked the schools hosting the workshops to invite about ten, interested neighbouring schools. Two teachers per school were invited, the 'teacher librarian' and one other interested teacher. As has already been mentioned these 'teacher librarians' had no library qualification but were simply the teacher who has been made responsible for the 'library' in the school. In a few instances they were studying for an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in School Library Development and Management. However a number had been chosen as the 'teacher librarian' because they had an interest in this area.

The workshops ran over two mornings and we each had a two hour slot. The reading intervention was therefore very short. We were constrained for time not only because of the extremely long distances we had to travel to the workshop venues, which were mostly at schools in the 'deep' rural areas of Ilembe, but also because teachers were anxious to leave as soon as school ended, as they were concerned about transport; these were all primary schools so that was early afternoon. In one instance one of the schools was last in line along a remote country road and there was just one bus to drop teachers off in the morning and to pick them up again in the afternoon. Judging from the reaction of the teachers it took no prisoners. The workshop ended abruptly as they rushed to pack up, concerned that the bus would go without them and leave them stranded. Most teachers appear to travel long distances to their schools and do not come from the surrounding community. There is a generally more flexible attitude to the times for holding workshops

in Ilembe, because the difficulties created by the 'deep rural' nature of the district are well understood. Before sending out the invitations we obtained the necessary permission.

3.2 Description of the workshops

Our workshops usually started with the section on library organisation and management where teachers were introduced to the idea that a library is a collection of reference, non-fiction and fiction material which all teachers should use for teaching and which learners should be able to get their clean hands on, even if the books are kept in a cupboard. They were shown how to accession books and arrange them in shelf order. My section on the reading programme usually followed. The last section was on information skills. Many teachers lack the skills they require to use reference and non-fiction material effectively for learning and are therefore unable to teach this to their learners.

3.3 The reading intervention 'section'

The reading section of the workshops was the reading intervention. The target group for the intervention was teachers, more specifically those teachers who had been made responsible for establishing a library in their school. The stakeholders involved in the intervention were the three ELITS Ilembe advisors (myself and my two colleagues) and the teachers who attended the workshops. The key stakeholders were the 'teacher librarians' and the interested teachers who attended. These teachers were asked to take what they learned back to their schools and to implement the reading programme that had been explained and demonstrated to them.

The reading intervention was designed to address the problem of poor reading skills, in particular the inability of many learners to read with understanding. The aim of the intervention was to give primary school teachers a practical approach to use in the classroom in order to improve learners' reading ability. In particular the reading intervention aimed to raise awareness of the gravity of the problem, to help teachers to understand the nature of the problem, provide teachers with practical tools to help to improve the situation, demonstrate how this could be done and motivate teachers to implement this in their classrooms. It also aimed to provide them with an opportunity to practice these skills and to make them aware of the value of promoting a culture of reading.

I began the reading section of the workshop by explaining that schools are required by the School Library Policy to establish a Reading Programme. I talked to teachers about what is meant by fiction and how schools could build up their own collection of storybooks for the reading programme, before going on to explain the reading process - making the distinction

between decoding and reading for meaning. I talked about the importance of using fiction to read stories aloud for pleasure and demonstrated how to read aloud, usually reading one of the Junior African Writer series books by Nola Turkington (1996) called *The Girl Who Wouldn't Wear Glasses* which worked well for demonstration purposes and which all teachers, I think without exception, thoroughly enjoyed. Once or twice I used Niki Daly's (1985) *Shongololo*. I explained and demonstrated how to introduce the books, what questions to ask and when to ask them and how they could involve learners in discussion in a way that helped them to understand and enjoy the story. Teachers were also given the opportunity to read another story aloud to each other in groups.

Support during the intervention took the physical form of handouts but I was also careful to give teachers moral support. Teachers were given a handout that provided an outline of the argument for a 'teacher reading stories aloud' approach to reading. (See Appendix D: Reading CAN be Fun). They were also given an ELITS list of Library Resource Material that they could buy, a diagram that shows how much time we spend listening (See Appendix E) as well as Pretorius' list of the benefits of reading stories aloud to children. (See Appendix A)

3.4 Analysis of the reading intervention

Although I had piloted the reading questionnaire and thought that the twenty minute time allocation was sufficient, in practice many teachers took about half an hour to fill it in. This had an impact on the time each of us had for our section of the workshop. One of the reasons why teachers took longer than expected, I suspect, is the language factor. I think that many teachers struggled with English even though I had been aware that this might be a problem and had tried to minimize it by the way in which I worded the questions.

I did not always have control over factors of relevance to the research (Denscombe, 2003: 81). Given the context of the workshops it was not possible to keep tight control over the process of filling in the reading questionnaire and the workshop evaluations. Teachers sometimes arrived late and did not always attend both days. A consequence of this was that there was not a hundred percent correlation between the reading questionnaires and the evaluations. In spite of this however, there is a more than 90% correlation. In any event the reading questionnaire sample is large enough for generalizations to be made about teacher practices and attitudes and it is the workshop evaluations, the interviews and observations that indicate how effective the intervention has been.

What I covered in the reading section followed a formative process to some degree in that, as I worked my way through the fourteen workshops, I understood better what needed to be emphasized. For example, it became obvious that I had to stress the fact that teachers had to use a different teaching style for the reading intervention, not their usual one. By the end of the series of workshops I had developed a set of guidelines that included the rather strange phrase 'DO NOT TEACH' in capital letters. This is not at all surprising because teachers are being asked to adopt a whole-language, progressive, interactive approach to teaching for the reading intervention, when they are familiar with a traditional, behaviourist, transmission approach.

Practical issues relating to the provision of the workshop included identifying the schools, organizing the workshops, sending out invitations, organizing transport to make sure that we could get to the schools to conduct the workshops, getting together the resources required for the workshops, organizing the visits to the schools before the workshops to check on their suitability as venues and setting up the follow-up visits for the interviews and observations.

Getting back to schools for the interviews and reading demonstrations proved difficult. This took time to set up and organise because transport was a problem. For most of the workshops we had a hired car, which worked best. The reason for this was because we did not then have to waste time with frustrating, lengthy bureaucratic procedures, which is what happened when we had to use an official car, commonly known as a KZN. As soon as the hired car had to be returned which was fairly frequently, transport became problematic. The constantly changing cars meant much loading and unloading of heavy boxes of books from many boots. Schools had extremely limited library collections, which made it necessary for us to take our own books for demonstration. The distances that we had to travel to get to the schools also made things difficult. The average traveling time to a school was one and a half hours. We were often on the road for three hours a day or more.

We also had to make a number of visits to the second interview school because of unforeseen events. I interviewed a teacher who I initially mistook to be the teacher librarian who had attended the workshop. Although the interview was necessary and useful, I had to go back to interview the teacher librarian. This was all duly set up and we arrived at the school, only to find that I had left behind the folder with the interview schedule. Eventually this interview was successfully completed, almost nine months after the workshops ended.

3.5 Evaluating the effectiveness of the reading intervention

In evaluating the effectiveness of the reading intervention it is important to clarify that I was not asking teachers to change from one particular reading teaching practice to another – to replace what they were doing with something else. I was also not trying to measure or test empirical data to see if there would be a significant and enduring improvement in learners' reading skills (Bennett, 2003: 37). More research would have to be done in order to see if implementing this approach results in 'significant and enduring improvement' in learners' reading ability. I tried to convince teachers of the benefits of including reading for meaning as part of their reading teaching practice, by introducing them to a reading aloud approach. My research was to see if teachers had implemented the reading approach that I advocated. Were teachers using it? Were they reading stories aloud to their learners on a regular basis? To what extent were teachers prepared to accept and use a psycholinguistic, whole-language reading approach in addition to, not instead of, the behaviourist, phonics approach with which they are familiar? The research was designed to find the answers to these questions.

4. Assumptions made for this research

This study was based on a number of assumptions. I assumed that there is a major problem with reading in our schools and that teachers are not doing enough to address the problem because their reading pedagogy is limited. I also assumed that there is a need for a different approach to reading, in addition to what is already being done. This was based on the idea that teachers do not understand and appreciate the importance of teaching learners how to read for meaning and that most teachers in the context of this study do not teach learners the skills they need for 'meaningful engagement with text'. In other words they neglect the communicative aspect of reading.

I assumed that teachers do not understand either the value of using fiction to teach reading skills, or that reading stories aloud will help learners to engage with text in a meaningful way; that using a reading aloud approach is appropriate; that the nature of this approach, if used properly, will help learners to develop the reading skills that they need for meaningful reading; that reading aloud will motivate learners to read on their own if suitable resources are available and that it is important to provide learners with the opportunity to experience reading for pleasure. I also assumed that schools had not established a Reading Programme.

5. Limitations of this research

There are a number of limitations to the study. I was aware that teachers might respond by giving me the responses they thought I would want, or what they thought they ought to say. I was also aware of the limitations of self reports and the fact that my role was that of implementer, researcher and evaluator. This study is concerned with the first level of effectiveness - evaluating the *direct effects* of the intervention. It is therefore not an impact study, which means that this research is exploratory and not conclusive and that I am making tentative suggestions based on the research findings.

As an ELITS Ilembe District advisor I identified a need, developed a strategy to help meet that need, provided an education intervention for teachers and carried out an evaluation. This means that the evaluation has been undertaken by the person responsible for the intervention. Although my objectivity could be called into question because I have a vested interest in gathering supportive evidence (Bennett, 2003: 78) I believe that I have been able to provide critical distance in the design of the study, the formulation of the questions, the way in which data was gathered, analysed and reported and because the evaluation involved identifying both potential limitations and improvements. I tried to take steps to minimize any potential bias, which might be introduced into the research, and understood that I had an obligation to address issues related to such bias in my evaluation. I also tried to provide critical reflection by presenting an academic argument in the literature review to support the reading approach that I advocate.

Although I am biased in favour of this approach, I need to know if it will work in the classroom or not. If it does not, I need to know the reasons why. It was therefore in my interests to step back and be as objective as possible when I designed the research and analyzed and interpreted the data. Being subjective or biased about the findings was not going to help to address the problem.

6. Research questions and the process of data collection

In order to establish the effectiveness of the intervention I asked three key research questions:

- What are teacher practices and attitudes to reading prior to the intervention?
- How effective is the intervention?

- What are the aids or barriers to change?

I wanted to find out what teacher practices and attitudes to reading were *before* the intervention, if teacher practices and attitudes to reading changed as a result of the intervention and whether the reading strategy I advocated had become part of classroom practice. I first of all had to establish what teachers thought about reading and what strategies they used to encourage learners to read. I then had to provide a reading intervention that demonstrated a 'reading aloud' reading strategy before 'measuring' how effective the intervention had been in changing how teachers thought about reading and the way they approached reading in the classroom. Both quantitative and qualitative styles of data collection were used as well as a variety of research techniques and research instruments. Data was collected both before and after the intervention. This was analysed and interpreted in relation to each of the three key questions.

6.1 Research techniques and tools for data collection

The process for the collection of the data for this research began early in 2005 and ended about halfway through 2006. A series of workshops that included the reading intervention, were held for primary school teachers, who were my unit of analysis. I conducted the research at district level across a number of schools. In order to evaluate how effective the reading intervention was in changing teacher attitudes and practice I used three techniques to ensure triangulation. These were questionnaires (a survey questionnaire and workshop evaluations), semi-structured interviews and informal observation of the reading demonstrations and the school reading environment. By using a range of methods I could put together a more adequate picture (Gillham, 2002: 81). A multi-method approach has the potential of enriching and cross-validating the research findings (Gillham, 2002: 84).

The first step was to establish what teacher practices and attitudes to reading were prior to the intervention. This was achieved by using a survey reading questionnaire at the start of the workshops (See Appendix F). Evaluating the effectiveness of the short intervention was achieved by asking teachers to fill in an evaluation form at the end of the two-day workshops (See Appendix G), conducting interviews at two of the schools that attended (See Appendix H), observing two reading demonstrations, as well as by informal observation of schools and classrooms in the Ilembé District over a period of three years (2004 – 2006). The 'teacher librarian' who attended the workshop was interviewed as well as the principal and another member of staff who had not attended. Aids and barriers to change were identified by teacher responses at the workshops, as well as observation by the facilitators (which includes the researcher) of the teachers in the workshops. In addition,

the reading questionnaire, the workshop evaluations, school interviews and observation were used.

6.2 The process of data collection

Assisted by one of my colleagues, the questionnaire was piloted in two schools at the end of 2004. Eight teachers filled in this pilot questionnaire. Some adjustments were made as a result of this process. I used 154 reading questionnaires in all and these were representative of 96 schools, and 155 workshop evaluations, representative of 95 schools.² Informal observations were made during these workshops. The semi-structured interview schedule was designed to probe, in more depth, certain aspects of teacher attitudes and practice around the subject of reading aloud and whether or not teachers were using the approach with their learners. I conducted the interviews with teachers in two schools at the end of 2005 and in the first half of 2006, in order to achieve triangulation and observed teachers reading aloud in the classroom/library. The visits to the two follow up schools included informal observation of the school and classroom reading environments. The results were analysed and the factors that impacted on change identified. Recommendations were made based on the analysis of this data in order to make improvements in practice.

6.3 Primary sources of data for analysis

- Questionnaire and workshop evaluation data
- Transcripts of interview data
- School/classroom observation notes
- Notes on observation of teacher reactions at the workshops

6.4 Sample design and sample methods

My target population was primary school teachers, teaching in schools where English is the second language. The teacher librarian and one other interested teacher, from a cluster of about ten schools in all but one or two of the 14 wards of the Ilembe District, were invited to attend ELITS workshops. My sample was therefore made up of teachers who were purposefully selected for the survey. I was interested in this particular group and deliberately selected them from this particular context, because I wanted to understand their reading teaching methodology. They were selected with a specific purpose in mind, and that purpose reflected the particular qualities of the people chosen and their relevance to the topic of the investigation. The participants showed certain characteristics that I, as

² Although teachers signed registers these were not necessarily 100% accurate because the workshops extended over two days. The questionnaires and the evaluations were returned by nearly all teachers who attended and are as accurate a reflection of numbers as the registers.

the researcher, was interested in and which I believed would provide the most valuable data (Denscombe, 2003: 15). This could be described as homogenous sampling and is therefore not a random selection. The sample was not finalized before the study commenced but changed as the study progressed. For example, I did not know how many teachers would turn up for the workshops or if the same teacher would attend both days although I assumed that most would.

The 154 reading questionnaires and 155 workshop evaluations were enough to give me a representative, cross-section sample of the whole population and the desired level of accuracy. I believe that the sample size of the questionnaires and workshop evaluations is wide and inclusive enough within the particular context, to give credibility to generalized statements based on the research (Denscombe, 2003). The data therefore comes from a representative sample of the whole population of rural primary school teachers in Ilembe. I also believe that the data collection methods and sampling are both valid and that this research data is essentially reliable.

6.5 The reading questionnaire

I designed a survey questionnaire (See Appendix F) on reading as one of my research instruments because there is a certain amount of information that can be collected quite easily and quickly in this way. The questions were designed to find out what teacher attitudes are to reading in general, and to reading stories aloud in the classroom in particular, and what they do to promote reading. I was also interested in finding out a little about their own reading background and current reading habits.

When choosing teachers to fill in the pilot questionnaire I relied on a colleague to choose the two rural primary schools in Ndwedwe that we visited. She needed to visit the schools and as they were representative of primary schools in the district, it was convenient for me to use them for piloting the questionnaire in order to get feedback on its clarity and workability (Gillham, 2002: 19). Eight teachers filled in the pilot questionnaire; five were from one school that went from Grade One to Five, and three from a school close by that went up to Grade Four. Three were Foundation Phase teachers, four Intermediate Phase teachers and one Senior Phase. (One teacher did not indicate the phase but I think it was Intermediate). After explaining to the principals that we required some teachers to test the reading questionnaire for us and that it was intended to help us design our workshops, they were perfectly willing to co-operate, as were the teachers when this was explained to them. These teachers probably represent a cross-section of the whole population of teachers

within this particular context, although of course the sample for the pilot questionnaire is far too small to apply equally to the rest of the population.

As a result of having piloted the questionnaire, a number of adjustments were made. I made minor changes to the format to make it clearer, provided more options with tick boxes, changed the instructions for Question 22 so that all could respond to it, rather than only those who said that they do not read stories aloud, included questions 27 – 30 and collapsed some of the options for Question 26 under a single item, 'Reading celebrations'.

The 154 survey reading questionnaires were filled in by the teacher librarians and other interested teachers who attended our ELITS Ilembe workshops from April to August 2005 and are enough to give me the desired level of accuracy. Teachers filled in the reading questionnaires at the start of the workshop when I was present to clarify questions and instructions. Although I suspect that a few may not have returned these, most did. The response rate for the collection of this data was therefore very good. I am aware that my authority as an official of the department probably meant that teachers were unlikely to refuse to fill in the questionnaires, but I was careful to make my request in as friendly and unthreatening a way as possible and to express my gratitude for their help.

The issue at the heart of the research is whether teachers are willing to read stories aloud to their learners in the classroom. I divided the questionnaire into four sections: teacher reading background; current personal reading habits; teaching, and the school. Most of the questions related to the teaching section. The questionnaire included a mix of both quantitative and qualitative questions. Examples of quantitative questions are ones requiring a yes or no answer, how many were read to regularly, what they read etc. Examples of qualitative questions include open-ended questions like: 'How do you encourage your learners to read?' 'Why do you say so?' Questionnaires limit and shape the nature of the answers and lend themselves to more quantitative type questions. This allows for more speedy collation and analysis than would be the case with qualitative data. They also eliminate the effect of personal interaction with the researcher (Denscombe, 2003).

The reading questionnaire I used served to provide useful information about teachers' attitudes to reading and their classroom reading practice. Where the quantitative information provided a somewhat limited response, it was followed by a qualitative question. For example 'Please explain' or 'Say why you think so'. Many teachers answered 'Yes' to Question 12: 'Do you read stories aloud?' This may be the answer they

thought they were expected to give, rather than a truly honest one. Other questions in the questionnaire were designed to test the truth of this response.

The questionnaire was fairly short, six pages, and I thought quite user-friendly. I used the comic sans script, font size 14, to make it more inviting to read with reasonable spacing and clear layout. The size of the tick box was a problem because it was very small but it was easier to simply insert one from the symbol menu. I provided an example of a tick box with a tick that extends outside the box but even so quite a few teachers tried to fit the tick inside the small box, which made it difficult to read. I also tried to provide options to choose from to make sure questions were answered. I thought that the questionnaire would be quick and easy for respondents to fill in because most of the questions did not require the participants to think about how to express ideas. In practice though it took about half an hour to fill in.

I collected more information than I ultimately used. Although I asked teachers to fill in responses saying what material they had in the classroom and in what language, Zulu or English, I decided to exclude the language data aspect in my final analysis. It would have required quite a lot of extra work to capture and analyse and although it would be interesting to see just how much *useful* mother tongue reading material there is in primary school classrooms, I decided that this aspect would best be left for another study because it was not essential. Also there is a tendency for a lot of material to collect in classrooms that should have been thrown out a long time ago.

The reading questionnaire provided answers to the key question: What are teacher practices and attitudes to reading? It also provided insight into possible barriers or aids to change. This information served as a benchmark against which change could be 'measured'. For a more detailed and deeper understanding of teacher attitudes and practice it was necessary to conduct interviews, as these would be better able to provide this than a questionnaire. The personal interaction allows respondents greater freedom when answering questions. It was also a means to test the truthfulness or accuracy of data provided by questionnaires. Do teachers really read stories aloud? What kind of stories are they reading aloud?

6.6 The workshop evaluations

Teachers filled in the 155 workshop evaluation forms (See Appendix F) at the end of the two-day workshop. This evaluation covered all three aspects of the workshop but had a specific focus on the reading section. Workshop evaluations are a common way of establishing how effective a workshop has been. The obvious drawbacks are that they

might not be taken seriously, participants may be in too much of a hurry to leave to fill them in properly or, not wanting to appear rude or ungrateful, do not provide honest responses. I tried to circumvent some of this by the way in which I designed the evaluation form.

6.7 The interviews

Because it is sometimes difficult to check the validity of questionnaire data and because the information is sometimes limited, I also used in-depth interviews for a deeper and more detailed understanding of teacher attitudes and practices. Interviews illuminate as well as illustrate, what is covered in the questionnaires (Gillham, 2002: 82).

I chose two schools for the interviews. The first school chosen was a Senior Primary that had a motivated teacher librarian who was working in difficult conditions to establish a library even though the school was under threat of closure because of falling numbers. This school was selected to host our ELITS workshop because it already had a small collection of books. As usual some neighbouring primary schools were invited to attend but in this instance very few responded. A workshop held the previous year for the same area had a similarly disappointing turnout. Although the teacher librarian herself showed an interest and said that she read stories aloud to her learners, she seemed to be working in what appeared to be a below average school. However the school was fairly typical of others in the area.

The second school was not a hosting school but the teacher librarian had attended the ELITS workshop at a nearby school. She was the only one from the school to attend. It is a perfectly average Junior Primary although it too had a small collection of books that it was attempting to organise into a library. This school was actively involved in providing the resources necessary to establish a central library. This teacher librarian said that she read stories aloud to learners on a weekly basis.

The schools were also chosen partly on the basis of what was convenient because getting to them to conduct the interviews proved difficult and time consuming. Transport was always an ongoing problem both for the workshops and school visits. Although I had set up an appointment with the 'second' school, when a colleague and I arrived we discovered that the gates were locked which was not unusual but the school looked decidedly deserted. We subsequently discovered that the entire school had gone to Durban for an outing and the message to say that no-one would be available arrived too late. Rather than waste the opportunity and not wishing to have to make further arrangements to come out again,

organizing transport being such a problem, we continued up the road to a junior primary school that had attended the same workshop and on explaining the situation they were happy to oblige.

At each school I used a semi-structured interview schedule (See Appendix H) to interview the teacher librarian, another teacher who had not attended the workshop and the principal. A semi-structured interview allowed me as the researcher to ask clear questions that I wanted answered but I asked them in a way that invited an open response. I also prompted the interviewees when I felt it necessary to do so (Gillham, 2002: 82). As the interviewee I was able to elaborate on points of interest (Denscombe, 2003: 167).

A colleague was with me during the interviews, taking notes. This was because I did not record the interviews, and I was concerned that I would not be able to take adequate notes and conduct the interview at the same time. It was extremely helpful having her do this and no surprise to the teachers being interviewed as they were used to us working together. All the interviews took place in the school's library in a relaxed and informal manner.

6.8 Observation

Observation is a powerful way to gain insight into situations. The researcher can see what is actually happening in a school/classroom (School of Education, Training & Development, 2004: 95). Observation of the school reading environment helped me to check the accuracy of the data. For example, if a teacher said that she read stories to the learners, I was able to see what books were available for the teacher to read and how suitable these books were.

I have used informal observation of schools and classrooms in Ilembe over a period of three years. I looked to see how much space the school had for a library and the quality of the books teachers regarded as library books. When I interviewed the teachers in the two schools, I also observed the physical conditions in the school and the general reading environment. In addition I observed a reading aloud demonstration, one in each school. The observations took place during the course of more than one visit.

7. Ethical considerations of the research

When conducting this research I was mindful of my official position and the authority and power this gives me over the teachers I work with. I made it clear from the way in which I

interacted with them that I respected them as practitioners working at the ‘coal face’ and that I would value any feedback they gave me. My approach in the workshops was to provide teachers with information that would increase their understanding and awareness of how to address the problem of learners’ poor reading skills by demonstrating reading stories aloud and explaining how this would help to overcome the problem. My objective was to convince them to implement the approach in their classrooms. I did not say that this was something that they had to do but that I hoped very much that I had ‘sold’ them the idea sufficiently for them to try it out.

I was able to do this research as an employee of the Kwazulu-Natal Department of Education because research and development is part of my job as a Senior Education Specialist. At the start of each workshop I explained that the purpose of the reading questionnaire was to provide information that would help with the planning and design of the reading section of workshops and that this was important because schools are required to establish a Reading Programme as part of the implementation of the ELITS School Library Policy.

When the interviews were set up I explained that they were a follow-up to what had been covered in the initial workshops, in particular to see if schools are reading stories aloud to their classes, to find out if what was covered in the reading section of the workshop was useful and to give teachers the opportunity to talk about any problems that they might have encountered. These arrangements and visits were made with sensitivity, and care was taken not to make schools feel that they were being ‘inspected’. This was achieved by making it clear that their input would provide valuable information that would help with the implementation of the policy. The response was very positive with teachers more than willing to participate.

Workshop evaluations are standard practice and it is my job as a school advisor to visit schools and make observations. This kind of evaluation is essential if the work that education advisors do is to be effective. In addition, because generalisations have been made from all the research data, it is not possible to identify individual teachers and schools.

8. Data analysis

After the last workshop was held, I went through the tedious process of capturing all the collected data and then began the monumental task of trying to make sense of it. It is

necessary for me to acknowledge at this point, that as the researcher I played a significant role in the production and interpretation of the qualitative data (Denscombe, 2003: 268). The material had to be translated into a manageable and comprehensible form and although the analysis of the open questions required a great deal of work it was done on the understanding that it is possible to make real discoveries using this method (Gillham, 2002).

I set up two databases on the computer using a Microsoft Access Programme, one for the reading questionnaires and one for the workshop evaluations. I was not able to set up a single database because there was not a strict correlation between the questionnaires and the evaluations, for reasons already explained. This did not create a problem for analysis because the reading questionnaire was designed to determine teacher reading practices and attitudes prior to the reading intervention and the evaluations to determine the effectiveness of the intervention itself. I then drew up a number of tables in each database, based on the question groupings of the reading questionnaire and the workshop evaluations.

8.1 The reading questionnaire tables

- Biographic details
- Qualitative data
- Reading habits and materials
- Teacher attitudes
- Teaching practice
- The school and reading

8.2 The workshop evaluation tables

- Workshop evaluation reading
- Qualitative workshop evaluation

I excluded Questions 4, 5 & 16 from the workshop evaluation analysis. I did this partly because I was swamped with data, and partly because I decided that they were not essential for the analysis of the effectiveness of the reading intervention, even though getting books into the hands of learners is extremely important. I also knew that the workshops were not long enough to cover everything adequately, whether teachers recognized this or not.

The quantitative data was counted to get numbers and percentages. The qualitative data was broken down into categories based on my attempts to identify themes and patterns. This process was time consuming and had to be repeated in order to refine explanations

based on new insights. These categories were coded using numbers and entered into the relevant table in the database (Denscombe, 2003: 272).

Denscombe (2003) identifies the advantages of qualitative analysis. These are that the data and the analysis are 'grounded in reality' because they have their roots in the conditions of social existence; there is a richness and detail to the data because this is an in-depth study of a relatively focused area of small-scale research; it generates 'thick descriptions' which means that qualitative research is a useful way to deal with complex social situations; it is better able to tolerate ambiguity and contradictions which reflects the social reality that is being investigated; it opens up the possibility of alternative explanations. He sees as its disadvantages that it may be less representative; that interpretation is bound up with the 'self' of the researcher and that there is a real danger that in coding and categorizing the data the meaning of the data is lost or transformed (Denscombe, 2003: 280 – 282).

I have attempted to justify my methods and conclusions by demonstrating the nature of the decisions taken during the research, where appropriate, and the grounds on which these decisions can be seen as reasonable (Denscombe, 2003: 268 – 273). My research findings and analysis are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Research Findings and Analysis

1. Introduction

This chapter reports on and provides an analysis of the research findings. In so doing it attempts to strike a balance between description, analysis and interpretation. I have tried to present the data in a user friendly way and provide analysis where appropriate. I deal first of all with the responses to the reading questionnaire, then the workshop evaluations and finally the interviews.

The reading questionnaire was designed to determine teacher practices and attitudes to reading before the intervention, and began with a section to provide information about teachers' reading background. I start with the biographic data, and then move on to the data that was collected to determine teachers' reading practices, before examining teacher attitudes to reading. There was also a section on the school and reading.

Teachers were asked to fill in a workshop evaluation in order to help establish the effectiveness of the workshops in general and the reading section in particular. These findings are presented and analysed. Both the reading questionnaire and the workshop evaluation were designed to produce a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. Finally I provide a detailed description of the interviews and reading aloud demonstrations, which I analyse, before summarising and interpreting the findings.

A point to remember at the outset is that to some degree many of the teachers who came to the workshops had some interest in libraries and working with books. All our workshops with one exception, were 'cluster' workshops, with the hosting school inviting interested surrounding schools. The teacher librarian at a school and one other interested teacher were invited. The exception was one school-based workshop that we held which was with all the teachers at that school. There was a noticeable difference in the responses to the reading questionnaires and the workshop evaluations from these teachers with many of them not engaging with the questions to the same degree as the others and often not providing explanations.

The findings could therefore be said to show a degree of bias in that many of the participants were already interested to find out what we had to say to them and what we would cover at the workshop. Having said that, the real 'test' was to try to establish how effective the reading intervention had been. We do appear to have maintained some interest in what was covered because many of these schools have attended subsequent workshops although these do not form part of this study. Also as more teachers became aware of what we were doing in the workshops, interest grew. Even so some schools do not seem to want to make any effort at all. As ELITS advisors we had made a decision to work with those schools that showed an interest, very often represented only by the teacher librarian and perhaps one or two other teachers who were open to new ideas and practices.

Another point that perhaps should be made at the outset, particularly for those interested in the gender issue in education, is that nearly all the teachers who attended were women. Only a handful of male teachers were present at the workshops. This is because the majority of teachers in primary schools are female.

2. Reading Questionnaire

2.1 Teacher reading background

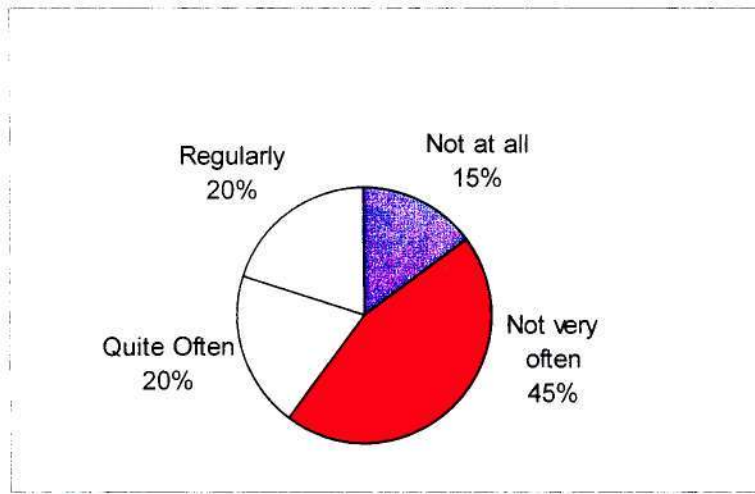
2.1.1 Childhood reading

The very first question that I asked teachers was: Did anyone read to you when you were a child? I did this because I wanted to establish if reading aloud, particularly reading *stories* aloud, had been part of their childhood experience. An astonishing 85% (131) of the 154 teachers surveyed said that they were read to, which means that only 15% (23) were not read to. However this apparently encouraging start has to be examined more closely.

When we look at how frequently teachers were read to, we see that most (45%) were not read to very often (see Figure 1) and that only a very small percentage (28%) were read *children's stories* when they were children. (See Figure 2)

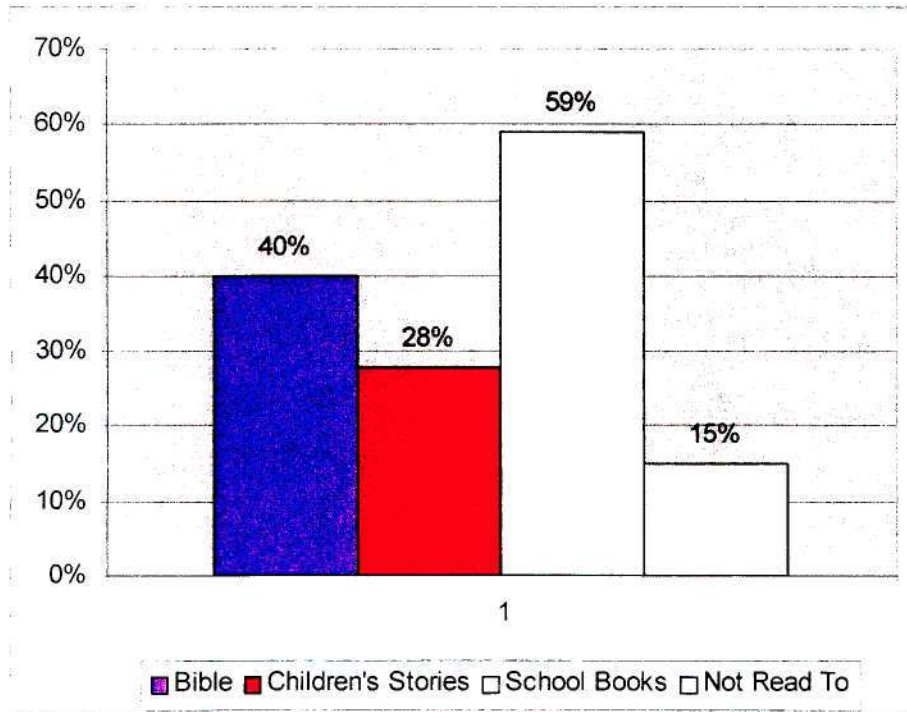
Many teachers had more than one type of material read to them. (See Figure 2) Their *responses* (calculated as a percentage of the 154 total) indicated that 40% were read the Bible, and 59% were read to from school books. I also asked who read to them (See Figure 3) Was it a family member, a teacher, or both.

Figure 1: Frequency read to

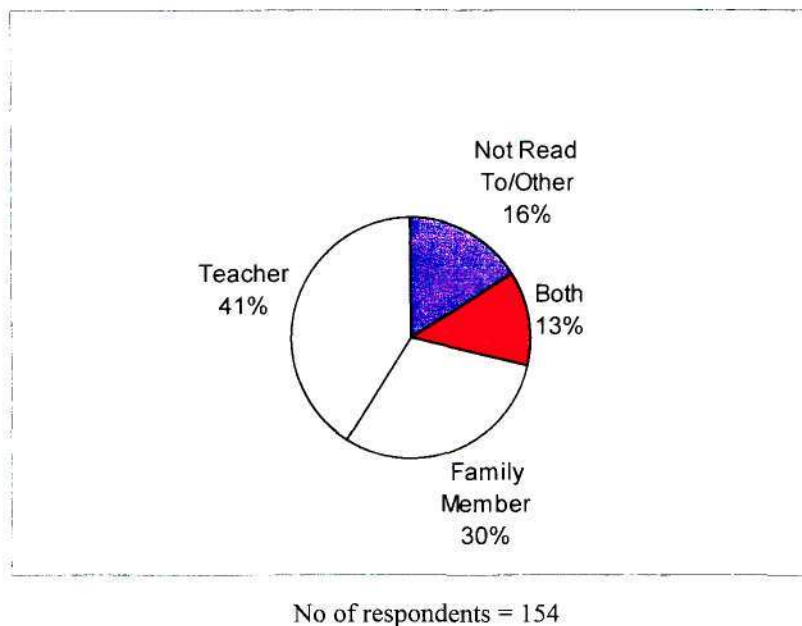


No of respondents = 154

Figure 2 : Material read



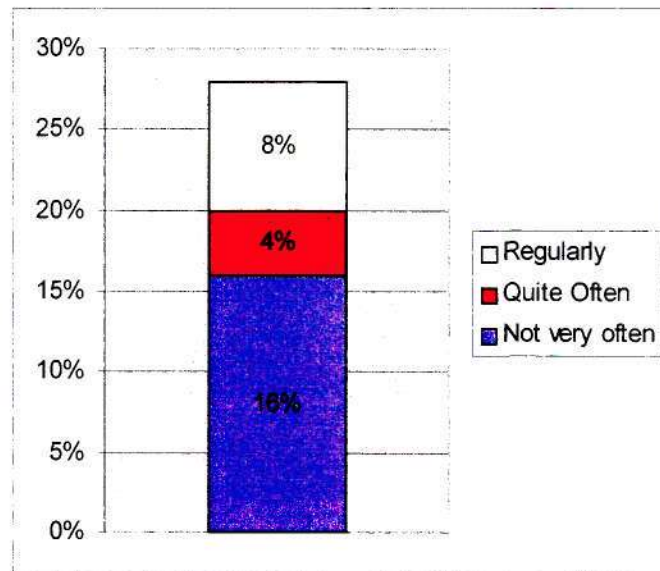
No of respondents = 154

Figure 3 : Read to by whom

41% were read to by a teacher, 30% by a family member and 13% were read to by both a family member and a teacher. 16% were either not read to at all or were read to by someone other than a family member or teacher.

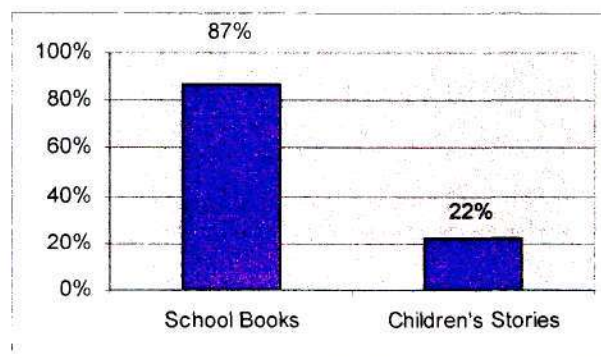
Of the 28% (43) of teachers who said that they were read *stories* as children, only 8% (13) were read stories on a regular basis. (See Figure 4) If we include the 'quite often' category (6), that increases to 12% (19) of those who were read stories frequently enough for it to be a meaningful experience. A further 16% (24) were read children's stories but not very often (See Figure 4). Of the 8% (13) who were read stories regularly, 23% (3) were read to by both teacher and family member, 38.5% (5) were read to by their teacher and 38.5% (5) by a family member.

Although 85% of the teachers surveyed said that they were read to as a child either regularly, quite often or not very often (See Figure 1), only 12% were read *children's stories* either regularly or quite often (See Figure 4). If we generalise from this and assume that those who were read to 'not very often' cannot be considered to have been read aloud to in any meaningful way, it means that 88% of primary school teachers in Ilembe have not experienced having children's stories read aloud to them as children on a regular basis.

Figure 4 : Frequency of children's stories

No of respondents = 154

Most of the respondents who were read aloud to as children, were read aloud to by teachers. (See Figure 3) 87% of these were read aloud to from schoolbooks. Only 22% of these respondents say that their teachers read children's stories aloud. (See Figure 5)

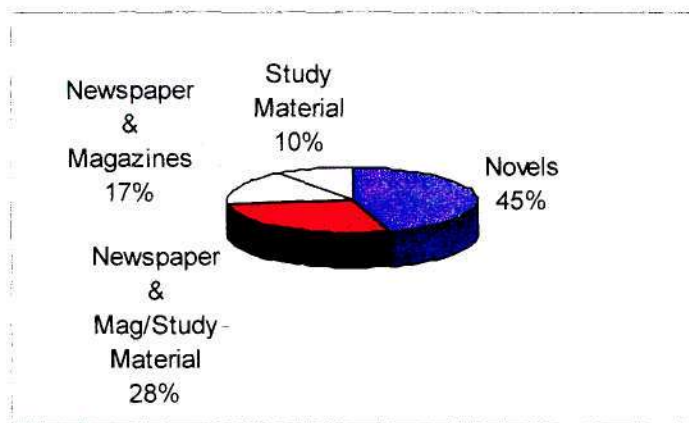
Figure 5 : Material read by teachers

No of respondents = 83

2.1.2 Current reading habits

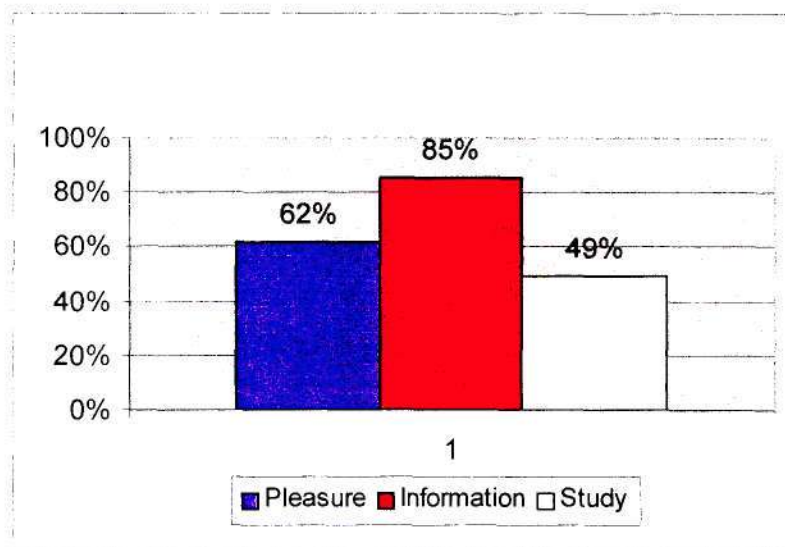
When teachers were asked what they read now 45% say that they read novels. They also read study material, newspapers and magazines. (See Figure 6) When asked what their *purpose* was for reading, most of the 154 respondents (85%) said that they read for information, but 62% said they read for pleasure. (See Figure 7)

Figure 6 : Material read now



No of respondents =154

Figure 7 : Purpose for reading



I expected the majority of teachers to say that they read for information. I was also not surprised by the 50% who say that they are studying. What is perhaps a little surprising is the 62% who say they read for pleasure, and if we look at the breakdown of what they are reading, the 45% who say they read novels. (See Figure 6) This is higher than I was expecting. I was interested to see if there was any correlation between having been read to as a child and reading novels as an adult. Only 12% of teachers were read stories regularly or quite often as children but 45% say that they now read novels for pleasure. Perhaps this supports the assertion that as human beings this kind of reading feeds a psychological need (Ousbey, 1992). Interestingly there appears to be no correlation between reading novels now and being read to as a child. (See Table 1) Although Table 1 is a rather crude reflection of this correlation (for example, it does not engage with the question of whether or not there is any merit in including teachers reading aloud infrequently from schoolbooks) there does not appear to be any link between the two.

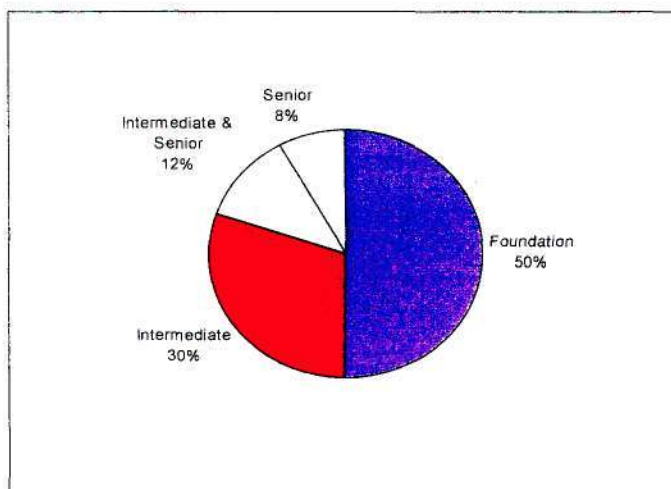
Table 1 : Correlation between being read to as child and current reading habits

Childhood reading			Read novels now		Don't read novels now	
Read to as child	131	85%	57	44%	74	57%
Not read to as child	23	15%	12	52%	11	48%
	154	100%	69	45%	85	55%

2.1.3 Phases taught

The 154 teachers surveyed were asked which phase they teach. Half the teachers are Foundation Phase teachers, 30% are Intermediate Phase teachers, 12% teach both the Intermediate and Senior Phases, while 8% teach the Senior Phase. (See Figure 8) The Senior Phase is represented in the sample because primary schools include Grade 7 which is the first year of the Senior Phase.

Figure 8 : Phases taught



2.1.4 Conclusion

The findings that I think are significant are that 88% of the teachers surveyed have not experienced having children’s stories read aloud to them as children but that even so 62% say that they now read for pleasure and 45% say that they read novels for pleasure. Although it could be argued that the latter is an example of teachers providing the answer they think is the one they should give, it has to be said that they were given a range of material to choose from such as newspapers, magazines, study material and non-fiction with nothing to suggest that ‘novels’ was the response to be singled out. I also find it interesting that there appears to be no correlation between teachers reading novels now and having been read stories as children.

2.2 Reading teaching practices

2.2.1 Reading strategies

To try to establish what teacher reading practices were before the reading intervention I asked teachers to explain how they encourage their learners to read and what strategies they use. See Table 2 for the results based on 180 responses. Most teachers mentioned more than one strategy. More than half the responses fall into Category 1 which reflects the emphasis that teachers placed on providing *learners* with opportunities to *practice* reading using whatever reading material they had at hand. This included material as diverse as rules and charts on the one hand and storybooks on the other.

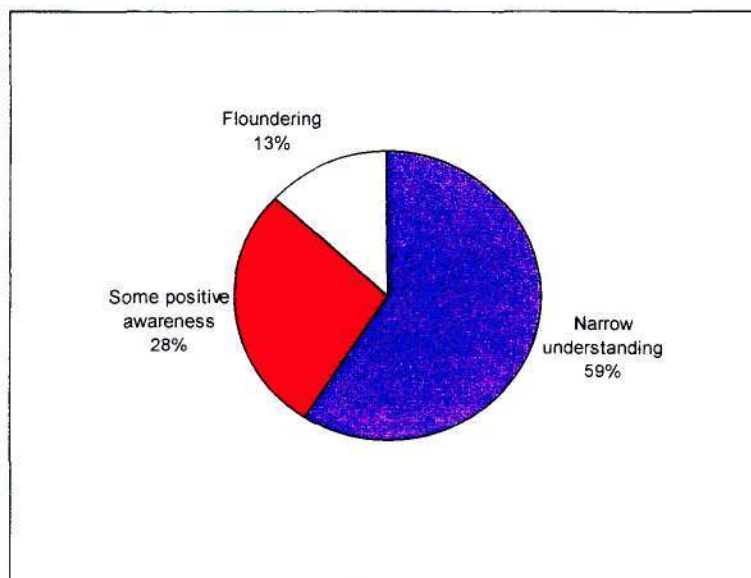
Although Category 1 reflects teachers' understanding of the importance of providing learners with opportunities to practice their reading skills it also suggests a rather limited, mechanical approach to reading teaching. Only 10% of the responses made mention of teachers reading stories aloud which suggests that the value of doing this was not understood by the majority of the participants. Categories 3, 4, 6 & 8 reflect an understanding of some of the more creative strategies that can be used to encourage children to read but together with Category 2, represents only 28% of the responses. Telling learners to read or that reading is important (Category 5) is tantamount to having no strategy at all. (See Table 2)

Teachers do not appear to be aware that their reading teaching practice should include the use of storybooks (fiction) to encourage learners to read for pleasure in order to help them to engage with the content in a meaningful way. Most of the participants' responses also do not indicate an appreciation of the value of reading storybooks aloud to learners as a way of engaging them in reading for enjoyment.

The categories can be grouped to indicate the level of understanding that teachers have of what reading teaching involves. Category 1 shows that teachers have a very narrow understanding of how to encourage learners to read. Categories 2, 3, 4, 6 & 8 together show that teachers have some awareness of the more positive and creative strategies that can be used to encourage learners to read, while categories 5 & 7 demonstrate that some teachers do not have a reading strategy. I have described these teachers as 'floundering'. (See Figure 9)

Table 2 : Reading strategy categories

Category	No of responses (180)	%	Basis on which category was established
1	105	58%	The main emphasis was on providing learners with an opportunity to practice reading using a variety of materials eg. newspapers, magazines, workbooks, class readers, storybooks, charts, rules etc. and in a variety of ways. The focus was almost exclusively on the acquisition of the mechanical skills associated with reading eg. pronunciation, vocabulary, punctuation, listening.
2	17	10%	Teachers reading stories aloud to learners.
3	5	3%	Using creative strategies to encourage learners to read that are likely to engage the learner.
4	15	8%	Encouraging learners to use a library or reading corner.
5	8	4%	Telling learners to read/importance of reading.
6	10	6%	Using a reward/incentive system/competitions.
7	16	9%	No response/no strategy.
8	4	2%	Telling stories.

Figure 9 : Quality of reading strategies

No of respondents = 154

Here are examples of some of the responses to the question on how teachers encourage learners to read. They reflect a mix of both good and bad strategies, but together present a somewhat confused picture.

- Before I start my lesson I drill them to read their charts every morning.
- To read old newspapers. To read from textbook one after another in the classroom.
- Book review, dramatization of books, visits of authors to school.
- Reading to them – poetry recital – drill work charts – finding info – read stories – leave out endings for them to find out.
- Foundation Phase learners enjoy stories. I always tell them that they will [find] stories in books.
- Learners clap hands for the one who has read.

One Foundation Phase teacher says that she ‘uses two periods a week for reading’. It is hard to imagine how her learners could become competent readers if this is the case. Although these responses sometimes include some positive reading strategies, they are in the minority. The ‘book review, dramatization of books, visits of authors to school’ is a response that stood out as an exception. Taken as a whole the responses suggest not only a lack of a coherent strategy for encouraging learners to read in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases but also suggest that teachers have a very limited idea of what reading teaching involves. If we generalise from these findings it would appear that many teachers in Ilembe primary schools do not have a clear idea of what good reading teaching really means. Not many include more interesting, creative reading strategies.

Further analysis of Category 1, in Table 2, reveals that 46% (48 out of the 105 responses in this category) mention using newspapers and magazines as reading material. What I saw of this material in classrooms/libraries did not inspire confidence that it could be used in a way that would be beneficial to learners. This in my view is not suitable reading material for either the Foundation or Intermediate Phases as it is usually adult reading material. Although many teachers have probably been told that in the absence of any other reading material they should be creative with the use of newspapers and magazines, I think that this has been an unfortunate development. Instead of expecting teachers to ‘make do’, ways should be found to make sure that all schools have a collection of quality books.

It should be noted that the ELITS School Library Policy makes provision for schools to use their Norms and Standards allocation to establish a library budget in order to buy suitable books, which should of course include an exciting fiction collection. The recommendation is that 10% of the school's Norms and Standards money should be spent in this way. There are problems with this in practice, not least is convincing principals to spend this money on library books. Another problem relates to the bureaucratic procedures that schools have to follow. These procedures are confusing and not user friendly.

Another unfortunate development as a result of the inequalities of the past that is worth mentioning, has to do with highly unsuitable books being donated to schools which then create quite a serious problem. For example we have seen university engineering textbooks on primary school shelves! Schools feel obliged to keep these books but they take up valuable shelving space and getting rid of them is not easy.

2.2.2 Reading *stories* aloud

87% of teachers said that they read **stories** (fiction) aloud to their learners. (See Table 3)

Table 3 : Teachers read stories aloud

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
Say they read stories aloud	134	87%
Do not read stories aloud	20	13%

Taken at face value this is a very positive response. However subsequent questions reveal a somewhat different picture. It is possible that some teachers gave me the response that they thought was the 'correct' one. Also, I suspect that some teachers may not have read the question carefully as it asked if they read *stories* aloud. I think that some might have read this as 'Do you read aloud to learners?' To check the reliability of the responses to this question I asked teachers to give me examples of the titles that they have read aloud. I also wanted to know what teachers understood by 'stories'. 15 (10% of the 154 total) who said that they read aloud, did not provide titles. (See Table 5) An analysis of the titles (235 responses from 119 respondents) produced the list of categories below: (See Table 4)

Table 4 : Title categories

Title categories	Number of titles (235)	Percentage
Storybook titles	102	43%
Fairy stories/folktales	62	26%
Class readers	18	8%
Language books	21	9%
Novels (mostly unsuitable for primary)	5	2%
Poetry/ Biblical stories/ Unidentified	9	4%
Workbooks	9	4%
Non-fiction	9	4%

69% of the titles are storybook, fairy story or folktale titles. This does not reflect the number of *schools* using this kind of material as respondents often gave more than one storybook title, although this does appear to indicate that quite a number of teachers are using this kind of material to read aloud to learners. However informal observation during many visits to schools throughout Ilembe over the last three years, and meetings with many teachers, suggests that most schools do not have collections of *suitable* fiction material. Teachers say that they are reading *stories* aloud to their classes but much of the material that they have to read from is not particularly exciting or interesting. Teachers seem to have a different idea about what is meant by ‘good’ stories from what I would consider to be a good/suitable story. Even so, some schools are using this storybook material to read aloud to their learners however infrequently, as we shall see.

22 of the respondents (14% of the total) can be considered not to read stories aloud because they provided titles for class readers, language books, workbooks and non-fiction material that do not relate to reading for enjoyment. (See Table 5) Although non-fiction can of course be read for enjoyment, I have excluded it here because of my focus on stories. This means that of the 134 teachers (87% of the total) who said that they read stories aloud to their learners, only 97 (63% of the total) can be considered to read *stories* aloud.

As a further check to see if teachers were really reading stories aloud I asked them how often they read and for how long. I wanted to see if teachers were reading aloud to their classes reasonably frequently. If they said they were reading ‘not very often’ regardless of

the length of time, or for less than 30 minutes a week, I excluded them from the number of respondents who said that they read aloud. I did this because I feel that this low frequency level is simply not enough to make much of an impression. This meant that a further 69 respondents (45% of the total) who said that they read aloud, do not read aloud frequently enough for this to be meaningful. (See Table 5)

Table 5 : Teachers who cannot be considered to read stories aloud

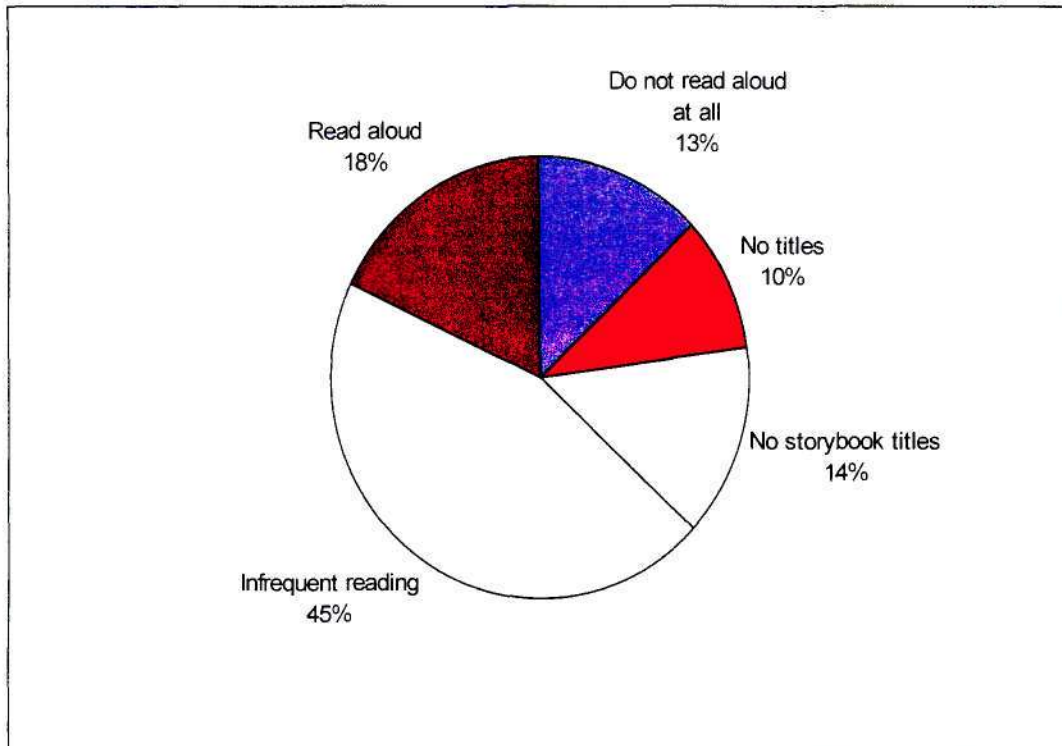
Category	Number of respondents (126)	Percentage based on 154 total
Do not read aloud	20	13%
Did not provide any titles	15	10%
Did not provide storybook titles	22	14%
Do not read aloud frequently enough	69	45%
TOTAL	126	82%

126 (82% of the total) of teachers cannot be considered to read stories aloud. This means that only 28 (18% of the total) can be considered to read *stories* aloud to their learners *frequently* enough for this to be a meaningful experience. (See Table 6) This is almost a complete reversal of the percentages in Table 3 but is probably closer to the 'real' picture.

Table 6 : The 'real' picture

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
Do not read stories aloud/Not considered to read aloud	126	82%
Considered to read aloud	28	18%

I have used a pie chart to show the category breakdown of the 'real' reading stories aloud picture. (See Figure 10) Out of 154 respondents only 18% (28) read stories from storybooks aloud to their learners either daily or for 30 minutes or more per week. Only 6% (10) of teachers say that they read stories aloud for 30 mins on a daily basis, which is the time allocation I advocated in the workshops and was also the time suggested for reading in the open letter from the National Education Department.

Figure 10 : The reading stories aloud breakdown

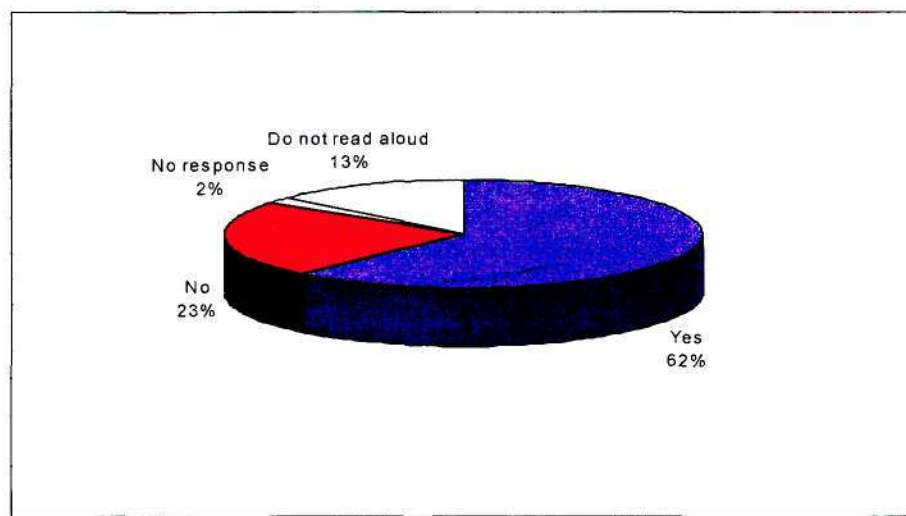
No of respondents = 154

72% (20) of the 28 who do read stories aloud to their learners are Foundation Phase teachers, 14% (4) are Intermediate Phase teachers, 7% (2) teach both Intermediate and Senior Phase learners and 7% (2) are Senior Phase teachers. It is not surprising to see that most of these teachers teach the Foundation Phase. However, because they represent such a small part of the surveyed sample and if we generalise, of the Foundation Phase teacher population of Ilembe as a whole, this is very worrying. All Foundation Phase teachers should be reading exciting storybooks to their learners on a daily basis. It is a practice that should, in my view, be carried on into the Intermediate Phase, and the first year of the Senior Phase as it is part of the primary school. At least the Senior Phase is represented in this sample.

2.2.3 Asking questions

62% (96) of the teachers surveyed said that *learners* ask them questions about the stories they read to them. 23% (35) say that learners do not ask them questions, 2% (3) did not respond and 13% (20) do not read aloud. (See Figure 11)

Figure 11 : Learners ask questions



No of respondents = 154

Learners asking questions is an important indicator of the quality of the interaction between teacher and learner. If the learners are not asking teachers questions they are not engaged in a meaningful way in the story reading. Teachers should involve their learners when reading stories aloud to them by encouraging them to ask questions.³

Those who say their learners do not ask them questions are probably using a teaching style that does not allow learners to engage in an interactive way as part of a shared reading experience. The 62% who say 'yes' are ostensibly reading stories aloud and engaging learners in the story by allowing them to ask questions about the stories being read to them. However, a qualitative analysis of examples of the kind of questions teachers say that *learners ask* reveals a somewhat different picture. (See Table 7)

³A comment by one of the examiners to the effect that 'some Zulu people claim that in Zulu culture it is rude to ask questions of someone who has gone to the trouble of teaching you something, since doing so would be tantamount to suggesting that their teaching was inadequate' raises an interesting and important consideration to which there is no simple solution. This could usefully be the subject of further research.

Table 7 : Kinds of questions

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
Unconvincing questions	52	34%
Convincing questions	27	17%
Said no or did not provide examples	55	36%
Do not read stories aloud	20	13%

Examples of unconvincing questions are:

- Who and what?
- What is the lesson in the story?
- Who are the characters?
- Why was that done?
- Open ended questions.
- Who's the author?

Examples of convincing questions are:

- Was the mother not afraid of the snake.
- Why the educator run away?
- What happened to ... after?
- Is it true?
- Did this really happen?
- What does handsome mean?

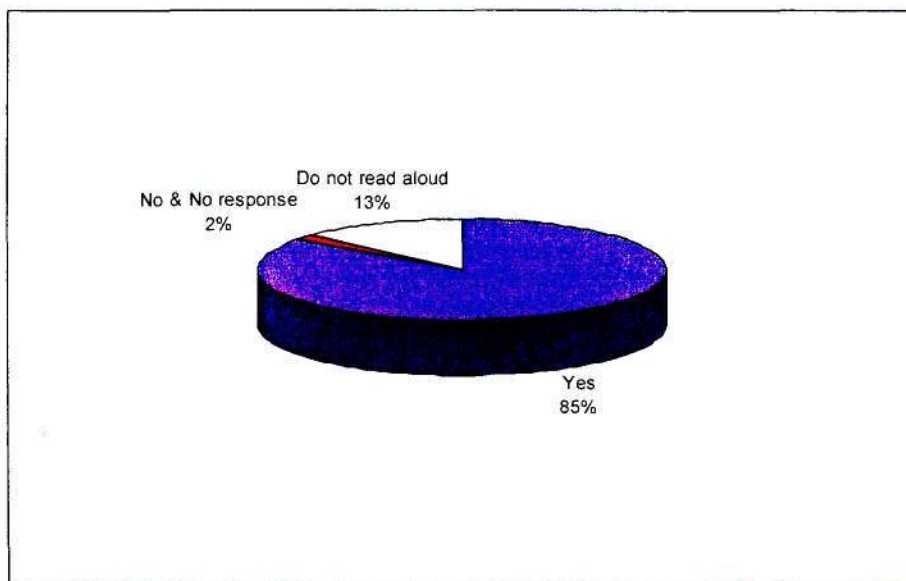
34% (52) of the responses were unconvincing. The examples teachers gave were more like teacher questions, not the kind of questions that learners would ask, or else they were too vague which suggested that learners were not really asking questions about stories that were being read to them. Only 17% (27) of respondents supplied convincing examples of questions. (See above) 36% (55) said that learners do not ask questions or said they did but did not provide examples. The rest 13% (20) had said that they do not read stories aloud.

The examples of the convincing questions learners ask, provide an indication of the quality of the interaction between the teacher and the learner, even if teachers are using class readers and language books, rather than storybooks. These examples of learner questions

demonstrate that teachers are reading some kind of story aloud and allowing learners to ask questions which suggests that they are engaging with the story in a meaningful way. This kind of positive interaction between teacher and learner, regardless of the reading material they are using, provides a solid base from which to work when introducing a new reading approach. However if we generalise from the sample it would appear that a very small number of primary school teachers in Ilembe are interacting with their learners in this way.

85% (130) of respondents said that *they* ask their learners questions about the stories they read to them. (See Figure 12)

Figure 12 : Teachers ask questions



No of respondents = 154

This result comes as no surprise at all. Teachers constantly ask their learners questions. They see this as what they should be doing. What should be interrogated here is the quality of these questions. Are they questions that will engage the learners in the stories the teachers are reading aloud and help them to understand them? A qualitative analysis of the questions provided as examples suggested these categories. (See Table 8)

Table 8 : Types of questions asked

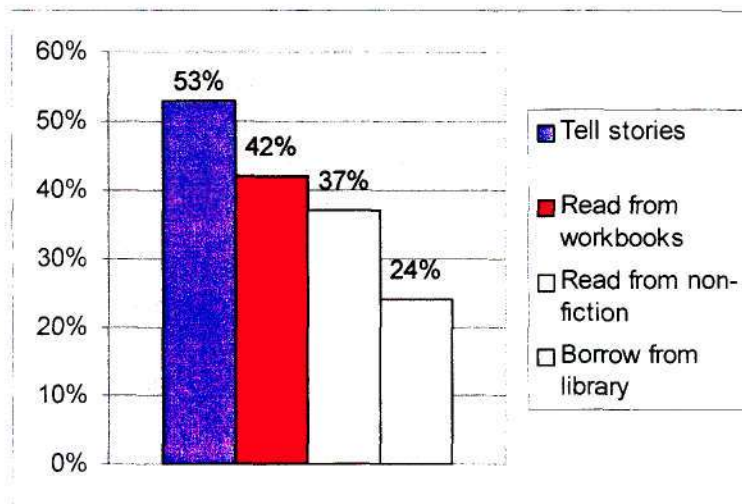
Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
'Testing' type questions	49	32%
'Engaging' questions	27	17%
Vague, unconvincing, not related to stories	43	28%
Did not provide examples	15	10%
Do not read stories aloud	20	13%

32% (49) of the respondents asked questions that 'tested' the learners in some way and 28% (43) provided questions that were vague or unconvincing, or were not specific or did not relate to 'stories'. 23% did not provide examples or do not read aloud. Therefore only 17% of teachers ask their learners questions that are likely to engage them in the stories being read to them. These findings suggest that even if some primary school teachers are reading stories aloud, many of these are not asking their learners questions that will help them to understand and enjoy the stories being read to them. This is either because teachers have a view of reading teaching that says that learners must 'learn' something and be 'tested' on it or because they lack the skills they need to make their questioning technique effective, or they may simply be unaware that they should be asking such questions.

Three of the teachers who provided convincing examples of questions learners ask, and five of the teachers who provided examples of engaging questions they ask, were using class readers, language books and workbooks, not storybooks. For many teachers this is the only material available. Even though this is a small number it demonstrates that there is not a 100% correlation between the use of interactive, meaningful questions and the use of storybooks. However it is the quality of teacher interaction with learners that is really important. If these teachers had exciting storybooks to read aloud they would probably encourage the kind of learner participation that is a necessary part of this reading approach.

2.2.4 Teacher reading practices

Figure 13 provides some insight into teacher reading practices from Question 22. Other responses from this question will be presented under teacher attitudes. Teachers were able to indicate more than one reading practice, so Figure 13 reflects the percentage response of the 154 respondents to each of the reading practices they referred to.

Figure 13 : Teacher reading practices

No of respondents = 154

53% (82) of the teachers surveyed say that they tell their class stories. 61% of these teachers teach the Foundation Phase and 34% the Intermediate Phase. Although I am focusing on ‘reading’ and not ‘telling’ stories this is obviously an important aspect of reading teaching, especially for Grade R and the Foundation Phase and should be encouraged.

It is interesting to see that teachers say they do read aloud from non-fiction books (where they have them) and not surprising that they read aloud from workbooks. For many it is part of their normal teaching. I was pleasantly surprised though by the 24% who said that they borrow books from a library to read to their classes, although they might be referring to whatever limited library their school might have and not just to a public library.

2.2.5 Summary of reading teaching practices

It would appear that most respondents (72%) (See Figure 9) do not understand that good reading teaching *includes* providing learners with opportunities to experience reading as an enjoyable activity as part of their reading teaching practice by reading stories aloud, and that most of the remaining 28% have only a limited awareness of the value of this kind of reading experience. Only 18% (See Figure 10) of the teachers surveyed read *stories* aloud to their learners frequently enough for this to make much of an impression. In addition only 17% (See Table 7) of the teachers surveyed appear to be interacting with their learners in a meaningful way when they read aloud to them, by allowing their learners to ask questions about the stories being read and only 17% (See Table 8) ask their learners questions that are likely to engage them in the story. As half of the teachers surveyed teach

the Foundation Phase and another 42% the Intermediate Phase, this is a major problem. (See Figure 8)

2.3 Teacher attitudes to reading

2.3.1 When to start encouraging learners to read

In order to help me to gauge teacher attitudes to reading, teachers were asked when to start encouraging learners to read. 72% of the teachers surveyed thought that learners should be encouraged to read books other than their workbooks as early as possible (this includes Grade One) which suggests that they have some understanding that this is important for reading development. (See Table 9)

Table 9 : When to introduce reading books

Category	Number of respondents (354)	Percentage
As early as possible (Includes Grade One)	110	72%
Grade Two	12	8%
Grade Three	20	13%
Grade Four	5	3%
Grade Five; Intermediate Phase (Includes those that start early but stop in Grade 7 or 8!)	5	3%
No response	2	1%

The 28% of teachers who think that it is better to start later than Grade One (or did not respond because they did not know) is worrying. All teachers should understand the importance of encouraging learners to read using storybooks from as young an age as possible. I have categorised the teachers' explanations for why learners should be encouraged to read books other than their workbooks. (See Table 10)

Table 10 : Teacher explanations for when to introduce reading books

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
1. Only encouraged <i>once</i> they have acquired some of the skills necessary for reading eg. sufficient vocabulary. For some this can start as early as Grade One and for one as late as Grade Five when learners can read on their own.	37	24%
2. Start as early as possible for a variety of reasons. (See the breakdown below.)	87	56%
3. Muddled thinking	8	5%
4. Learners should do this only when they reach the higher grades (Intermediate) because of the need to read across more learning areas and to get information. (<i>English becomes the medium of instruction</i>)	4	3%
5. No reason given or did not respond at all.	18	12%

What I realised, reading through the teacher responses, is that many teachers seem to assume that learners have to have *English* vocabulary before they can read and that reading therefore means reading in English. This understanding is, I think, significant. If this is the case teachers need to be made aware of this blurring of literacy development and English language development. Although I did address the language issue to some degree in the workshops by advocating that teachers read aloud in Zulu in Grade R and the Foundation Phase I think that this is something that should be covered in more depth in future workshops. Category 2 (87 respondents) can be broken down further. (See Table 11)

Table 11 : Reasons for need to start early

Category	Number of respondents (87)	Percentage
1. Need to start as early as possible because reading is useful. This is the practical, functional motive for reading.	19	22%
2. Reference is made to the love of reading and use of pictures to encourage reading.	32	37%
3. Just a general sense that it is a good idea to encourage them from a young age. Not really able to say why.	36	41%

37% of these respondents (second category) understand the value of encouraging learners to read books other than their workbooks as early as possible, because this can help learners to develop a love of reading. Some of these also understand that young children

can read using pictures to tell the story and that suitable material is available for young learners. Examples of some of these responses are as follows:

- To have interest in books.
- Ability to visualize. Able to communicate effectively.
- ...use your imagination and its fantastic.
- Get skill of looking and wanting to say what happens or interests them on what is written or drawn.
- ...interpret pictures – telling what story is about. Able to predict. Captivate interest.
- Even young children can read stories (picture books)

22% referred to the practical, functional motive for reading and 41% just had a general sense that this was a good idea but could not say why. The 37% of teachers (32), who have some awareness of the value of developing a love of reading in children as early as possible, represent only 21% of the teachers who were surveyed. It would appear that most teachers not only do not understand the whole language, communicative aspect of reading but also fail to understand just how vitally important this is for a child's reading development. Only two responses referred to predicting what will happen in a story and there was only one reference to children's imagination being stimulated by books and only one to learners' ability to visualise. This suggests that a whole language reading approach is almost entirely absent from teachers' reading pedagogy and is not understood.

2.3.2 Why teachers read stories aloud to learners

The reasons teachers gave for reading stories aloud fall into two main categories. (See Table 12)

Table 12 : Reasons why teachers read aloud

Category	Number of respondents (IS)	Percentage
1. Emphasis is on teacher <i>teaching</i> particular skills.	92	60%
2. Teachers see learner understanding and enjoyment as part of the reason for reading stories aloud.	25	16%
3. No response (2)/ Did not provide titles/ Do not read aloud.	37	24%

Some of the reasons provided in Category 1 are as follows:

- To develop concentration
- To develop listening skills
- Teach correct pronunciation
- Learn about and obey punctuation marks
- Testing to see if learners are listening with understanding
- Improving spelling
- So learners can hear the words
- Learners can understand new and difficult words
- Learn sounds and words
- Learners will hear, understand, listen, pay attention.
- They will hear correct way of reading
- To teach them how to read correctly
- To teach them to read aloud
- To develop thinking skills.
- Makes it easier for them to remember climatic regions.
- So that I can be exemplary in reading and so that they can familiarise with the tone in parts of speech.
- To improve myself.
- I feel that in English they will get used to hearing the language because they are not used to it especially that they have no television to watch and listen to.
- They must hear what I say.
- Sometimes because I don't have enough books for all learners to read.

Other reasons supplied in response to this question include:

- To bring stories to life.
- Learners will be able to understand the stories through gestures.

One teacher provided a novel reason for reading stories aloud: Learners could 'catch it' from her. She is not far wrong.

60% of the responses refer to reading stories aloud as an opportunity to *teach* the children something that teachers consider to be important. Only 16% of these responses show some awareness that reading stories aloud to children helps them to understand and enjoy them.

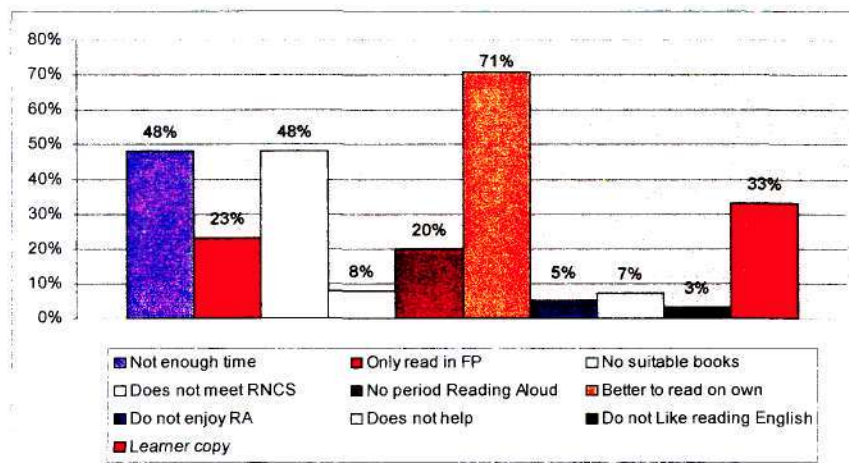
I suspect that many teachers initially gave what they considered to be the 'correct' or what they thought was the acceptable answer -- saying 'yes' to reading stories aloud. It is possible that some, perhaps quite a number, did not differentiate between reading 'stories' and the kind of material they would use to read aloud from as part of their normal teaching, because teachers indicated that they used a variety of books, not just storybooks. In

addition I believe that many of them did not fully understand what ‘reading stories aloud’ to learners really meant or misread the question as simply ‘reading aloud’.

2.3.3 Attitudes to reading

Many of the responses to Question 22 (a list of True/False statements about reading aloud) provided an insight into teacher attitudes to reading (See Figure 14).

Figure 14 : Percentage of teachers with negative attitudes to reading aloud



No of respondents = 154

48% (74) of the teachers surveyed said that they would like to read stories aloud to their learners but that there is not enough time and 52% (80) disagreed. In other words nearly half say that they do not have time to read stories aloud. This is an issue that I addressed in the workshops. I emphasised the importance of reading aloud for 30 minutes every day and the need to make time to do this because reading is a priority.

23% (36) said that they thought teachers only read stories aloud in the Foundation Phase. This was lower than I was expecting. Even so, although 23% is relatively low it is a misconception that needs to be addressed. 77% (118) said false. Only 8% (13) believe that reading aloud does not meet the NCS requirements. I covered all these issues in the workshops.

20% (31) said that there is no period on the timetable for reading aloud. It is difficult to know how to interpret this because teachers understand reading aloud to refer to learners reading aloud. I also think that some teachers may have read this as, ‘There is no period on the timetable for reading’. From our experience with teachers and the schools ‘reading’ does not always seem to feature on the timetable, let alone ‘reading aloud’ specifically. In our workshops we stressed the importance of establishing on the timetable both a ‘library’ period, when the learners and library books could come together, as well as a period for the

reading programme. Both are requirements of the School Library Policy. Many schools do not have these as established periods on their timetables.

71% (110) said that once a child has learned to read it is better for them to read the books themselves. It is to be expected that so many have responded in this way. The ultimate objective is to produce learners who can read. But what does “Once a child has learned to read” really mean and what do teachers understand this to mean? For most teachers, as Pretorius (2000) points out, it is once children have learned to ‘decode’ words, which is supposed to happen in the Foundation Phase. If it does not, there is very little ongoing reading support to make sure that not only do learners ‘learn to read’ but that they also learn how to engage with increasingly difficult texts in a meaningful way in order for them to become skilled, independent readers, which is after all the goal. This is where the ‘teachers reading stories aloud to learners all through the primary school’ approach becomes important. As well as learners reading on their own, if indeed they do, teachers can use this approach to provide vital, ongoing reading support. This is a point that I must stress more than I have done, in future workshops.

A problem that we have encountered however is that many Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers in the primary schools see themselves as ‘specialists’ teaching either the languages and the social sciences on the one hand, or maths and the more ‘scientific’ subjects on the other, even though the general expectation at primary level is that they teach all the subjects. I have subsequently learned that this is possibly to cut down on lesson preparation, a consequence of the demands of constant curriculum change. Some of the few teachers, who honestly expressed reservations about how this reading approach would be received by the other teachers in their schools, raised this as a concern. This is because those primary school teachers who do not see themselves as language teachers, extraordinary though this sounds, are less likely to be cooperative about reading stories aloud which appears to be seen as the ‘language’ teachers responsibility. This view has been borne out in subsequent workshops although these are not part of this study. I also worry that high schools generally, and maths and the science subjects in particular, have a higher status in teachers’ minds than primary schools, languages and especially the Foundation Phase. This perception amongst teachers, if indeed true, must be challenged.

Only 5% (7) said that they do not enjoy reading aloud. 95% (147) say they do enjoy reading aloud. This is really encouraging and would appear to be a genuine response because this result is confirmed by the responses in the workshop evaluation as well as our observation of the teachers during the workshops. Only 7% (11) said that reading stories aloud to learners does not develop their reading skills. This means that an overwhelming

93% believe that it does. This too is encouraging. If teachers see the ‘reading stories aloud’ approach as beneficial they are more likely to want to try it out.

33% (51) said that reading aloud would only work if each learner has a copy of the book. This is another issue that I addressed in the workshops. I pointed out that it is better that learners do not have a copy of the book in front of them when the teacher reads aloud because learners should concentrate on *understanding* the story and not on trying to decode words as the teacher reads, or be distracted by pictures. Teachers are used to the idea that each child should have a class reader or a textbook. One of the reasons why I believe that this reading approach can work in this context is that teachers only need *one* copy of the book they read aloud. This approach therefore helps to overcome the problem of a lack of suitable resources. Instead of using newspapers and magazines, teachers can borrow books from the nearest library until such time as the school has bought its own books. This is not an impossible thing to do and is something that some teachers, as we have seen, are already doing.

2.3.4 Reading for information or pleasure?

When asked which they thought was more important, reading for information, pleasure or both, most teachers (87%) said both reading for pleasure and information are important. None singled out reading for pleasure alone but 9% singled out reading for information. (See Table 13)

Table 13 : Percentage of teachers reading for pleasure/information

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage	Comment
Reading for pleasure	0	0%	None singled out reading for pleasure on its own as being more important.
Reading for information	14	9%	6 of these were from the school based workshop – nearly half
Both	134	87%	Information and pleasure
Did not respond	6	4%	Did not respond

An analysis of the responses to the question, ‘What strategies do you use to encourage reading’ does not support this. Most teachers are not promoting reading for pleasure in their classrooms. Although teachers say that reading for pleasure is important and although as we have seen 45% of teachers say that they read novels for pleasure themselves, this is not reflected in their practice. This is an issue that we need to focus on more in follow-up workshops.

2.3.5 Buying storybooks

When analysing the responses I decided to combine Questions 24 and 25 on whether or not schools buy library resource material and the more specific question on the kind of material the school buys, because I was particularly interested in whether or not schools are buying *storybooks*. This meant that I was looking at whether schools were spending some of their norms and standards money to buy storybooks (fiction). (See Table 14)

Table 14 : Percentage response to buying of storybooks

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
No	100	65%
Yes	43	28%
Did not respond	11	7%

Only 28% of respondents say that their schools use their Norms and Standards allocation to buy fiction. Even then our observation suggests that they are buying very small quantities of books. It is also possible that some of the respondents are referring to a single event, a not very successful book exhibition held in 2004 designed to encourage schools to buy suitable books.

2.3.6 Reading promotion

Teachers were asked to choose *one* of a number of different ways to promote reading. (See Table 15)

Table 15 : Preferred method to promote reading

Category	Number of respondents (154)	Percentage
Reading Programme	38	25%
Reading celebrations	20	13%
Motivate learners to take out books from a library	23	15%
Classroom collections	28	18%
Provided more than one	18	12%
No response	27	17%

Although some teachers do have what they consider to be classroom collections, all schools would benefit from a healthy injection of exciting storybooks into their classrooms. 18%

of teachers (28) expressed an interest in having a classroom collection and 25% (38) were interested in a reading programme. This represents 43% of the teachers surveyed and is a positive place to start. Motivating learners to ‘take out books from a library’ and reading celebrations - one that is fashionable is the Readathon and even more currently, the ‘Reading Tent’ - are all well and good but in themselves are not going to do much to turn the deplorable reading situation around. Schools do have the means to provide classroom collections of quality fiction/storybooks, and consensus on a reading programme that could make a real difference to learners reading ability, would go a long way to help improve the present poor reading situation.

2.3.7 Suitable school collections and learner borrowing

If teachers said that their schools had a collection of suitable library resource material I wanted to find out if learners were able to borrow these books as I felt that this would be a reflection of teacher attitudes to reading. Of the 44% of teachers (68) surveyed who said that their school does have a library collection only 40% (27) allow learners to borrow books. This means, that only 18% of the surveyed sample of teachers as a whole have learners who are able to borrow books from the school library. Again if we want an indication of the percentage of *schools* in the sample allowing learners to borrow books, it is likely to be almost half of 18%.

I also wanted to know why learners are not able to borrow these books. Some teachers answered this question even though they had said that learners are able to borrow and even if they had said that their school does *not* have a suitable collection. I have included all the responses to this question as they provide some useful insights. (See Table 16)

Table 16 : Reasons why learners are not able to borrow books

Category	Number of respondents (81)	Percentage
1. Provided justification for learners not borrowing books.	35	43%
2. Lack of resources.	20	25%
3. Concern about books being lost or damaged.	26	32%

The reasons given in Category 1 included:

- Reasons that were not logical
- Cannot move the mobile unit (Mobile units were given to a number of schools to help them establish a library. They proved anything but mobile and were also highly

unsuitable as a library cabinet because of the nature of the shelving. However this should not prevent schools from allowing learners to borrow books.)

- Had a burglary
- Do not know about ELITS
- ELITS has not given the school books
- Lack of skills
- No library

Extracts from some of the questionnaires include comments such as:

- We are looking forward to (*presumably a time when learners will be able to borrow books*)
- Teachers are taking books and sabotaging us
- I haven't seen them [books] but I've heard they are there

A school's limited library resources and the fact that teachers believed learners would not treat with care the few books the school had - that books would be lost or damaged, came up as a concern in the workshops. Teachers were anxious about allowing learners to take these books home. This is also something that I addressed in the workshops. Teachers also seem to expect to be given books before anything can happen. There is little sense of agency.

2.3.8 Teachers using library resources

Of the 45% of teachers (69) who say that they have a suitable collection of books in their school 67% (46) say that teachers use these books regularly in the classroom. (See Table 17)

Table 17 : Use of library resources

Category	No of respondents (69)	Percentage
Yes	46	67%
No	12	17%
No Response	11	16%

This would seem to suggest that if books are available teachers are likely to use them. Unfortunately this sometimes means that teachers use them and do not return them. The comment mentioned above: 'Teachers are taking books and sabotaging us' was not an isolated one. This issue came up in the workshops and when we visited schools. We would sometimes find that when a school had a set of encyclopaedias, for example, it was

incomplete because teachers had taken some of the volumes, either for preparation or for children at home, and not returned them.

2.3.9 Resources in the classroom

I asked teachers what kind of reading materials they had in their classrooms because without the 'right kind' of books teachers are severely restricted in what they can achieve.

Table 18 : Reading material in the classroom

Category	No of respondents (154)	Percentage
Both storybooks and class readers	80	52%
Class readers	28	18%
Storybooks	22	14%
Other (Non-fiction, newspapers, magazines, Bible)	14	10%
'No response'	8	5%
None	2	1%

A total of 66% ($80 + 22 = 102$) respondents said that they have storybooks in their classrooms. (See Table 18) Although this might appear quite positive my observation of the books in schools over many visits, suggests that most schools do not have interesting collections of children's stories. So what do teachers consider a storybook to be and what do I imagine when I talk about storybooks? A distinction should be made between workbooks, schoolbooks, class readers and language books on the one hand and fiction material, storybooks/real books on the other. Teachers tend not to differentiate, largely I suspect because the really exciting fiction material that will stimulate and interest children is simply not available in most schools and is unfamiliar to many of them. The teachers' narrow understanding of what is meant by 'storybooks' was borne out when I analysed the examples of the titles that they read aloud. Although it appeared that quite a high percentage read 'storybooks' the selection was limited and the fairy stories and folk tales, although fine to use, can pall after a while especially if teachers are using them to teach some kind of moral lesson which many seem to feel the need to do. During the workshops I showed teachers the kind of books (fiction) that they should be using to encourage children to read.

2.3.10 Suitability of storybooks

In order to check the reliability of teachers' responses about the reading material they have available, I asked if the statement: 'There are no suitable storybooks in the school' was true for them.

Table 19 : Suitability of storybooks

Category	No of respondents (154)	Percentage
No suitable storybooks in the school	69	45%
Suitable storybooks in the school	85	55%

66% of the respondents had said that they have storybooks in the *classroom*. (See Table 18) However only 55% said that there are suitable storybooks in the *school*. This is an 11% discrepancy. (See Table 19) Later in the questionnaire I asked teachers if their school has a suitable collection of *library resource material*. (See Table 20)

Table 20 : Collection of library resource material

Category	No of respondents (154)	Percentage
No	73	47%
Yes	69	45%
No response	12	8%

This time only 45% responded positively. What many teachers consider to be a 'suitable' collection is suspect as we have seen. Our observation as ELITS advisors is that most schools do not have a suitable collection of library resource material or if they do, it is a very small collection.

2.3.11 The language issue

I had intended to look more closely at this. For example, I asked teachers to say whether the reading material they had in their classrooms was in English or Zulu. I decided though that this was not the main thrust of my research. I also felt that the quality of most of the material that I know is in the classrooms was such that it was not really worth analysing in this way. As a result I have not included this data. However I did ask teachers to say which language they prefer to use when they read aloud. I have excluded the 20 who said that they do not read aloud. (See Table 21)

Table 21 : Language preferred

Category	No of respondents (134)	Percentage
English	31	23%
Zulu	14	11%
Both	89	66%

A majority of teachers (66%) appear to be happy to use both English and Zulu for reading aloud/teaching in the classroom. If both languages are preferred for reading aloud it is probably true also for their general teaching. A significant 23% prefer to use English only. (See Table 21) It appears to be common practice for teachers in a primary school to teach both the Intermediate and Senior Phases, hence the combination in Table 22. A breakdown of the grades these 134 teachers teach revealed the following: (See Table 22)

Table 22 : Breakdown of grades and preferred language

	Foundation Phase (70)		Intermediate Phase (36)		Intermediate & Senior (18)		Senior (10)	
Both	73%	51	67%	24	50%	9	50%	5
English	14%	10	25%	9	44%	8	40%	4
Zulu	13%	9	8%	3	6%	1	10%	1

Both English and Zulu are favoured in all the grades. The 14% of teachers who are interested in only using English in the Foundation Phase is cause for concern. As we have seen in the teachers' responses to the question on reading strategies and their reasons for reading stories aloud, they place a high value on English language acquisition. However when this leads to the exclusion of the use of Zulu as the mother tongue in early literacy teaching it is harmful to a child's literacy development in my opinion. As one might expect there is a greater interest in using 'English only' in the Intermediate and Senior Phases but I believe that the use of both languages should still be encouraged. There is very little support for using Zulu *only*, not even in the Foundation Phase (13%).

We have found that schools have very few Zulu storybooks, if any at all, to use for reading aloud even though this is so important in the lower grades. When a school's extremely limited collection of suitable library books are organised on a shelf, the English fiction collection in my experience, is always larger than the Zulu fiction collection. ELITS is

actively trying to address this imbalance but with teachers understandably concerned about teaching rural children English there is a tendency to emphasise English vocabulary. This tends to kill the enjoyment of a story. We experienced this approach to reading aloud when we visited the schools for the interviews and watched 'read aloud' demonstrations.

Only 3% of the teachers who were surveyed said that they do not feel comfortable reading English storybooks aloud. (See Figure 14) I am assuming that this response is related to a language problem and not that these teachers have some rooted objection to using English. Some teachers appeared to struggle with English when they filled in the questionnaires. Many of the schools in Ilembe can be considered to be 'deep' rural schools and getting learners to learn English appears to be a priority for many teachers, more important even than teaching them to read. Given the rural, remote nature of this district it is not surprising to find some teachers who struggle with English.

2.3.12 Summary and analysis of teacher attitudes to reading

72% of teachers believe that learners should be encouraged to read books other than their workbooks as early as possible without really being able to explain why, while 28% think that it is better to start later than Grade One. The reason for this appears to be that many teachers assume that learners have to have *English* vocabulary before they can read and that reading therefore means reading in English. Many teachers appear to be largely unaware of this blurring of literacy development with English language development.

Although some teachers do understand that encouraging learners to read books other than their workbooks as early as possible can help them to develop a love of reading, only two responses referred to predicting what will happen in a story, one to children's imagination being stimulated by books and only one to learners' ability to visualise. Instead 60% of teachers see reading stories aloud as an opportunity to *teach* the children something that they consider to be important. Their emphasis is on the mechanical aspect of reading or on imparting information. Only 16% of the teachers surveyed have some awareness that reading stories aloud helps children to understand and enjoy them. The findings therefore suggest that most teachers not only are unaware of and therefore do not understand and value, the communicative aspect of reading, which is about reading for understanding and enjoyment, but also do not understand that this is essential for a child's reading development.

Nearly half the teachers surveyed said that they would like to read stories aloud to their learners but felt that there is not enough time to do this. This rather suggests an attitude that says that reading stories aloud is not important enough to make this a priority.

Although only 23% felt that it is teachers in the Foundation Phase who read stories aloud this attitude needs to change to at least include Intermediate Phase teachers who should not see themselves as 'specialists'. Most did not see reading stories aloud as a means of providing ongoing reading support because 71% said that once a child has learned to read it is better for them to read the books themselves.

94% of teachers said that they enjoy reading stories aloud and 93% believe that this develops learners reading skills. This is a positive place to start if there is to be any hope of teachers changing their reading teaching practice to accommodate reading for pleasure.

Although 87% of teachers said that reading for pleasure is important and 45% said that they read novels for pleasure themselves, this is not reflected in their practice. To some degree the latter finding, I think, knocks what appears to be a generally held perception that teachers do not read themselves. It is not helpful to castigate teachers and make them feel guilty because of this perception, as some seem to do, even if this is the case. Even though the sample could be said to be biased in favour of those who have an interest in books and reading, many teachers believe that reading for pleasure is important. This is something that can be built on and used in future workshops in the hope that this will change teachers' reading practice in the classroom. In the workshops I stressed the fact that even if teachers did not read themselves, when they are standing in front of a class reading stories aloud to their learners, they are important reading role models.

33% felt that each child should have a copy of the book that is read aloud. When I covered this aspect in the workshops and asked teachers why children should *not* have a copy of the book when they read aloud, they readily understood that the book would be a distraction and that children would not therefore give their full attention to understanding the story. Only 28% of the respondents said that their schools use their Norms and Standards allocation to buy fiction and only 18% of the surveyed sample of teachers have learners who are able to borrow books from the school library. 57% of those who responded expressed concerns about limited resources and books being lost or damaged, as reasons why learners are not able to borrow books. This is an attitude that can change with the necessary information and a workable system.

Although teachers say that they have storybooks in the classroom (55%) and a suitable collection of library resource material (45%), the reality is that very few schools have suitable books or if they do, the collection is very limited. Teachers' idea of what is really suitable can change with exposure to the right kind of books.

The 73 % of teachers in the Foundation Phase who prefer to use both English and Zulu for reading aloud, the minimal 13% who prefer Zulu only, and the 14% who only want to use English, all point to a high value being placed on English language acquisition. This is also borne out through informal observation of the material in the schools, which reveals that teachers tend to favour English fiction over Zulu fiction. The thorny issue of mother tongue versus English as the medium of instruction in primary schools influences both teachers' attitude to reading as well as their reading teaching practice.

Finally we should be aware that when answering the questionnaire teachers would sometimes contradict themselves. If we take one of the questionnaires as a rather glaring example we find the following contradictions. One teacher said that she reads storybooks such as *The Picture that Came Alive* and *Trolley Trouble* but she also said that there is not enough time for reading stories aloud and that there are no suitable storybooks in the school. She also said that the school spends Norms and Standards money to buy storybooks but that the school does not have a suitable collection of books. It is possible that the wording of this last question caused some confusion. Teachers were asked if their school has 'a collection of suitable library resource material eg. books given to the school by ELITS'. Some appeared to understand the question to read, 'Has your school been given books by ELITS', which is what they all want and expect and I suspect that some were only too ready to answer, 'No'. It was not possible to factor these contradictions into the data analysis.

3. Workshop Evaluation

The purpose of the workshop evaluation (See Appendix G) was to help to establish how effective the reading intervention had been. I used 155 workshop evaluations.

3.1 What teachers found useful

The response to the workshops by the teachers was positive. 89% found all three sections useful (Library management; Information skills; Reading) and a further 9% singled out the reading section. This finding can be confirmed by our observation of the teachers during the workshops. Most did appear to find them beneficial. However teachers were often not able to articulate *why* they found the sections useful. What came across from their responses was a general sense that they thought that the workshop was useful. In their explanations 39% made a specific, positive reference to reading aloud. Here are some of their responses relating to reading:

- I also discovered the importance of reading aloud
- It reminded me of how reading should be encouraged.
- We as parents are also responsible for teaching our children to read.
- Reading aloud was enjoyable. I think my learners will enjoy as I did.
- I didn't know that reading skills is so important to the learners. *(This is a Foundation Phase teacher)*
- [The workshop] gave lots of info about reading and how to use it in the class.

One comment about the usefulness of all three sections of the workshop that I think is quite telling, says: 'It all explain how to implement in real life.' We tried very hard to make sure that the suggestions that we made in the workshops could be implemented in 'the real life' situation that teachers face in schools.

If teachers said that there were sections that they did not find useful they were asked to explain why. Not one singled out reading as *not* being useful. Instead 74 of the teachers surveyed (48%) singled out reading, or some aspect of what was covered in the reading section of the workshop, as *the most useful thing* that they had learned during the workshop. This is nearly half. Given that most teachers seem to have found all aspects of the workshop useful and that all the sections appear to have been well received, this is significantly high although reading was not necessarily the only aspect to be singled out. Other aspects were as well. Teachers were also interested to find out more about library management. There was less interest in information skills although some singled this out as an important aspect.

3.2 What teachers need more help with

7% of teachers felt that they do not need any more help. This reflects either a lack of interest or a perception that this would be a waste of time because their school does not have library resources.

Only 8% saw themselves as needing help with reading books aloud for pleasure. It would seem that most teachers feel confident about reading aloud in this way. I find this interesting because I thought that teachers might lack confidence to read stories aloud. However as it turns out, this was not a problem, which means that one potential barrier to the implementation of this reading approach is removed. Again our observation of the teachers during this section of the workshop showed that the majority were quite at ease

reading aloud to their peers. It should be noted that the storybooks they were using were not difficult and written in very simple English, so language was not a problem. At a subsequent series of workshops in August 2006 with a different group of teachers, I read aloud a story that was a bit more difficult and asked teachers at the end what they thought of it. Without hesitation they all chorused 'too long'. It was only when I began to ask them questions about the story, in order to help them to engage with it in a meaningful way, that they showed more interest.

I do not find it surprising that 85% of the teachers surveyed said that they want help with other aspects of the workshop. A lot of what was covered in the other two sections was new to them. Teachers wanted help particularly with the organisation and management of a school library but a number of teachers also said that they wanted help to develop their information skills. It was obvious to us from the response during the information skills section of the workshop, that many teachers need help with integrating the use of library resource material into the teaching of the curriculum and that one of the reasons why this does not happen, even when a school has suitable books, is because teachers lack the skills they need to do it or to do it effectively.

3.3 Teachers reading aloud experience

A large part of the Workshop Evaluation was devoted to questions about what was covered in the reading section. Questions 6 – 12 produced eight 'No responses' from two respondents out of a total of 155. Most of these questions related to the actual reading aloud experience, whether I was reading aloud or whether the teachers were reading aloud. One respondent may have missed this section of the workshop, the other left blank 7, 8, and 9 only, probably wanting to fill in 'no' but did not want to appear rude. These latter questions asked whether respondents enjoyed discussing the stories that were read aloud, whether they enjoyed the experience of reading stories aloud and whether the workshop had made them feel more confident about reading aloud.

There was one 'No' to question 11 on whether 'the workshop has given you some ideas about how to involve learners in discussions about the stories'. Otherwise the response to this section of the workshop was overwhelmingly positive. Teachers said that they enjoyed listening to the stories that I read aloud, they enjoyed discussing them, they enjoyed the experience of reading stories aloud themselves, they say that they feel more confident about reading stories aloud, that the workshop has given them some ideas about *how* to read the stories aloud, as well as ideas about how to involve learners in discussions about

the stories and say that they will go back to their school and read stories aloud to their learners.

This emphatically positive response can be confirmed by my and my colleagues' informal observation of the teachers during this section of the workshops. Teachers clearly enjoyed their experience of the stories. On one occasion some teachers' concentration had lapsed somewhat and they were talking to each other and not carrying out my instruction to take turns in their groups to read aloud to each other and to listen while the story was being read. Others in their groups began to read and it was really interesting to see that gradually the talking stopped and they were all drawn into and absorbed by the story. Whether or not these teachers then went back to their schools and read stories aloud to their learners is another matter and something that the interviews were designed to determine.

Although there is no doubt that practically all the teachers at the workshops enjoyed the stories, as well as the experience of being read aloud to and reading aloud themselves, later workshop evaluation questions reveal a degree of reluctance on the part of some to either be involved in any further workshops to have an opportunity to practice new skills related to the reading aloud approach (Question 19) or to actively involve themselves in implementing the reading stories aloud approach (Question 20).

3.4 Convincing other teachers in the school

Although only 7% (10) of the teachers surveyed, either said 'No' or expressed some kind of reservation about whether other teachers in their school would be interested in reading stories aloud, I believe that the reasons that they have given to explain their response provides interesting, honest insight and a more realistic assessment of what they were likely to encounter when they went back to their schools.

These are the negative responses to Question 13 and the explanations provided for their responses (Question 14) that say that other teachers at their schools will not be interested in the reading aloud approach or that express reservations about whether they will be.

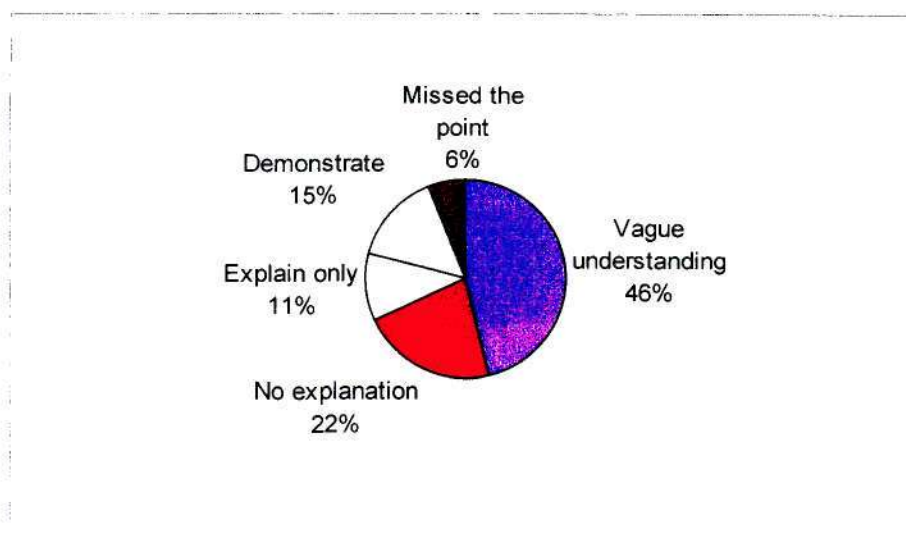
- Yes and no. Some will be interested, but some will think its childish and maybe a waste of time.
- No. Lack of skills and confidence.
- Yes and no. Other educators don't like reading. They won't like to have 30 min. reading period. They don't like to read aloud to their children especially in Senior Phase.
- Because others are not language teachers.
- I hope (yes). *Has reservations but does not give reasons.*

- No. They don't have enough time to do it because a lot of work that is expected from them.
- No. Not all of them. They might say they are not teaching language. Only language educator must read stories to the learners.
- Yes. They might not all of them. *No explanation given.*
- No. They are not interested. Learners will be lazy in reading for themselves.
- No. I think they need motivation from the beginning of the year. *(The respondent does not expect a good response as she anticipates a degree of inflexibility. The timetable is determined at the beginning of the year but there is nothing to stop individual teachers making time in their relatively flexible, primary school day for reading aloud, as I have pointed out in subsequent workshops.)*

The reaction of Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers could well be a problem especially given what I have already said about 'specialisation' in the primary school. If lack of skills or confidence is a problem perhaps seeing the approach demonstrated would allay fears as the teachers at the workshops did not appear to have this problem and as far as a lack of time is concerned I think that teachers sometimes use this as an excuse to maintain the status quo which they probably see as the easy option.

However 93 % of teachers said that they thought other teachers in their schools would be interested. Whether this interest would be enough to change practice was something that I wanted to investigate. This does suggest however that there might well be a degree of interest that could be capitalised on.

Figure 15 : Categories based on responses to 'convincing other teachers'



No of respondents = 155

An analysis of these responses⁴ suggests division into five groups. (See Figure 15)

1. Vague understanding
2. Explain only
3. Demonstrate
4. Missed the point
5. No explanation

The first group shows that 46% (66) of teachers have not properly understood what I covered in the workshops. Teachers explained why they would try to convince other teachers at their schools to read stories aloud by referring to something that they had learned about the value of reading aloud. However what they singled out demonstrates a rather vague understanding of the reading message of the workshop. Even so this does suggest that there is some hope that they have learned something useful. In the second group 11% of teachers (16) appear to understand the benefits of the reading aloud approach and the importance of report back but will only *explain* this to the other teachers at their schools. The third group hit the jackpot in that 15% (21) teachers were prepared to *demonstrate* the reading aloud approach in order to convince other teachers. Some of these respondents were prepared to set an example that they hoped others would follow. The fourth group missed the point altogether eg. The respondents think that it is the *learners* not teachers, who should be reading aloud, or they say nothing of substance. This accounts for 6% or (8) of the respondents. In the final group 22% of teachers (32) said they would try to convince other teachers in their schools but provided no explanation.

Some of the comments from Category 1 are as follows:

- To make our learners have a success in schoolwork I'll encourage the teachers to teach reading in classes. (*This was an Intermediate Phase teacher.*)
- Drill the importance of reading (how it helps learners and makes teaching easier).
- I will as hard as I can. (*If only earnest willingness could be translated into action!*)

The reasons teachers gave for convincing other teachers in their schools to read stories aloud in the classroom reveal a degree of ignorance about what I was trying to achieve in the workshops. I had wanted to convey the fun aspect of reading aloud but also explain that doing this is important to help children to read for meaning. I had expected that teachers would demonstrate the reading aloud approach as the most effective way to convince others to implement it. These responses highlight the need for future workshops with teachers in order to clarify and reinforce the reading ideas presented to them. The

⁴ Because one of our workshops was a school-based one I excluded, from this question, the 12 respondents who attended. 140 said 'yes' they would.

responses also reveal muddled thinking about the best way to report back to schools, partly I suspect because teachers are not entirely clear about what they should be reporting back. Even though I did provide handouts, future workshops could make sure that teachers have some guidance on how to do this, in particular to lead by example and by encouraging them to provide a reading aloud demonstration. Finally, although the ‘drill the importance of reading’ is only one response, it reflects an entrenched behaviourist teaching mindset that highlights the importance of providing teachers with ‘how to’ skills.

3.5 Follow-up workshops

Teachers very often indicated that they would like follow-up on more than one aspect of the workshops. 62% (96) of the teachers surveyed want a follow-up workshop related to the other two aspects of the workshops and not on reading. A breakdown of these responses reveal that about 70% would like follow-up on library organisation and management and about 30% would like more on the integration of information skills. Although what I covered in the reading section appears to have made an impression, most teachers seem to believe that they do not need any more help with this approach. This reveals a degree of ignorance about what is really involved if this approach is to be implemented successfully and is a further indication that follow-up workshops are necessary. Teachers felt comfortable working with the simple stories that I used but if any progress with learners reading ability is to be made at all, both learners and teachers have to interact in a meaningful way with increasingly more complex texts, in this case stories. The quality of the interaction between teacher and learner is also critically important. Only 10% (15) singled out reading for follow-up. (See Table 23)

Table 23 : Follow-up workshops

Category	No of respondents (155)	Percentage
Singled out reading for a follow-up workshop	15	10%
Did not single out reading	96	62%
Offer no explanation/ Do not want a follow-up workshop	36	23%
Want to sort out problems encountered with implementation	7	4%
Want books	1	1%

23% (36) did not say what they would like to cover in a follow-up workshop, did not respond at all or do not want a follow-up workshop. This suggests a lack of interest or a degree of inertia or both. 3% (5) of these said that they do not want a follow-up workshop and 3% (4) did not respond. Of the five who said they do not want a follow-up, one was a

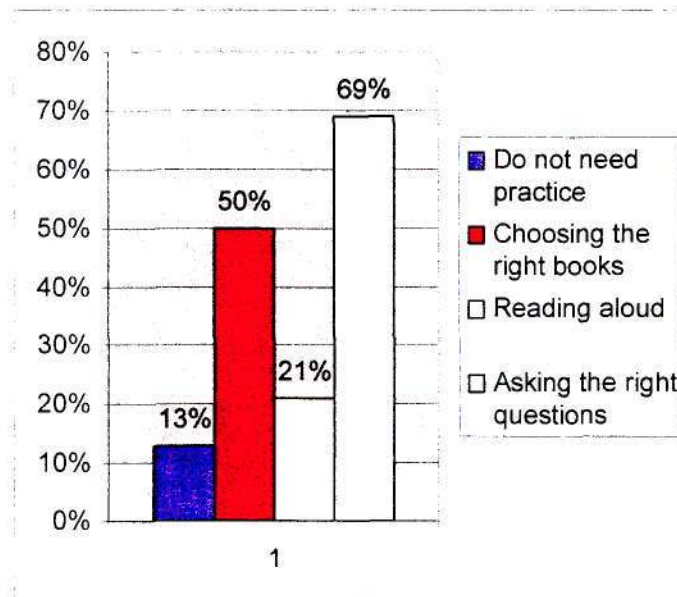
teacher whose lack of interest had been marked, two seemed to be familiar with reading stories aloud and libraries, and the one school has subsequently shown quite a lot of interest.

I find the 5% (7) who want a follow-up workshop in order to sort out problems with implementation, interesting. I think that there are two possible reasons for this response. The first is a genuine desire to find solutions to inevitable problems and the second is that these teachers have a somewhat cynical view, probably based on years of experience, about grand, new ideas from the Department that they believe are not going to work in practice.

It is interesting to note though that when asked specifically about what reading ‘practice’ they need, a slightly different story emerges.

3.6 Areas needing practice

Figure 16 : Areas needing practice



No of respondents = 155

The 13% (20) who said that they do not need any practice are respondents who would appear not to be interested in this approach at all, fail to understand what this approach really involves or are confident that they know what they are doing. Two of these singled out reading for a follow-up workshop but then said that they do not need any reading practice. 89% (85) of the 96 who did not single out reading for follow-up workshops then said that they need reading practice. (See Table 23)

21% of the respondents felt that they need to *practice* reading aloud, more than double the number 8%, who had said that they still need more help with *how to* read books aloud for pleasure. However the *how to* of Question 3, should be seen in the context of that question and the other aspects of the workshop, where the need for more help appeared to be greater. It does suggest though that most teachers feel confident about reading aloud. This is confirmed by our observation of the teachers in the workshops.

Many teachers (69%) recognised that they need help with asking the right questions. This is the more difficult aspect of the reading aloud approach for many teachers and they have correctly identified it as requiring more practice. It is an area that requires development, demonstration and practice in follow-up workshops. Teachers (50%) also indicated that they would like help with choosing the right books to read aloud. They then provided explanations for why they needed more practice in a particular area. (See Table 24)

Table 24 : Reasons for needing more practice

Category	Number of responses (N)	Percentage
Identified what they need to practice but did not explain in more detail	85	55%
Provided what can be considered to be a useful explanation	48	31%
Did not provide a useful explanation	4	2%
Did not respond	18	12%

These are some of the responses:

- During discussion I wish learners to practice using English.
- As a Maths teacher I don't have much skills in reading and choosing right books. I need more skills to be developed because I am interested in library and in reading stories for pleasure as that will help me even in my family as well as my community.
- Since Grades are not the same level of thinking I think questions should vary.
- We don't have enough suitable, enjoyable or funny books at school.
- Sometimes I just mixed the questions. I did not get answers to some. I think that it's they way I phrase my questions.
- I want the book which will make them learn a lesson to what they are using daily because they are in rural areas.

- Questioning is a skill. I need to improve on how I can ask relevant questions to the story.
- I feel that I need these aspects because I want to make the best reading role model for my learners to develop interest in reading books and also for fun.
- My learners are sometimes difficult to use English so questions are sometimes hard to answer. *(The suggestion is that it is not legitimate to ask the questions in Zulu. The focus seems to be on learning English not on becoming literate.)*
- Need practice in asking the right questions esp. to learners where English is 2nd language as they have difficulty understanding.

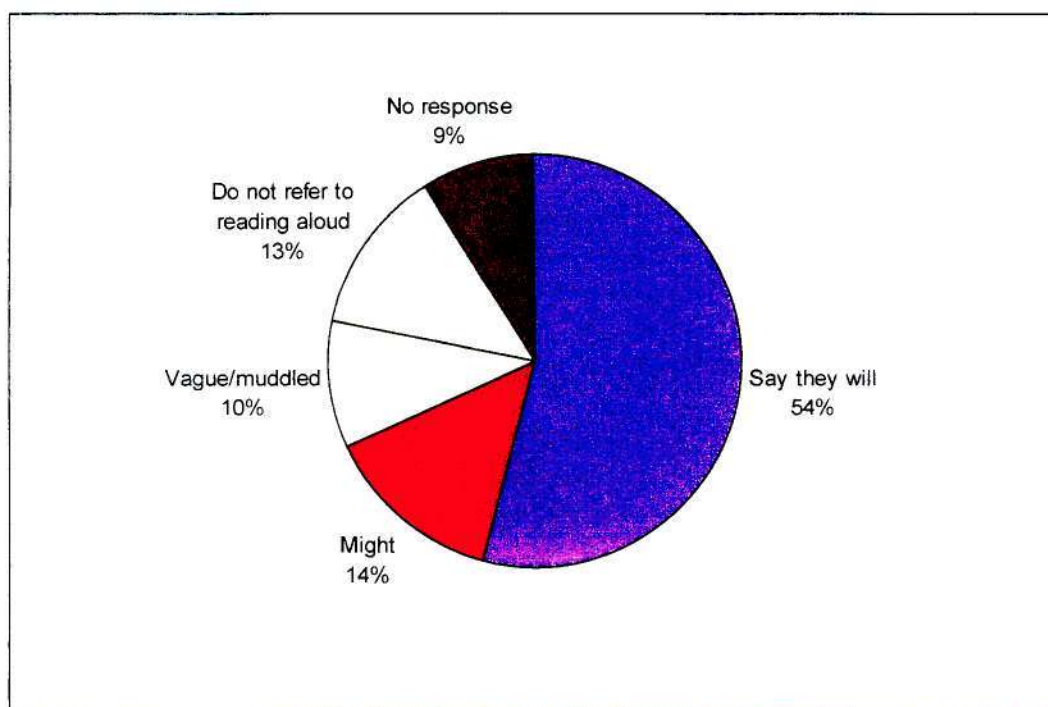
This response is from a teacher who says that she does not need practice:

- I have always been reading to my children both in class and at home. In school I have my own personal collection of library books which should now total 73 but unfortunately some got burned in a fire last year.

3.7 Commitment to action

When asked to name three specific things that they will immediately do differently in the classroom (one for each section of the workshop) teachers were somewhat less forthcoming. 54% of the teachers surveyed appear to *say* that they will implement the reading aloud approach in their classrooms because they refer to some aspect of what they have learned. (See Figure 17)

Figure 17 : Implementation of reading aloud



No of respondents = 155

The responses of 14% suggest that they *might* implement reading aloud but do not inspire an awful lot of confidence that they will. This combined total of 68% (105) suggests a somewhat tentative initial positive response. Reading aloud did not make any real impression on 13% (20) because they made no specific mention of it when they said what they would implement. A further 9% (14) do not appear to be interested in implementing any aspect of what they learned in the workshops as they did not respond to this question at all. As one might expect when asked a direct question about what they are immediately going to do differently in their classrooms based on what they have learned in the workshops, teachers are not quite as enthusiastic in their responses.

3.8 Summary of the workshop evaluation findings

Teachers found all three sections of the workshop useful (89%) but many singled out reading as having made an impression (48%). They responded enthusiastically to the experience of reading stories aloud, indicated that they feel confident about reading aloud, said that they would like more practice choosing the right books to read aloud and that they particularly want practice asking the right questions. They were rather more muted when it came to committing themselves to implementing the reading stories aloud approach in the classroom with only 54% saying that they would.

4. The interviews and observations

I used semi-structured interviews (See Appendix H) as the instrument to ‘measure’ whether or not the reading intervention was effective and chose two schools to interview. The first was a Senior Primary school in Ndwedwe (Grades 5 to 7) and the second a Junior Primary school (Grades R – 4) also in Ndwedwe but in a different ward.

4.1 First school interview

4.1.1 Background

Together with my ELITS colleagues I first visited the Senior Primary School towards the end of February 2005. Our purpose was to establish the suitability of the school for one of our cluster workshops and to give the teacher librarian some advice and assistance with the organisation of the library. She had asked us to come. The school was typical of most primary schools in Ilembe. The buildings looked drab and uninviting, although we learned

later that some of it was quite new. The teacher librarian had established a library in one of the classrooms and had made an effort to organise the books and allow learners access to them. In particular she wanted help with shelving because the somewhat clumsy, makeshift arrangement of desks that she was using meant that the books kept sliding off. We were able to make some suggestions as to how she could overcome this without having to wait for resources, essentially by using completely flat desktops and bricks covered in thick paper to act as book ends.

The school was also due to receive books as part of the School Library Development Project, even though it was under threat of closure because of falling numbers. It has subsequently received them. The teacher librarian was keen for us to hold the workshop at her school and agreed to invite some interested neighbouring primary schools.

The school only had five educators including the principal and was facing the possibility of losing two of these because numbers had dropped. Enrolment stood at eighty and with the declining numbers there was a possibility that the school might close. The school had no telephone, as there were no lines available and no electricity although the school had been wired and it was hoped that this was coming soon. However the school does have running water.

The workshop was held in May 2005 and was attended by 7 surrounding schools with a total of 8 teachers. When we arrived for the workshop we found that the teacher librarian had taken our advice on shelving, she had also removed unsuitable material from the library such as textbooks and teacher reference as we had suggested. One of the concerns that she raised at this time was that lending was a problem because she said that there is no culture of book reading or book care. This is an issue that we address in the workshops.

I subsequently chose this school for one of the interviews because the workshop there stood out in my mind as not having been very effective, for two reasons. The first was that this was the most poorly attended of all our workshops and the only one where there was a suggestion of negativity from the teachers. The other reason that I chose the school was that the teacher librarian, who was the only teacher from the school to attend the workshop, was rather distracted. The reason for this was that over the two days of the workshop she was left on her own in charge of the whole school and in addition she was trying to organise the preparation of food for all the workshop participants, not something we had requested but something which a number of the host schools generously did for us in the

absence of our own ELITS budget. However she did have the opportunity, before the interview, to experience the workshop again with the School Library Development Project (SLDP) book handover.

The reading questionnaire revealed the following information about this teacher librarian: she was read to as a child, but not very often by a family member, who read the Bible to her. She says that she reads stories such as *The Beanstalk* aloud to her learners, also not very often and reads for about 30 minutes when she does. Learners do not ask her questions but she asks them questions about the stories that she reads to them. She ticked the following as true statements:

- I tell my class stories.
- Once a child has learned to read it is better for them to read books themselves.
- I borrow books from the nearest library to read aloud to my class.

This teacher librarian had some experience of being read to as a child but not so that she would be familiar with having storybooks read aloud to her for pleasure. Although she does read aloud to her learners she does not do this on a regular basis and chooses English fairy stories to read aloud. She teaches in a traditional manner, testing her learners by asking them questions, believes in the value of telling her learners stories, shows initiative in that she takes the trouble to borrow books from a library to read aloud but believes that it is better that children learn to read books for themselves.

One of my colleagues and I visited the school for the interviews early in November 2005. We paid a subsequent visit to the school in March 2006 when we had to park our car at the school and walk up the hill to visit the high school because the track to the high school was impassable. We took the opportunity to see the teacher librarian and had a look at what was happening in the library. She had recently received the SLDP books. They were in a box waiting to be accessioned. The school had lost two educators so they were now down to three. As there was a class in the library the teacher librarian asked us to do a reading aloud demonstration with them. I agreed because she had already taken the trouble to do a demonstration for me and I felt that this was an opportunity to show her how this could work in practice. We chose one of the newly arrived English fiction books out of the box, a Junior Africa Writer Series book called *Charlene the Speed Freak*. My colleague read the story aloud and I tried to discuss it with the learners. The children appeared to enjoy the story but the fact that they are not fluent in English, and my one colleague and I were unable to either discuss the story in Zulu or translate it, created an immediate problem. It was a useful experience for us to see just how much of a problem the language barrier is.

In addition to showing initiative in seizing the opportunity to get us to demonstrate the reading aloud approach to her class, this teacher librarian had also taken the initiative, based on my advice in the workshop as part of the reading intervention, to allow learners to borrow books from the library and take them home in plastic sleeves. She showed us these library books, in the plastic sleeves that she was busy preparing for the learners to take home. Although not part of the interview, I have referred to this later visit as an indication of the fact that this teacher librarian was prepared to put new ideas into practice.

4.1.2 The reading aloud demonstration and interviews

I set up an appointment with the teacher librarian for the interviews and she agreed to also do a reading aloud demonstration for me. She was happy to do this and had gone to some trouble to prepare beforehand, to the extent that she had drawn up a lesson plan and had hand drawn pictures relating to the story.

4.1.2.1 The reading aloud demonstration

The Grade 6 learners sat in a circle in what felt like a somewhat artificial situation and the teacher read *Little Red Riding Hood* aloud to the class. Although the story was well read, the presentation included the teacher repeating the question: We call it apause for answer, then answer supplied: 'wolf'(sic). The children responded as though they had heard the story before. The only noticeable reaction from them was when the wolf showed his teeth. The teacher's emphasis when reading the story was on vocabulary. The children were given the opportunity to repeat words. They were also given the opportunity to answer a question like: "Who comes inside?" - and shown a picture. The learners responded to this question. The teacher summarized the story using the illustrations. She asked the question at the end "Have you understood the story?" She also asked them to fill in missing words as an oral exercise.

The only really challenging questions were asked at the end: "Was the story interesting?" to which the children answered 'Yes' and then in response to the question 'Why'? said it was because: 'Animal is talking'. The other question was: "What do we call a story that is not true?" Answer: "Fiction".

This teacher appeared to be used to reading stories aloud in this way, using the not very exciting storybook material that she had available. Although she clearly felt quite confident about reading aloud to her class, the way in which she engaged the learners in the story reflected a teaching style that is not conducive to a communicative, whole language

approach to reading that emphasizes understanding and enjoyment. Her focus was on the facts of the story, reinforced by a memory test at the end in the form of a one word, lower order question quiz that served no purpose. She was also concerned about teaching the children English vocabulary. There was no engagement with learners' feelings about the story or encouragement for the learners to use their imagination, to predict what might happen next for example. She did not engage the learners in the story in any way that would help them to do this.

This limited approach to reading stories aloud is reflected in the reading questionnaire data in response to the questions on reading strategies, and the reasons that teachers gave for reading stories aloud. Reading aloud in this way is problematic because the purpose is to teach children English vocabulary. My workshop reading aloud demonstration emphasised the importance of learners understanding and enjoying stories, but this does not appear to have changed the way this teacher librarian reads aloud to her learners.

4.1.2.2 Interview with the teacher librarian

(See Appendix H)

The teacher librarian arrived at the school in 2000. She found a pile of books and children who could not read even though this was a Senior Primary school. She was interested in improving reading skills but found it quite an effort. Because the school had no readers she used the (*probably donated*) collection of books that she found in the school. She would take groups of learners to this collection of books. When the new classrooms were built she requested one as a library. She told us that she had studied for an ACE library qualification through UNISA for the theory and went to Ikwezi (a section of the Education Department that provides in-service training) for the practical. She said that she found both helpful.

When asked what she thought that she had achieved she responded by saying that both the teachers and the learners are now interested in the library that she had established and that she has developed herself through her studies because she now reads on her own. She finds the time.

She said that the time factor is a problem at school. She needs to supervise the learners in the library because they cannot be left unsupervised. Although a library period is included in the timetable she explained that you cannot have all forty learners in the library at once,

so the class has to be split and there is no extra staff. In other words the logistics are difficult.

For her the best way to promote reading in her school is to provide learners with a change of atmosphere by allowing them to come to the library. She also lets learners read at their own pace.

She does not allow the learners to take books home. She says that parents are illiterate and do not look after books so the learners must read them at school. At this point she wanted to know how to encourage *boys* to read. She believes that ultimately it is better that the learners read the books themselves. She identified *vocabulary* as the problem saying that learners will not read until they have vocabulary. She believes that reading aloud will help *all* children and has identified a need for a cassette player to play cassettes of stories being read and wants to do some fund raising in order to achieve this.

Using her responses to questions arising directly out of the reading questionnaire and workshop evaluation she said that she no longer believes that once a child has learned to read it is better to only read books themselves, although she did not elaborate. She said that the learners did not ask questions about the stories she read to them and that they still do not. Although she had said that she did not think that other teachers in her school would be interested in reading stories aloud because they would feel they lacked the skills and confidence to do this, she found that after she had demonstrated the reading aloud approach to them, they were interested.

When asked if she had been practicing asking the right questions to encourage discussion she said that she encourages questioning in Grade 7. She made the suggestion that this aspect should be dealt with in workshops. She wanted to know what sort of questions to ask and understands that she must know where to stop so that suggestions could come from the children. This is something that I suspect, a lot of teachers schooled in the old transmission style of teaching, struggle with. Simply being aware that this is a problem however is a step in the right direction.

This is a teacher who has shown an interest and a concern for her learners. She wanted the learners to come to the library to read. She took the initiative to develop a library and as we observed, she made an effort to make the library a stimulating environment by making and displaying charts as well as organizing the books.

As the teacher librarian was the only teacher from the school who attended the workshop I asked her the questions as the teacher who had attended even though she was not always present in the room.

What she remembers about the workshop is the importance of reading and the importance of listening. She says that reading takes the place of old grannies' stories because there are no grannies telling stories anymore. She also commented that children do not understand the language of the text (English) unless assisted.

The highlight of the workshop for her was the importance of books and reading because this is what she says develops the nation.

To promote reading she asks 'reading questions' and provides instructions. She lets learners read and interpret for 10 minutes in groups on their own but assists them with prewritten questions eg. complete the following and discussing *what* that question means.

She says that she is doing something different as a result of the workshop. She no longer reads from old Department textbooks and class readers but now uses attractive new books with pictures ie. fiction. She also now allows the learners to read regularly and gives them practice writing, such as a description or a poem, on their own that they can read out loud. (ie. creative writing). She says that she reads aloud on a daily basis.

For her the purpose of reading aloud is so that a child learns pronunciation. She says that it is also about the ability to *listen*, as well as being about concentration and understanding. She says that the 'young ones' do not concentrate. She sees the repetition in stories as being good for this because it provides the opportunity for children to become disciplined. She says that she does not read aloud for too long but keeps the sessions short. She believes that Grade 5 have the reading ability of Grade 1 in English. Reading aloud she feels gives learners the chance to *understand* and that this approach actively teaches listening as opposed to hearing.

She promotes reading for pleasure by having groups in the library and allowing them to read what they like. She also checks on borrowings and checks that they are in fact reading and does this by mild interrogation. She now has learners *asking* for library sessions.

They read *stories* in class twice a week. The teaching programme takes up a lot of time ie. teaching the formal aspects of language. When they read daily the questions are on the board.

For her the reading aloud strategy works because it is about reading for enjoyment and it improves vocabulary. She says that the learners all like to listen and talk among themselves about it. They obviously associate reading and enjoyment. They also discover some words that crop up in other Learning Areas.

She believes that there should be a much greater emphasis on reading and says that reading and reading workshops should not be taken lightly. Teachers should be taught how to read to learners and more workshops are required to do this. Teachers should attend these workshops and there should be follow-ups. She thinks that teachers need to see the benefit of reading for children and that these benefits should be pointed out to them. She also says that some teachers are not good readers. She referred to the belief, now highlighted in the letter from the national Education Department, that teachers say that with OBE there is no reading. She clearly does not agree with this and believes that reading must be emphasized.

This teacher librarian prefers English because learners need English for the real world. She says that it equips them for the future and sees a big need for improvement in English. She believes that all small children should be taught English along with Zulu as this prepares them for primary school and thinks that there should be parallel classes because 'you cannot suddenly have a big switch to English'.

The last few questions relate to providing feedback to other teachers at the school and their response. This teacher provided feedback by reporting back at a formal meeting and giving a demonstration of the reading aloud approach which received a positive response. She says that the other four teachers support the library because they now come and use it, although they still lack confidence. They are also using some non-fiction. There are two language teachers - herself and one other and they 'do the reading programme'. She pointed out that teachers like to specialize in the Intermediate Phase. We spoke to the other language teacher who appeared to support the teacher librarian and what she was doing with the library and reading. The response to the need to establish a reading programme was positive. The other teachers at the school were supportive and the school agreed to provide space on the composite timetable for reading.

This teacher librarian has clearly identified reading as a key aspect of learning and was concerned about learners' lack of adequate reading skills. The workshop helped to reinforce for her the importance of reading and listening. The highlight for her was the message about the importance of books and reading. Although she does read stories aloud to her learners her focus is not on helping them to understand and enjoy the stories for their own sake but rather to use them as an opportunity to increase their English vocabulary, which as we have seen she considers to be very important. She also uses reading stories aloud to test learners' ability to remember what has been read. She does not entertain the idea of reading Zulu fiction. Instead she seems to suggest that children cannot read unless they have some English vocabulary.

4.1.3 Summary of the findings from the interview with, and observation of, the teacher librarian

Judging from the demonstration and some of her responses, this teacher librarian does not engage the learners in the story in a meaningful way. The workshop did not change her practice of not encouraging her learners to ask questions about the stories. However she says that she is now using fiction rather than textbooks and class readers for reading aloud. She says that she reads aloud because pronunciation is important as well as understanding. She mentioned reading for enjoyment as a reason for reading aloud, the answer perhaps that she thinks that she ought to give but then goes on to say that it improves vocabulary, the answer that I suspect is the real one. This all suggests that although she does read stories aloud and now does this more frequently than she has been doing, she has nevertheless not really understood the value or experience of reading aloud in this way. Her real purpose for reading stories aloud is not for enjoyment or even understanding but rather to teach, English in particular, because without this she believes that learners will not be able to read their English schoolbooks and will therefore not succeed.

4.1.4 Interview with the Principal

The Principal confirmed what the teacher librarian had said about the library and how it was established. His opinion was that the workshop had been good and that they had gained a lot. He had received positive comments from neighbouring schools who felt that they had been given practical ideas for a simple library. He said that the report back to the staff had been good and that he appreciated the SLDP donation that was coming. He said that the neighbouring schools now know how to arrange these books. He felt that the workshop brought back the spirit of clustering because in working with his school, others

benefited. One problem that he had experienced however had to do with the requisition of shelving for the library because procurement has been slow to deliver.

When asked more specific questions about how his school promotes reading, what he sees as the purpose of reading aloud, what he understands by reading aloud, and the kind of reading programme that he envisaged for his school, he was somewhat vague. He felt that the reading programme was good because the teacher librarian and the other teachers have now been given the opportunity for learners to read out loud and gain confidence. He announced that the teacher librarian had organized a Readathon for neighbouring schools to come and see how to encourage reading.

He seemed to see reading aloud as something positive and said that reading should not just be on learning subjects. He also believed that it is in line with an outcomes approach. After some prompting from me he said that they have built in a reading time for next year so that teachers have a chance to read to the learners. He was positive about the policy requirement for a reading programme because he said learners now *like* to read, where they did not before. He also felt that they are more interested in the newspapers. With more prompting from me about what will happen during the reading time he said that learners would borrow books to read. He said that there will be a reading programme in the school and also a separate library time and that all four teachers were happy with this. He said that they all support the teacher librarian. When I pointed out that it is the *teachers* who must read aloud and asked if all would be happy with this, including the non-language teachers, I was assured that they would and that the non-language teachers would use articles. The principal said that the teacher librarian had also encouraged neighbouring schools, such as the Junior Primary next door, to start libraries so that the links could be kept.

My colleague's comment after this interview with the principal was that he sees the school library as a 'marketing trick' for the school and I am inclined to agree, particularly perhaps if we see this in the context of declining numbers and the threat of closure. Although he was supportive of what the teacher librarian was doing with the library and her interest in reading, he did not have any real understanding of the reading approach I was suggesting. In fact he demonstrated that he had missed the point altogether when he said that the teacher librarian had organised a Readathon for neighbouring schools to come and see how to encourage reading, although this probably happened prior to our workshop. Another example is when he referred to the reading programme as an opportunity for *learners* to read out loud and gain confidence. Not of course that this is not extremely important but

my emphasis is on *teachers* reading aloud. He also failed to pick up on the idea that I was advocating, that *all* primary school teachers should read *stories* aloud to their learners. This message has obviously not got through loud and clear, probably because the teacher librarian did not emphasise it in the report back, or perhaps because she made the assumption that it is the language teachers who would read stories aloud. This inclination in the primary schools to have ‘specialist’ teachers, even in the Intermediate Phase, appears to be the norm and as I have said, is cause for concern.

Although the teacher librarian had tried to interest the Junior Primary feeder school next door, in establishing a library and had invited them to our cluster workshop, they did not attend and in subsequent conversations with her she referred to their singular lack of interest. In addition, although the high school just up the eroded track had an interested teacher librarian and a small, quality collection of books provided by ELITS, for some strange reason the principal had recently locked the library and denied everyone access. Whether or not it has now been unlocked I do not know. I mention this as an example of a lost opportunity for schools in very close proximity to work together to provide ongoing, coherent reading support for their learners.

4.2 Second school interview

4.2.1 Background

The second school where I conducted interviews and observation was a Junior Primary and was not the one that I had originally intended to use as I have explained. The teacher librarian was the only one from her school who had attended the workshop that we held in April 2005 at the Senior Primary school that was close by. The children at the Junior Primary (Grades R – 4) go on to this Senior Primary. Fourteen schools attended this workshop with a total of twenty-four educators.

One of my first visits to the Junior Primary school was in July 2005 when a colleague and I were asked by the teacher librarian to advise the school on the planning and installation of shelving in a classroom that they were fitting out as a library. They had also made an opening through to an adjacent classroom that they were establishing as a computer room. We conducted an interview, in November 2005, with one of the teachers (an HOD) who had attended the report back given by the teacher librarian. Progress had been made in the library. The shelving was in, they had a carpet on the tiled floor and they were working to get the library up and running for the New Year.

4.2.2 Reading aloud demonstration and interview

We initially interviewed the HOD who had attended the report back given by the teacher librarian. She had also attended the circuit meeting that we had held in August 2005 at her school, where the importance of teachers reading stories aloud to learners had been emphasized. This teacher was happy to do a reading aloud demonstration for us without any prior warning. This she did with a Grade 3 class in the library. The learners all came in and sat on the carpet with the teacher in a chair in front of them. I moved from the back where I had been sitting, to the front because I was an object of interest and was causing something of a distraction. The book that the teacher read aloud was *Mantunje and the Wooden Spoon* one of the 'Big Books' often used in Junior Primary schools. This was a suitable story for the learners as far as the content was concerned but it was not in the learners' mother tongue.

The teacher began by asking the learners the *colour* of the book and then emphasized the names of the author and illustrator. A, 'Sorry to fold book' was directed at me. This was because she realized that she was folding the book back and that I would not approve because I had demonstrated how books should be handled. Either the teacher librarian mentioned this in her report back or she saw me demonstrate this at the circuit meeting. Her delivery was slow and methodical with a teaching style that relied on repetition. 'Mango fell into ther-i-v-e-r.' Repeated. The reading session (lesson!) focused on vocabulary and she used a mixture of English and Zulu. It was not so much a 'reading' of the story as a 'telling' of the story. Even so the teacher 'read' aloud well with lots of expression and action. She was quite confident and clearly enjoying what she was doing. However the learners were reluctant to answer questions. Our presence may have been a factor but they did not appear to understand much English and I think that they were shy to answer questions asked in English. In spite of this language problem they were interested and engaged in the story although the reading was too drawn out.

As with the first reading aloud demonstration the learners fluency in English was a problem. Neither teacher engaged with the story in a meaningful way. They did not ask questions that would help the learners to understand the plot, engage with the characters or identify what either the characters or the learners were feeling. Enjoyment of the story was not uppermost. The story got lost. Their energy was misdirected because their purpose was not about providing learners with an opportunity to understand and enjoy the story for its own sake. Instead it was about teaching English vocabulary and 'testing' the learners.

We interviewed this teacher after the demonstration. She revealed that most of the books that she was using for reading aloud were the books that had been rejected for the library. The library was not yet up and running and teachers did not have access to the fiction material.

As a result of what she had learned from the report back and the circuit meeting she said that there had been a change of mindset. Some, learners presumably, like to read to 'others' and some like to listen which she sees as helping with discipline. She sees reading aloud as enabling children to read and follow the story. The learners read to each other the same book that the teacher had already read out loud. She felt that learners were more confident about answering questions because they are now more fluent, I assumed in English.

Her strategy to develop learners reading skills is that they should start in Grade R when they can use pictures to imagine and create stories, 'eventually to be curious' and she believes that *telling* stories helps to achieve this. The children change stories to suit themselves and this invention is encouraged. Also they may read out what they have written to the class and gave 'news' as an example, which she says they embellish a lot.

She prefers to use both English and Zulu in the classroom because the children come from different backgrounds ('learned' and 'unlearned'). She says that it is easier to code switch – consciously – to assist question interpretation because they all arrive struggling with English. They seem to understand it but battle to answer in English.

She told us that after attending the workshop the teacher librarian called a meeting and reported back to the school what she had learned. She asked that half an hour for reading be included in the timetable and this was agreed to. It also appears to have been implemented more or less immediately without any resistance. When questioned more closely about this she said that it could have been because teachers were told to do it.

We learnt that the teacher librarian did not do the reading aloud demonstration for the report back to the school but asked this teacher to do it even though she was not the one who had seen my demonstration. She told us that the teachers enjoyed the demonstration. Also from what she told us she is clearly seen as the storyteller 'gogo' in the school and enjoys this role. This was obvious when we observed her 'read aloud' demonstration.

On some prompting from me she said that although the other teachers in the school accepted the need to establish a reading programme, not every teacher did so with full enthusiasm. Again with some prompting from me she said that a reinforcement workshop would be useful. Although we did this it was not particularly successful. I explain this in more detail later in this chapter.

After this visit my colleague and I subsequently spent two days at the school early in the New Year in order to help with the organisation of the library. We met with the teacher librarian and in the afternoon we held a workshop/meeting with all the educators. We spent the second day sorting books and held a workshop with the learners who were to be library monitors. We were told during this visit that one of the problems experienced by the school has to do with procurement procedures that make buying library resource material very difficult. In April 2006 a colleague and I again visited the school, this time in order to interview the teacher librarian and the principal.

4.2.3 The interview with the teacher librarian who attended the workshop

The reading questionnaire revealed the following information about this teacher librarian: she was read to as a child, quite often, by a teacher who read the Bible and school books to her. She says that she reads stories, such as *Vuyo's Family Tree* aloud, on a weekly basis for about twenty minutes. Learners do not ask her questions but she asks them questions. She ticked the following as true statements:

- I *tell* my class stories.
- Once a child has learned to read it is better for them to read books themselves.
- I read aloud from workbooks.

What she remembered about the workshop was the emphasis on reading, the importance of reading and what to do about reading. She said that she understands the link between reading and other learning areas and gave as an example being able to read instructions. For her reading is important because 'the best results come from reading'. She says that it spills over into all learning. She felt that most teachers in her school had a negative attitude towards reading aloud but that the workshop had stressed the 'fun' aspect of actual reading. She felt that things like pronunciation, punctuation marks and stressed vowels were being learned when reading aloud. When asked why teachers were not motivated when it came to reading, the response was very interesting. We were told that it was the strategy they used – they would just give books to learners and be impatient with poor reading. This would not build confidence and so learners did not improve. The learners were unable to

observe good reading because the teacher did not demonstrate this. All would *hate* reading because it was seen as a waste of time. Teachers would get frustrated and learners would lose confidence.

She thought that reading stories aloud for fun was a better way to approach reading because it would be fun listening and learners would pick up tips and want to read themselves. She had a workshop with staff on how to motivate both them and the learners to focus on reading. Teachers have picked up on this and she says that 'it is having a good effect in their learning areas because part of the cause was inability to read'.

Having had the importance of reading reinforced in the workshop she went back to her school and after the feedback workshop got them to agree that reading should be emphasised. The school decided to implement my recommended 30 minutes timetabled period of reading for 'fun'.

What I said in the workshop about reading obviously struck a chord with this teacher librarian. She had identified reading as a key area of concern for her in her school and was open to ideas about what to do about it. Teachers often see reading aloud as the *learners* reading aloud. This is obviously a boring and time consuming exercise for many, particularly if they are coping with large classes. If teachers are not doing this properly it is perhaps one reason why children are failing to learn to read; they are not getting the reading practice that they so desperately need when they are 'learning to read'. Because many learners from this district come from illiterate homes the only reading practice support that they get is at school. Schools should perhaps look at ways to relieve the pressure on teachers by bringing in suitable community members to help listen to the children's reading. *Teachers* reading stories aloud to children, is in no way a substitute for this kind of reading practice. It is something that should be done *in addition to* normal reading teaching.

The highlight of the workshop for this teacher librarian was the section on reading and *how* to present it to the children. What she learned is that learners' interest can be engaged by using pictures, and that their curiosity can be aroused by asking questions.

The school has implemented both classroom reading periods and library reading periods. There are forty learners in a class so the class is split. The teacher librarian takes twenty for reading, three times per week in the library. She teaches book care, reads stories from

books and sometimes *tells* the story from the book. The children enjoy being told stories and she gets a good response from the Grade R's. She finds the 'Big Books' useful because of the big pictures and says that the older ones also like to read by themselves.

Teachers also read stories aloud to the children in the classroom for thirty minutes per day. Sometimes the children then dramatize these stories. The books are borrowed from the library and stay in classroom. About three books are read to the children each week with teachers using both English and Zulu books. When half the class is in the library the other half are in the classroom having teachers read aloud to them. Using questions is not a test but to check if the learners are following the story. The aim in the classroom is to cultivate a love of reading.

The establishment of a reading programme in the school using the 'teachers reading stories aloud to learners on a regular basis' approach has been entirely due to what was learned in the workshop.

The teacher librarian sees the purpose of the teachers reading aloud approach as building confidence. She believes that if all teachers did this matric would improve. She says that punctuation is demonstrated. With some prompting she said that it is about asking questions that help children to understand and predict the story in order to arouse interest.

She promotes reading for pleasure by using the thirty minutes timetabled for pleasure reading, to read stories aloud to the children which they sometimes then dramatise. When asked she said that teachers enjoy doing this. She says that before both the learners and the teachers were floundering but that this approach has 'made it totally different'.

I asked if she thought that reading aloud should stop when the children are confident readers and her response was to say no, that maybe they (presumably those that are not so good) could take turns with some of the better readers. The teachers at this school have been given a progress chart to fill in but do not make it obvious that they are observing the children read. She said that having only twenty in the class makes it easier to observe. The chart helps when the librarian and the teacher compare assessment notes and it also means that teachers cannot fudge ('cheat') results. She showed us the chart.

What I find interesting here is that when I talk about reading aloud, I assume that it is understood that I mean *teachers* but the response that I get shows that teachers assume that

I am referring to learners. The fallback position seems to always be that learners, not the teachers, do the reading.

I found that the interview questions were somewhat repetitious. It was obvious from previous responses that this teacher librarian reads *stories* aloud, she says because children like stories and that she sees the reading aloud approach as helping a lot. As an example she mentioned Grade R children who if they cannot recall a story are able to do so when shown the book as the pictures act as a prompt. She finds that the children can recall a lot from reading aloud.

The school was working on a system to allow learners to borrow books. This was under discussion and parents would have to sign consent forms. She sees this as a way to encourage children to become independent readers. The children would be allowed to keep the books for two days. She said that they are very keen to borrow.

When asked which language she *prefers* to use she said Zulu at an early age, Grade R. She said that teachers use Zulu in all the grades but that the ‘unofficial’ policy is to use English. In Grade R and Grade One *most* of the reading is done in Zulu. From Grade Two, teachers use a mixture of English and Zulu. When asked if they prefer to do this she replied that ‘it is difficult because of official policy’. She did not elaborate on what was meant by ‘unofficial’ and ‘official’ policy and as she appeared to be uncomfortable talking about it I did not pursue it. When I asked if the learners are being taught to read in both languages she replied that parents and children want to learn in English but that official government policy is that children in Grades 0 – 6 should be taught in their mother tongue. I assumed therefore that officially the school has a policy of mother tongue literacy, perhaps to satisfy the Department because it is a Junior Primary, but that in reality English is emphasized because of pressure from parents but also it would appear, because this is what many teachers prefer. She then said that all teachers were taught in English. I assumed that she meant that as children they were taught in English. The assumption appears to be that this was seen as positive. She sees the language of instruction as a difficult issue and something of a struggle. When I asked if teachers choose Zulu books to read aloud she said ‘Yes’. From our observation of the material in the library, the school does have a small collection of Zulu fiction. Titles of some of the books include:

Umfowethu omncane (Grade R – 3)

Penda isibhakabhaka (Grade R – 3)

Yisikhathi sokuyolala (Grade R – 3)

Mina nginjani (Grade R – 3)

Unabulela Grade 4.

Another interesting point that she raised is that the quality of the written Zulu, in the books that they have to work with, is a problem. This is an issue that other teachers have mentioned when I have discussed the shortage of Zulu fiction material. Also many stories written in Zulu to fill this gap, and translations of English children's fiction are apparently of poor quality. Teachers are concerned because they feel that learners 'need to know their language' as she put it.

She confirmed what the HOD had said about providing feedback to the school about the workshop and that the response had been positive. She said that it is school policy to have a meeting to report back to the rest of the staff. From the way she spoke *she* did the reading aloud demonstration using one of the Big Books which she said the staff enjoyed because 'I behaved like a teacher and they behaved like learners'. It is possible that both the HOD and the teacher librarian were involved in a demonstration, perhaps at different times.

Revisiting the statements ticked as true from the reading questionnaire she now both tells and reads stories. It is still true that once a child has learnt to read it is better for them to read themselves but this can come after having been read aloud to. She now uses fiction rather than workbooks to read aloud from but although she feels more confident about choosing the right books would still like a workshop on this. She has now been able to organise the time for reading.

To sum up, this teacher librarian also had a special interest in improving the quality of reading teaching in her school. The school wasted no time in implementing a reading aloud timetable and teachers no longer seem to 'hate' reading time. Although this is a Junior Primary school where one would expect a high degree of interest in reading teaching this is not always the case as we have seen. There also appears to be a degree of confusion about whether the focus is on teachers or learners reading aloud. The language issue is a concern, with teachers apparently finding it difficult to implement the 'Department' mother tongue language policy. An additional problem is that of the poor quality of Zulu in many of the books teachers are expected to use.

4.2.4 Questions relating to the *role of 'teacher librarian'*

The interview with this teacher librarian continued with questions that focused on her role as a teacher librarian. She explained how she came to be a teacher librarian saying that she had always been interested in reading and that she enjoyed reading at school. Before she came to this school she had worked with a teacher using a 'blue box'. These were storybooks that ELITS had given to some schools to try to provide them with library resource material. She started a library at her previous school and when she arrived at this school she talked to the principal about a library and the need for a library committee. She found that she had a supportive principal. The school established a library committee - each grade was represented as well as the School Governing Body. They used a spare classroom as a library and embarked on fund raising to develop the library. They also involved the Department of Physical Planning.

She had a positive response from the nearby Senior Primary when she approached them about promoting reading. This was the school where we held our first workshop. They also have a library and we had visited them prior to holding the workshop in order to help them to 'weed out' unsuitable books, getting rid of many unwanted donated books.

She attended our ELITS workshop at the nearby Senior Primary and had also enrolled to study for an ACE in Library Development and Management. This teacher librarian now has her library qualification and has been made fulltime in the library. This is quite rare in the context of this district not only because there are not many who have this qualification but also because a teacher librarian is quite often seen as being 'dispensable' when schools have staff in excess. She is understandably proud of having achieved a library with an integrated reading timetable, which she sees as the best way to promote reading in her school.

Her biggest problem is lack of funds. She needs money to run the library. The problem with Section Twenty schools and the use of Norms and Standards money to buy material is the red tape involved. Anything that is not in the Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) Catalogue, schools have difficulty buying. Section Twenty schools do not have the freedom to spend their money as they see fit but have to go through Department bureaucratic procedures. This is an issue that keeps cropping up when we talk to schools. Having to work with the Procurement section that handles this, results in a lot of frustration, long delays and non-delivery because the system breaks down somewhere along the line. Although LTSM should be what it says it is, it is in fact another term for

textbooks. Schools can easily buy textbooks but not library resource material (LRM is the acronym that I like to use) and that of course includes fiction.

We visited this school again in May 2006 because it was part of a Biblionef Project to get books into schools. We also organised a school-based reading workshop. This was held at the end of May 2006 and attended by all members of staff. However we have found school-based workshops to be problematic because of numerous interruptions. Teachers are often unable to give their full attention to the workshop because of other school demands. Also when workshops are held into the afternoon, as this one was, teachers begin to be anxious to leave. I found that this reading workshop was not very satisfactory for these reasons.

4.2.5 Interview with the Principal

The Principal corroborated what we had already been told. The teacher librarian had asked for a slot in a meeting after the workshop. The question on teachers' minds was: How was reading to be accommodated in the curriculum? The teacher librarian spelt out a plan for *reading* and the timetable. This reading plan was implemented from the word go after the workshop. This she felt fitted in well with the National Curriculum Statement. Her understanding of reading aloud is that it is for fun. She says that when reading silently you don't know you *are* reading. She assumed that it was the children who were reading aloud. When I asked about teachers reading aloud she said that this promotes listening skills and that children enjoy teachers reading and so are motivated to read. She said that the teachers like reading aloud 'a lot' and that the teacher librarian had encouraged them to borrow from the library and to read '*ourselves*'. She said that they also get information from these books.

The Principal's response to what she learned about the workshop was that it provided information on reading and that it stressed reading. Other aspects were covered in this workshop but reading seems to have made the biggest impact probably because it fed into an identified need. What they learned was seen as being important for them. Also this teacher librarian already had some library skills.

Our discussions revealed that the teacher librarian is working with a positive, interested principal who is not only happy to go along with her teacher librarian's initiatives but who is also actively supporting her. The initiative and drive is clearly coming from the teacher librarian but the principal shares her vision.

4.3 An overview of the interviews and observations

What emerges from the interviews in these two schools is that in both there are teacher librarians who have an interest and concern about reading and who are the driving force behind the reading and library initiatives in their schools. They are actively looking for ways to improve the reading environment in order to help their learners. They are therefore open to ideas that they think will work in their context. Both schools have principals who are supportive of what the teacher librarians are doing, and staff who are going along with these ideas and not undermining what they are trying to achieve, as we have sometimes found to be the case.

Having said all that, in both cases teachers reading stories aloud for enjoyment as an approach to reading that is an end in itself has not been *fully* understood although the Junior Primary teacher librarian did pick up on the idea of reading for fun. The Senior Primary teacher librarian saw reading aloud as a *teaching* tool first and foremost. Neither properly understood the value and importance of including the communicative, whole language aspect of reading as an essential part of their reading teaching.

5. Conclusion

In attempting to determine teacher reading practices and teacher attitudes to reading, an analysis of the Reading Questionnaires suggests that teachers tend to focus on the 'how to' mechanical aspect of teaching children to read and largely ignore reading for meaning. Teachers appear to be unaware that reading for meaning should be 'taught' or that fiction can be used to do this. The reading intervention served to remind teachers of the importance of reading. It attempted to provide moral support, introduce the idea of *teachers* reading stories aloud as a means to help children understand and enjoy what they read, and provide practical ideas on how to implement this approach. Although teachers enjoyed the reading section of the workshops, the evaluations show that many only partially understood what I was saying about reading aloud. When it came to committing themselves to take action to implement the new strategy, teachers were less enthusiastic in their response. The interviews show that when new ideas about reading fall on fertile ground, change can take place. However, the change in teaching reading practice at the two interview schools was constrained because of a failure to comprehend the teaching philosophy that underpins the 'teachers reading stories aloud' approach.

This study is limited in that the reading intervention itself was extremely short and served only to *introduce* teachers to the idea of reading stories aloud as a reading teaching

approach. In addition, follow-up workshops were not included as part of the study. The reading intervention itself was restricted by the tight time-frames of the workshop as a whole. The rural nature of the district, together with the ongoing transport problems, acted as strong practical constraints against the organisation of follow-up workshops that could be included as part of the study, although some of these workshops have since taken place.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Introduction

This chapter draws conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of the research findings and provides suggestions relating to certain aspects of reading teaching. In so doing it seeks to answer the important key question: How effective was the reading intervention? I have also attempted to identify both the factors that enable change to reading teaching practice to occur, as well as those that hinder or act as barriers to change. In order to do this, I have drawn on two models of change which have been developed from examining the effects of curriculum innovation. They are the *Typology of continuing professional development (CPD) outcomes* model developed in the UK and aspects of the *Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM)* developed in the USA (Bennett, 2003: 42).

What is being evaluated is the effectiveness of an intervention that introduced teachers to a particular reading approach. Although I made the assumption that this reading approach is appropriate, this is one of the factors that should be taken into account because the nature of the reading intervention must necessarily influence its effectiveness. Would teachers want to read stories aloud to learners in the classroom and would they feel that this was an approach that they could implement? If the reading intervention has not been effective how much has this to do with the reading approach itself, and how much has to do with other factors? My hypothesis was that this is a workable strategy within the context of the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal. It has now been 'tested' and conclusions have to be drawn.

My theoretical framework has influenced the way in which I have designed and analysed this study. This research is informed by psycholinguistic and psychodynamic theory. I used a whole language, 'real books' approach to teach reading for meaning because reading is not only a means to an end, but is also an end in itself. Teachers need to understand the pleasure of being lost in a good book, the importance of stimulating children's imagination and the psychological need for such engagement with books. I therefore designed the study to see if teachers would accept this approach to reading. The data that I collected was intended to find out what teacher practices and attitudes to reading were – in particular in relation to reading stories aloud, and whether after being exposed to a short reading intervention, this had influenced their practice. It was also intended to try to identify those

factors that enable change to take place and those that act as barriers. I needed to know to what extent teachers understand the value and importance of reading for meaning using fiction, the basis for the reading aloud approach, and to what extent they truly understand that exposing children to this kind of reading is good teaching practice.

In Chapter Three, I referred to Hargreaves, 1996 (cited in Bennett, 2003: 37) who accused researchers of producing ‘inconclusive and contestable findings of little worth’, and who argues for evidence-based education because he believes that much educational research is ‘unscientific’. As was pointed out in the methodology chapter this research does not claim to be ‘scientific’ using quantifiable, empirical data, nor is it an impact study. Instead it aims to understand the effectiveness of the intervention based on Oakley, Pratt & Clayton’s (1998) first level of outcomes, ‘Direct Effects’. The research findings are exploratory and not conclusive and the suggestions that I am making based on these research findings are therefore tentative.

2. Research conclusions

2.1 Teacher reading background

The findings appear to suggest that many primary school teachers in Ilembe have not experienced having children’s stories read aloud to them as children. This is not something that is familiar to them. 88% of the participants had not experienced this. Even so quite a number of the participants (45%) do appear to understand that reading for pleasure is important and say that they now read novels for pleasure, which I found surprisingly high, although it should be remembered that to some extent these participants were self-selected. The survey sample was perhaps biased in favour of teachers who were already interested in working with books. This suggests that these teachers were more likely to read novels for pleasure themselves and therefore more likely to be open to the idea of reading stories aloud to children for pleasure.

The interviews show that both teacher librarians liked the idea of using fiction in the classroom for teaching because storybooks are more appealing to children. They appear not to have understood this before the reading intervention, although they clearly understood the value of children reading library books, hence their concern to establish a library. Using the pleasure that teachers get from reading novels, to show how this can help their learners to enjoy reading would be a helpful strategy in workshops. When I did this at a workshop in the Port Shepstone District towards the end of 2006, I got a very

enthusiastic response from one teacher in particular who said that she gets completely involved with the characters in a story.

2.2 Teacher reading practices

72% of the participants, most of these teaching the Foundation and Intermediate Phases, do not have a clear idea of what good reading teaching involves and most of the remaining 28% only tentatively use more interesting, creative strategies to encourage reading. 58% see providing learners with the opportunity to *practice* their reading skills as sufficient encouragement for their reading development, although a few of these teachers said that they were using storybooks for this. Only 10% of the participants said that they read stories aloud in order to encourage their learners to read. This is a problem because it suggests that most primary school teachers in Ilembe do not understand that good reading teaching includes using storybooks to help learners read for meaning.

Although when asked if they read stories aloud to their learners the majority said, 'Yes' (87%), teachers are unfamiliar with both this kind of reading and the kind of fiction material that should be used for this approach, even though quite a high percentage said that they have storybooks in the classroom. Only 18% read stories aloud frequently enough for this to be a meaningful experience and since 72% of these are Foundation Phase teachers it suggests that most children in the Foundation Phase, let alone the Intermediate Phase, in Ilembe, are not having exciting stories read to them on a regular basis, and 13% are not being read to at all from any kind of material.

When teachers do read stories aloud to children, most of them are not interacting with their learners in a way that will encourage them to read themselves, nor in a way that will also help them to understand and enjoy the stories. 32% ask their learners 'testing' type questions and a further 28% ask vague and unconvincing questions that suggest a lack of understanding about how to engage learners in the stories in a meaningful way. As half of all these teachers teach the Foundation Phase and another 42% the Intermediate Phase, this is another problem.

2.3 Teacher attitudes to reading

72% of teachers understand that learners should be encouraged to read books other than their workbooks as early as possible, even though not all are able to explain why. The implied reason appears to be that many assume that learners have to have *English* vocabulary before they can read and that reading therefore means reading in English. This blurring of literacy development with English language development I think goes to the heart of the reading problem. Although they do not seem to realise it, teachers are placing a higher value on learning English than they are on learning to read. Teachers have correctly identified English as an essential skill if their learners are to be successful in school and have access to the world outside Ilembé. Understandable though this is, they are, with the best intentions in the world, tragically impeding the progress of many and crippling others by focusing on English at the expense of reading.

This focus on learning English was confirmed by our observation of both the reading demonstrations, where English vocabulary was emphasised to the detriment of the children's enjoyment of the story, as well as the teacher librarians' comments about mother tongue and English. The senior primary teacher librarian saw English as essential and did not appear to be interested in mother tongue literacy and the junior primary teacher librarian was conflicted. Informal observation of the material in primary schools shows that where schools have any fiction material at all there is usually more English fiction than Zulu fiction. Most teachers in the Foundation Phase prefer to use both Zulu and English for teaching with 14% preferring to use only English. The thorny and emotive issue of mother tongue versus English as the medium of instruction in primary schools influences both teacher attitudes to reading as well as their reading teaching practice.

In addition the *quality* of literacy teaching is an extremely important factor, whether children are being taught in English or Zulu. Although 'learning to read' is essential it is only part of the reading process as we have seen. Some teachers do understand that encouraging learners to read books other than their workbooks as early as possible can help them to develop a love of reading, but only two responses referred to predicting what will happen in a story, only one to children's imagination being stimulated by books and only one to learners' ability to visualise. This means that teachers are not using a whole language approach to reading teaching. By contrast 60% of teachers see reading stories aloud as an opportunity to *teach* children something that they consider to be important. Their emphasis is on the mechanical aspect of reading. Only 16% of the teachers surveyed have some awareness that reading stories aloud helps children to understand and enjoy

them. The findings therefore suggest that most teachers not only are unaware of and therefore do not understand and value, the communicative aspect of reading, which is about reading for understanding and enjoyment, but also more importantly, fail to understand just how vitally important this is for a child's reading development.

2.4 The reading intervention and models of change

To find out if the reading intervention was effective and whether or not teacher attitudes and practices to reading did change, I have used the two models of change referred to by Bennett (2003): the *Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM)*, developed in the USA, and the *Typology of continuing professional development (CPD) outcomes model* developed in the U.K. The first model draws on the work of Fullan (cited in Bennett, 2003) who argues that there are three dimensions at stake when providing an intervention: the use of new materials, the use of a new teaching approach and the possible alteration of beliefs. He identifies four phases of change: initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome. All of this has relevance for my reading intervention. It requires teachers to use new material – fiction, in order to use a new approach to reading that requires teachers to change the way they view reading teaching. I have initiated the intervention, some teachers have implemented changes up to a point, there has been a degree of continuation beyond the initial workshops but we are a long way from a final outcome.

Joyce & Showers (cited in Bennett, 2003) focus on staff development as a key element of successful change and suggest that there are four categories of 'levels of impact' in in-service training. These are awareness, the acquisition of concepts of organised knowledge, the learning of principals and skills and the ability to apply these principals and skills in the classroom. A key aspect of the reading intervention was teacher development. I tried to raise awareness about reading teaching, but analysis of the workshop evaluations, the interviews and the reading aloud demonstrations show that teachers have not really acquired the 'concepts of organized knowledge' to do with the reading stories aloud approach. Some teachers were in fact muddled and confused. A number did appear to pick up the principles and skills necessary to implement the approach, but because they lack a real understanding of the concepts behind it, this has not been properly implemented, as was revealed during the interviews and reading aloud demonstrations.

Bennett (2003: 44) refers to Joyce & Showers' more recent work where they identify a number of key components necessary for effective in-service training:

- Describing new skills to teachers

- Demonstrating new skills and techniques to teachers
- Providing opportunities to develop and practice these skills and techniques in simulated and real settings
- Giving teachers feedback on performance
- Coaching teachers on the job.

I spent a lot of time during the reading intervention describing and demonstrating these new reading skills and techniques to teachers and they did have a brief opportunity to practice reading aloud. However because this all had to be done in two hours this could not possibly be done thoroughly. It was an introduction only. I did not attempt to give any feedback on performance. This has to be a feature of future more intense workshops in order to reinforce what has already been covered and provide further demonstration but more particularly, to provide plenty of time for teacher practice and facilitator feedback. Coaching teachers on the job, in the classroom, is not something that I see on the horizon. Although this is a good idea, I understand that currently there is one Foundation Phase advisor for the whole district and the deeply rural nature of the district makes getting to the schools difficult and time consuming. For me personally language is a barrier, as I have experienced at first hand.

I have responded to the three key questions that Hord (cited in Bennett, 2003) suggests be used to interview key people associated with the innovation, as follows:

- What would you hope to observe when the innovation is operational?
I would hope to see primary school teachers using fiction to read stories aloud to their learners for thirty minutes a day. Such a reading timetable was implemented in the interview junior primary school and to a lesser degree in the senior primary school.
- What would teachers be doing?
They would be introducing and sharing exciting stories with learners in a way that helped them to understand and enjoy the stories that are read. Judging by the reading aloud demonstrations and the nature of the reading interaction that we observed, I have less confidence that this will be done in a way that will provide learners with the opportunity to engage with the stories in a way that is really meaningful.
- What are the critical components of the innovation?
They are that teachers must use exciting, appropriate fiction material and be skilled enough to understand the important elements of the story. These are the aspects of the

story that will interest children, such as understanding the feelings and emotions of both the characters and the readers/listeners, so that teachers are able to draw their learners into the story by asking them appropriate questions that help them to visualize, imagine and think about the story that is being read. There is a lot of work to be done here.

Hord (cited in Bennett, 2003: 49) says that key factors that have been shown to contribute to the success of the innovation are long-term planning, allowing sufficient time for an innovation to become accepted and used and supporting teachers through in-service provision before and during implementation. This is what I would like to do but is problematic for me personally in a Department that has been undergoing restructuring for the last ten years. Although this is an area that I would like to continue to work in, such long-term planning and sufficient time to see the intervention through properly might not be possible.

Although these aspects of the CBAM model are helpful, some of its assumptions and its focus on the stages of concern and the individual teacher do not make it a very practical model to use in this context. Harland and Kinder (cited in Bennett, 2003: 49) on the other hand, have developed the Continuing Professional Development outcomes model, which arises out of their expressed concerns about the outcomes and effects of in-service training (INSET) and continuing professional development (CPD) in the UK. I also have concerns in this area. This model seems to be more useful to describe the effects of 'programme implementation'. My intervention provided 'some form of training for teachers' and the effectiveness of that training should be explored in order to see what factors contribute to the level of success of the programme.

Bennett (2003: 53) says that Harland and Kinder's (1991) work led them to conclude that the presence of certain outcomes was more likely to achieve developments in practice than others and they proposed a hierarchy of in-service training (INSET) outcomes. The ultimate intention is of course to bring about change in practice. The hierarchy consists of third order outcomes, which raise awareness and provide information and materials, but which are unlikely to have an impact on practice unless some of the other outcomes are already present. The second order include motivational and affective outcomes and these were important in contributing to success, but substantial impact on practice was consistently associated with the presence of the two first order outcomes, that of value congruence and new knowledge and skills.

Physical resources made available to teachers can have a very positive effect on practice but that these alone are unlikely to have much effect unless accompanied by motivational outcomes and new knowledge and skills and that the 'acquisition of new materials' should be seen as separate from the 'use of new materials' because, as we have seen, it is possible for teachers to acquire new materials but not use them. However, changes in practice can be severely impeded if teachers do not have the necessary resources to support the changes, as is the case in this context (Harland & Kinder, cited in Bennett, 2003: 50 - 51). Ways should be found to make sure that all schools have a collection of quality books.

Harland & Kinder (cited in Bennett, 2003: 51 - 52) refer to two linked sets of outcomes: informational outcomes (which is about briefing teachers about background etc), and new knowledge and skills (which applies to a deeper and more critical understanding of the curriculum content). In this case knowledge is about the nature and process of reading, different teaching approaches, as well as skills such as how to read aloud. The suggestion is that this deeper understanding is one of the essential requirements for the success of an innovation. This is confirmed by these findings. Without this deeper understanding teachers are not going to be able to implement this reading aloud approach successfully. Future workshops will need to try to address this issue. However new awareness alone is insufficient to bring about change, there also has to be 'value congruence'. There should be 'significant overlap between a teacher's individual code of practice and the message given by the in-service training about what constitutes 'good practice'. Value congruence outcomes, as with new knowledge and skills, emerged as crucial to the success of an innovation. I tried to achieve 'value congruence' in the intervention by not asking teachers to change what they were already doing. Instead I asked them to *add* a communicative approach to their reading teaching. 'Value congruence' played a role in the implementation of a reading programme at the interview schools in that the teacher librarians already had a deep concern about learners' poor reading skills and about reading practice, and they were looking for ways to improve the situation. They adopted those ideas that they liked and felt would work in their context.

Harland and Kinder's (1991) typology of in-service training (INSET) outcomes cited in Bennett (2003: 51 - 52) makes provision for emotional responses that will inevitably be associated with any innovation through what they call 'affective outcomes' which refers to teachers' initial responses to in-service training. They established that affective outcomes were important precursors for impact on practice. Teachers' initial response to the reading intervention was undeniably positive both during the intervention as well as with the

teacher librarians in the follow-up interviews. The school principals also responded positively although both, especially the senior primary principal, demonstrated a lack of real understanding of the reading approach. It was also difficult to gauge the response of the majority of teachers at the junior primary school during a follow-up subsequent workshop. Harland and Kinder (cited in Bennett, 2003) say that initial positive responses may still not lead to success if teachers do not also gain the associated new knowledge and skills required to support their teaching. Because I saw this as a priority I spent a lot of time, effort and energy during the intervention to provide teachers with this new knowledge and skills. It clearly was not enough and more reinforcement and follow up is required.

Motivational and attitudinal outcomes refer to the enhanced enthusiasm and motivation to implement the work that teachers gain through their experiences of the in-service provision (Harland & Kinder, cited in Bennett, 2003). Again I attempted to address this issue in the intervention by being positive and supportive of teacher efforts in difficult circumstances and by demonstrating an awareness of the conditions they face. I was also careful to present and demonstrate the reading aloud approach as practical and workable in their context.

Institutional outcomes recognize that in-service work can have a collective impact on groups of teachers and their practice, with collaboration and mutual support contributing to the success of the intervention. This 'collaboration and mutual support' has been forthcoming from those with whom I work most closely at district level, but not as part of the larger education organization, partly because this research has not reached a wider audience but also because of the hierarchical nature of the organization. Decisions are made at a head office level, with the expectation that these will be implemented in the districts, even though there is not always agreement from those working on the ground.

My reading intervention raised awareness, provided information and explained how teachers could access material. Without the right resources the reading approach cannot be properly implemented and even though many of the other outcomes might be achieved, inertia is likely to set in if only one teacher in a school is interested and there are no books. If suitable books are available then the one or two teachers who attended the workshop are more likely to try the reading aloud approach. That is why I was careful in the workshops to explain to teachers that they do have the power to buy suitable fiction material, in spite of the practical difficulties they might encounter. Although the affective outcome was positive, without ongoing support and reinforcement this is likely to be lost. The two

teacher librarians who were interviewed were clearly motivated before the intervention to make a difference to reading provision in their schools and this led to strong 'value congruence' but the 'new knowledge and skills' were only partially understood.

Although many teachers singled out reading as having made an impression, responded enthusiastically to the experience of reading stories aloud, indicated that they feel confident about reading aloud but would like more practice choosing the right books and asking the right questions, it is unlikely that they all went back to their schools and implemented a 'reading stories aloud' programme as the analysis of this question in the workshop evaluation demonstrates. If resources are available, they have a supportive principal, they can see the value of doing this and have some idea of how to do it, it is possible that some will have made changes to their reading teaching practice.

The interview schools had supportive principals, especially the Junior Primary School, and they already had some resources. They saw the value of introducing fiction as part of their classroom reading teaching and the importance of establishing a reading programme but they did not really understand the value of using the reading aloud approach. However their response is encouraging, given that it is based on a two-hour, introductory intervention, but follow-up and reinforcement are essential if any kind of momentum is to be built up. Institutional support for this is an unknown quantity and given the concerns about teachers highlighted in the recent report released by the Human Rights Commission on the *Right to Basic Education* that identifies teachers as the 'key issue' and the fact that they are not in the classroom enough (Pierce, 2006), such in-service training although desperately needed, probably means more time out of school. I would argue however, that the quality of what goes on in the classroom and not a teachers' mere presence, is something that should be taken into consideration. In my opinion the Education Department should take very seriously the provision of in-service reading, teacher training.

3. Factors that aid or hinder change

3.1 The role of context

Whitehead (1996: 96) refers to the “close links between poverty and low literacy levels on reading ability.” Christie quotes Heneveld & Craig (cited in Christie, 2001: 44) who say that “in terms of school effectiveness studies, the quality of the school appears to influence student achievement more in developing countries than in industrialised countries, where family background overshadows school effects.” As South Africa is a developing country and Ilembe a good example of a poor rural area, we can expect to see close links between poverty and low levels of literacy and that the quality of the schools in this district will influence student achievement more than those perhaps in the more affluent urban areas. Schools in this district therefore have a very real responsibility to their learners. It is unfortunate that many do not appear to understand just how crucial their role really is.

Christie’s theoretical position, that sociological analyses of school change need to foreground agency in the context of structure is useful in understanding what is possible (2001: 61). She stresses the importance of a sense of agency and responsibility in order to enhance performance. She acknowledges that not all problems can be resolved at school level and that schools cannot easily change their circumstances. The schools in her study were struggling to operate in communities suffering from poverty and unemployment, conditions that are unlikely to change in the near future. Even so she concludes that research has suggested that schools are able to address successfully some of the problems that they face, particularly if they are able to enhance energies within the school and draw what resources they can from their immediate communities. She says that although it is important to acknowledge and understand ‘the force of general social patterns’ it is also important not to accord them determinist powers and goes on to say that this tension is nowhere better captured than in the paraphrased words of Marx: ‘People make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing’ (Christie, 2001: 62).

Teachers in Ilembe are working in schools that are struggling to operate in communities suffering from poverty and unemployment, conditions that are unlikely to change in the near future (Christie, 2001: 62). This does not mean that schools do not have power to make changes or that they cannot take responsibility for improving some of the conditions they face. Teachers have the power to make changes to their teaching practice. Primary school teachers in particular have a degree of autonomy in their own classrooms about how they divide up their time. They can make time for reading aloud if they decide that this is something worthwhile doing. Better still if the principal is supportive, as we have seen, a

reading programme can be added to the timetable. The two interview schools demonstrate what can be achieved when teachers take the initiative and are supported by their principals.

3.2 Barriers to change:

- ❑ The lack of real understanding of the value of *teachers* reading stories aloud to learners and how to do this
- ❑ Confusion between children reading aloud and teachers reading aloud
- ❑ A traditional approach to teaching that says that learners must learn something and be tested on it
- ❑ The language issue, in particular the fact that teachers appear to value learning English more highly than they do teaching learners to read
- ❑ A lack of interest and support from the principal and other teachers in the school. Even when this is present it is not enough for a truly effective reading intervention but without it nothing will change, even if it is official policy
- ❑ A failure to understand that teaching children ‘to’ read is only *part* of reading teaching
- ❑ Teachers’ own ability to understand the stories in a way that makes them more interesting to their learners
- ❑ Bureaucratic procedures and a lack of a practical, user-friendly, efficient system makes buying library books very difficult and could result in a school’s fragile interest being lost

3.3 Aids to change

- ❑ A concern about learners’ poor reading skills and a desire to do something about it
- ❑ Being open and receptive to new ideas as a result
- ❑ A supportive principal and to a lesser degree a supportive staff
- ❑ An understanding and awareness that the ideas being presented are beneficial and can be implemented in the school (Value congruence)
- ❑ Confidence that this is good practice
- ❑ Suitable fiction material
- ❑ Consensus about what reading approaches to adopt and an agreed understanding of the theoretical framework that underpins them

Christie (2001) identifies the features of resilient schools. (See Appendix I) These are schools that have managed to survive against the odds. She says that they see teaching and learning as their primary purpose. They provide a safe demarcated and orderly space for

their learners. They demonstrate a culture of concern and show a sense of responsibility for themselves and their functioning. In addition the principals are strong managers with many of them being women. The junior primary interview school in particular demonstrated these features, the senior primary less so. Christie's (2001) one really interesting finding is that a factor that was not significant was instruction and concrete support from education departments. I am not quite sure where that leaves this study. That aside, we also found that it is a school's interest and concern, very often perhaps just one or two teachers in a school, that makes a difference and is the reason why we in ELITS made a decision to work with those schools that are interested. Trying to work with schools that do not demonstrate a culture of concern and who do not show a sense of responsibility for whatever reasons is largely a waste of time, effort and energy as we have learned to our cost.

4. How effective was the reading intervention?

The reading intervention was developed with the intention of addressing a particular problem within the existing system - that of learners' poor reading skills. Does the intervention work? Does it lead to the desired results (Bennett, 2003: 39)? I made the assumption that reading stories aloud to children will improve their reading ability and I wanted to see if teachers would implement a reading aloud approach in their schools after a short reading intervention. The answer is 'Yes', to a point. I have influenced practice but I do not believe that I have fundamentally changed attitudes.

The teacher librarians interviewed adopted the ideas from the intervention that they liked and which they thought would work in their schools and implemented these. They both understood the value of using fiction and of reading on a regular basis, the junior primary more so than the senior primary. Both included library and reading periods in the timetable. However both tended to muddle the distinction between learners reading aloud and teachers reading aloud, especially the senior primary teacher librarian. Both reading aloud demonstrations showed weaknesses because enjoyment of the story was not the purpose for reading aloud. Essentially they were used as an opportunity to teach English vocabulary.

The responses to the reading questionnaire and workshop evaluation showed that teachers did not properly understand the rationale behind the '*teachers reading stories aloud*' approach and that they lack the skills required to interact in a meaningful way with their learners. This is particularly because the philosophy that underpins their teaching style

sees teaching as transmitting important information, 'teaching' and 'testing' children. The reading aloud demonstrations also showed that teachers seem to place the importance of learning English above learning to read.

It would appear that what I had been trying to get across about *teachers* reading stories aloud to their learners is an interesting idea when I demonstrate and talk about it and teachers will use aspects of the approach that suit them, but that is all. There is no fundamental change in their attitude to reading teaching that demonstrates a real understanding about why teachers reading stories aloud is something that they should all be doing. When teachers responded positively, they did so because they saw how what I was telling them about this approach, could help them to teach what *they* regard as important reading skills. For reading teaching to be effective teachers have to adopt a balanced approach that includes reading for meaning using a whole language approach, in order to help children to comprehend what they read. This they have not done.

Many teachers themselves appear to lack the skills they need in order to engage with stories in a meaningful way, possibly because they have not experienced the kind of pleasurable engagement with stories that allows them to imagine and express feelings. Reading stories that stimulate the imagination and engage emotions falls outside of most teachers own personal experience. They have not been exposed to exciting children's literature themselves and are not exposing their learners to this kind of reading. Informal observation and the interviews suggest that teachers would be open to the idea of using fiction, if it was available, even though they lack a real understanding of the value of using fiction to help learners to read for meaning. Teachers' own capacity to engage meaningfully with the stories they read aloud has to be developed so that they can do this effectively.

Even those who say that they read for pleasure are not using their experience to help children to engage with books in this way. They do not see reading for pleasure as a legitimate part of their reading methodology. Reading for pleasure in this way is not reflected in their practice. Without this kind of meaningful engagement with stories, children are not going to be able to develop the comprehension skills that they need in order to become effective readers. Although most teachers said that reading for pleasure was as important as reading for information, because of its absence in their practice, the reality is that teachers seem only to understand the practical, functional motive for reading and a mechanical way to teach it, and not the value of a whole language approach. Keyser

& Lyster, (2001) pointed out that although the new curriculum implicitly favours a whole language approach to the teaching of reading, the majority of teachers continue to use phonic-based approaches, which rely primarily on drilling and chanting.

I think that it is worth repeating Keyser & Lyster's (2001) findings of a case study of a 'Promoting Reading' workshop that I referred to in the literature review. They conclude that a one-day workshop can make a difference and that the demonstration and practice of techniques was the most effective aspect of the training workshop. What they found was important was the focus on practical skills and the provision of hard information. They go on to say that teachers in South Africa are generally under-trained, often de-motivated and do not particularly value reading. They believe that if efforts to promote reading are to be successful, teacher attitudes need to change; South African indigenous languages need to be validated; teachers need to be equipped with specific and practiced classroom skills and supplied with resources. This study supports these findings.

It is also worth remembering the reference that I made in the literature review to what Pretorius (2000) says, that reading is probably the most important skill for second language students in academic or learning contexts but that problems related to reading are particularly acute for learners who have to study in a second language and who come from an oral rather than a reading culture. This is because they learn to decode printed information but do not learn to read for meaning. They are seldom exposed to storybook reading as children, and they have very little experience of the printed word before they start school. In addition resources are sparse and often poorly managed so very few schools have adequate collections of narrative texts with which to attract children to the pleasure of reading and to ensure that the decoding-comprehension interaction is accomplished.

On top of all this, the change to English occurs when many have barely mastered reading comprehension skills in their home language so that they have few comprehension reading skills to transfer to English. They then proceed through an educational system that does not promote reading skills but relies instead on an oral transmission of information, on rote learning and verbatim recall that is often imperfectly understood (Pretorius, 2000). This study and my observation of conditions in schools in Ilembe, support Pretorius' findings. Also, because reading for meaning does not emerge spontaneously in young children once they have learned to read (Pretorius, 2000) teachers have to change the way they teach reading to enable this to happen.

5. Recommendations

My research was to see if teachers had implemented the reading approach that I advocated. More research would have to be carried out in order to demonstrate whether there will be 'significant and enduring improvement' in learners' reading ability if teachers implement this strategy (Bennett, 2003: 37).

There is a need for an agreed reading strategy that addresses the problem of learners' poor reading skills, one that recognises that teachers are the key to solving this problem and that it is what they do in the classroom on a daily basis to teach reading that really matters.

The use of newspapers and magazines in primary schools for reading practice should be discouraged in my view. Instead schools must buy their own Library Resource Material (LRM) as required by the ELITS School Library Policy. Provision of materials is a significant factor in the context of this study but as Christie (2001) points out, schools do have power to act and to take responsibility for making things happen. It is not just a question of a lack of resources. If schools see this as important they could find a way to make sure that they have the fiction material they require.

The message should go out to all Grade R, Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers that theirs is the most important job of all, teaching children to read, and should carry the highest status. This is a critically important 'specialisation' and our country's future depends on their doing it well. It is also of immense importance that their approach to reading teaching is such that children learn to love reading which is what the 'teachers reading stories aloud' approach has the potential to do.

The language issue is a problem that confronts primary school teachers every day in the classroom, as the reading demonstrations and interviews demonstrate. Teachers should be made aware of the extent to which their attitude to reading is influenced by the importance they attach to teaching their learners English. I believe that this is where a large part of the reading teaching problem lies and that a clear distinction has to be made between literacy acquisition on the one hand and learning a new language on the other. Most teachers require a lot of very careful, clearly thought through, practical guidance on how to teach literacy, reading in particular, that takes cognisance of this problem. The Education Department should seriously consider providing in-service teacher training or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for primary school teachers that take these

findings into account in order to improve teachers' reading and language teaching methodologies.

Another aspect that should perhaps be investigated is the claim that some teachers make that the Zulu used in story translations and in schoolbooks is of poor quality and that they therefore prefer to use English.

Teachers' own capacity to engage meaningfully with text has to be developed. Teachers themselves should be given the opportunity to experience reading children's literature for pleasure in a way that allows them to use their imaginations and give expression to their emotions. Because this falls largely outside of their own reading experience they do not know how to include it in their own teaching. An interesting example of this is that when asked to think of questions to ask learners that would help them understand another JAWS book, *Taxi to Johannesburg*, teachers consistently failed to ask: 'How would you feel as a ten year old boy on your own, coming from a rural area on your first visit to Johannesburg, arriving to discover that you have lost the piece of paper with your uncle's telephone number on it and you do not know anyone?' When I ask the question I get a surprised but 'feeling' response. This communicative aspect of reading is conspicuously absent from most teacher' reading practice.

It is necessary for teachers to understand that reading for meaning is just as important as word recognition. If they do not include this aspect of reading as part of their reading teaching practice they are only doing half the job. Although teachers liked the idea of using fiction for reading teaching they did not really understand the rationale behind the approach.

I think that an important message to send to teachers is that developing a culture of reading and fostering the reading habit in schools does not depend on teachers' current, personal reading habits. It is what they do to promote reading in the classroom that will make the difference. When they are reading stories aloud to children they are reading role models.

It is essential that teachers understand the difference between *learners* reading aloud and *teachers* reading aloud. Learners must have the opportunity to *practice* their reading skills, even though many teachers find this aspect of reading boring and frustrating. Perhaps learners reading *fiction* aloud to each other could be included as part of reading teaching practice. This is something that the junior primary interview school found useful. Schools

could also look for other ways to make this essential aspect of learning to read less tedious by, for example, bringing in suitable community members to help. *Teachers* on the other hand should read stories aloud in order to develop learners comprehension skills, their ability to read for meaning, which everyone seems to enjoy. Both of these aspects of reading are extremely important. Teachers should be aware that the purpose and nature of these two ways of reading aloud (learners and teachers) are not the same.

Teachers should also be aware that reading stories for pleasure is an end in itself. However a reading aloud approach that uses real books is also a useful means to an end, that of achieving the ultimate goal of developing skilled, efficient, independent readers who are not only able to decode effectively but who also understand what they read.

Follow-up workshops are essential. Reinforcement of new ideas and ongoing support are necessary if the initial positive response is to be capitalised on. In particular the workshops should:

- Make sure that teachers are aware of what the reading process involves.
- Help teachers to understand and accept that they need to adopt an interactive style of reading teaching that is based on a psycholinguistic, whole-language approach to the teaching of reading. Although it is difficult to break a traditional teaching mould, we must try to do this if this reading strategy is to be successful. If teachers are able to see just how important this is, and because reading and sharing stories in this way is such an enjoyable thing to do, it is possible that teachers will be prepared to use a different teaching style.
- Make sure that teachers understand the importance of distinguishing between teaching literacy and teaching English, and how this affects teaching practice.
- Make teachers aware of the importance of mother tongue literacy first even though this means taking 'the long way round' to English literacy, for the reasons that were outlined in the literature review.
- Point out that reading and language methodologies are not the same and depend on the teaching purpose.
- Emphasise reading aloud for enjoyment as an end in itself.
- Provide further reading aloud demonstrations using more complex stories.
- Provide further opportunities for teachers to practice preparing and presenting stories to children.
- Provide feedback on these presentations.

- Provide teachers with the opportunity to develop and practice the skills they need to draw learners into a story and engage them in a way that will interest them and help them understand the stories being read.
- Make sure that teachers understand that the quality of their interaction with their learners is a very important aspect of the reading aloud approach and that they need to learn to do this effectively.

6. Conclusion

When thinking of a title for this dissertation I originally thought of: *Teachers reading stories aloud in the classroom: A forgotten practice*. The value of reading stories aloud has been known for a very long time and used to be common practice, it still is in some enlightened schools, but somehow it seems to have been largely forgotten. I think that it should be resurrected on a daily basis in all primary school classrooms. The reading intervention seems to suggest that this is possible. Teachers enjoyed the reading experience, the interview schools implemented a reading programme based on the ideas presented to them at the workshops and teachers appeared to like the idea of using the kind of exciting fiction that I introduced them to instead of the rather dull book material that most have in their schools. The stumbling block is that teachers have not properly understood that children should be taught how to read for meaning and that reading, sharing and enjoying stories in the classroom is good teaching. This requires a change from a behaviourist mindset to an interactive, whole language approach.

I also think that when teachers are presented with something that makes sense to them and they can see that it is possible to implement in their 'real life' classroom situation they will do so. This is what happened at the interview schools. With more demonstration, plenty of practice and more work to help teachers understand these unfamiliar reading concepts, I believe that there will be converts and as the approach 'catches on' and other teachers see that it is possible, the message will spread. This is something that should be approached with a kind of missionary zeal if we are to have any hope of turning our disastrous reading situation around.

The findings of this study confirm what I suspected, that most children in primary schools in Ilembe are not being taught how to interact with books in a meaningful way. Not only do teachers *not* understand that this is something that they should be teaching, they also do not understand that the best way to help children to do this is by using storybooks and by

providing children with opportunities that help them to understand and enjoy the ‘whole’ message of the story.

My intention was to convince teachers to introduce a ‘teacher reading stories aloud’ approach to reading in their schools because I felt that teachers concentrate on one aspect of learning to read and neglect the other. The whole language, reading for meaning aspect of reading teaching is largely absent from the classroom. If there is to be any improvement in children’s reading ability, a lot of work has to be done to make teachers aware, not only that children should be given the opportunity to interact and engage with books and reading in a pleasurable way that helps them to understand and enjoy stories, but that this is a legitimate approach to reading teaching.

Teachers also have to be told what they do not wish to hear, and perhaps what many will be reluctant to tell them, that in this context teaching children to read in their mother tongue is more important than teaching them English, essential though this is. *Reading* should come first and learning a new language second. Because teachers’ reading teaching methodology is influenced by their attitude to reading, it is essential that teachers separate the teaching of reading on the one hand, from the teaching of English as a second language on the other. This means that their teaching methodology has to change in order to accommodate reading and language skills as distinct abilities.

This short reading intervention shows that positive shifts can occur in teachers’ reading practice, but that it is more difficult to change fundamental attitudes to reading. Even so the reading intervention was effective in bringing about some useful changes even though it was so short. Follow-up workshops that build on what has already been achieved are essential however if teachers are to fully absorb the new knowledge and skills they need for this reading approach to be effective. If learners are to become competent, skilled readers it is important that we go beyond the narrow view many have of what learning to read means.

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APPENDIX A : Benefits of reading story books

(Handout for ELITS workshop for school teachers)

In a readRight supplement to the Sunday Times entitled *Reading storybooks at home leads to success at school*, Lilli Pretorius provides a comprehensive list of the positive benefits of reading storybooks to children. I have summarized this below:

Reading stories aloud to children has the following positive outcomes:

- leads to reading success and later academic success
- helps children to develop specific language and cognitive skills
- provides opportunities for communication (expressing thoughts and feelings)
- helps children make sense of the world

Children:

- learn book language
- develop better grammar
- produce longer sentences
- have larger vocabularies
- develop good listening and comprehension skills
- learn to write more quickly and easily
- become familiar with story structure
- tend to write better essays
- become familiar with story-telling conventions
- become good at telling stories themselves
- are able to convey information more accurately and coherently
- develop the very important skill of critical evaluation
- develop longer spans of concentration
- develop a positive attitude to books and reading

APPENDIX B : Phinn's criteria for choosing books

(Handout for teachers studying an ACE library module)

Here is a summary of the questions that Phinn says we should ask when choosing books:

- Is the book visually appealing and eye-catching?
- Is the subject appropriate to the children in terms of age and maturity?
- Is the story worth telling?
- Does it read well aloud and bear a re-reading?
- Is it entertaining and challenging?
- Does it contain some excitement and suspense?
- Does it kindle curiosity and imagination?
- Is the language appropriate, natural and meaningful?
- Does it encourage children to predict what will happen, to anticipate and become involved in the narrative?
- Is there a richness in the expression and an imaginative use of words?
- Does the writer make some demands on his or her readers in terms of language?
- Is the dialogue appropriate to the characters?
- Is it clear, authentic and understandable?
- Do the illustrations enhance the story adding meaning to the words rather than detracting from them?
- Do the pictures link closely to the text?
- Is the print clear, well spaced and of an appropriate size?
- Are the characters rounded and convincing? (Do they live and breathe on the page, develop and grow in the readers mind?)
- Can children readily identify with the characters and enter into their lives?
- Is the story by a real writer, not merely a book especially written to teach children to read?
- Is the story of real interest to the teacher?
- Does she enjoy reading and re-reading it, presenting it and discussing it with her children?

Selecting books to read aloud

Selecting the right books to *read aloud* is obviously important because not all books are suitable for reading aloud. Ask the question: What works? You will learn from experience.

Choose books that you like and that you think will appeal to your learners. Jim Trelease, author of *The read aloud handbook* suggests four ...criteria of good read-aloud books:

They should:

- be fast-paced to hook children's interest as quickly as possible
- contain well-developed characters
- include easy-to-read dialogue
- keep long descriptive passages to a minimum" (Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987: 86).

APPENDIX C : Oakley's summary table

Table 2.2 Oakley's summary of the two main paradigms of educational research and evaluation

	'(logical) positivist' / 'scientific' / 'quantitative'	'naturalistic' / 'interpretivist' / 'qualitative'
Aims	Testing hypotheses / generalizing	Generating hypotheses / describing
Purpose	Verification	Discovery
Approach	Top-down	Bottom-up
Preferred Technique	Quantitative	Qualitative
Research Technique	Structured	Unstructured
Stance	Reductionist / inferential / hypothetico-deductive / outcome-oriented / exclusively rational / oriented to prediction and control	Expansionist / exploratory / inductive / process-oriented / rational and intuitive / oriented to understanding
Method	Counting / obtrusive and controlled measurement (surveys, experiments, case controlled studies, statistical records, structured observations, content analysis)	Observing (participant observation, in-depth interviewing, action research, case studies, life history methods, focus groups)
Implementation of method	Decided <i>a priori</i>	Decided in field setting
Values	Value-free	Value-bound
Instrument	Physical device / pencil and paper	The researcher
Researcher's stance	Outsider	Insider
Relationship of researcher and subject	Distant / independent	Close / interactive and inseparable
Setting	'Laboratory'	'Nature'
Data	Hard, reliable, replicable	Rich, deep, valid
Data type	Report of attitudes and actions	Feeling, behaviour, thoughts, actions as experienced or witnessed
Data analysis	Specified in advance	Worked out during the study
Analytic units	Pre-defined variables	Patterns and natural events
Quality criterion	Rigour / proof / evidence / statistical significance	Relevance / plausibility / illustrativeness / responsiveness to subjects's experiences
Source of theory	<i>A priori</i>	Grounded
Relationship between theory and research	Confirmation	Emergent
Causal links	Real causes exist	Causes and effects cannot be distinguished
Nature of truth statements	Time-and context -free generalizations are possible	Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible
Image of reality	Singular / tangible / fragmentable / static / external	Multiple / holistic / dynamic / and socially-constructed
Research Product	Stresses validity of research findings for scholarly community	Stresses meaningfulness of research findings to scholarly and user communities

Taken from Oakley, 2000, 26-7. (In Bennett, 2003: 22-3)

APPENDIX D : Reading CAN be Fun

(ELITS workshop handout for teachers)

Reading CAN be Fun

How teachers can promote reading for pleasure in their classrooms

Questions to ask

- Why do we read?
- What should we read?
- How do we choose what to read?
- How should we read?
- How does this help?

Why we read

- Information
- Pleasure
- Both

What to read

- Read Fiction (stories) for pleasure BECAUSE
- Stories have power
- Good stories draw you in and engage the reader.

How to choose what to read

Storybooks must:

- Stimulate the imagination
- Engage the reader's emotions
- Have good, interesting plots
- Have believable characters

How to read

- Read good stories aloud with lots of expression
- Ask questions that encourage learners to think about the story
- Discuss these stories with learners

Teachers can promote reading for pleasure in their classrooms by reading stories aloud, asking questions and discussing these stories with learners.

Why it is important to do this

- Reading is a difficult, complex process that requires effort.
- Listening to stories being read aloud is easier than reading them on your own.
- Reading skills, such as comprehension, can be developed through listening
- Reading for meaning is what is important.
- Learners will be motivated to read on their own.

Some advantages of this approach

- Helps overcome the problem of a lack of resources because only ONE copy of the book is required.
- Achieves all the RNCS languages outcomes.
- Demonstrates teachers as reading role models whether they are readers themselves or not.

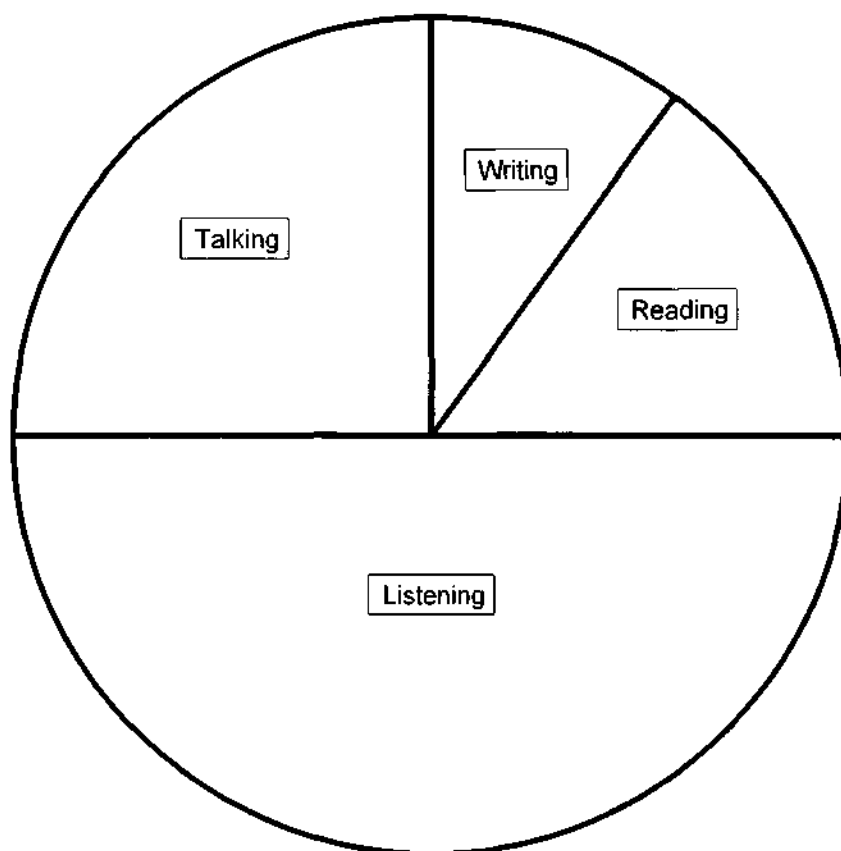
June Mackie

ELITS Ilembe District

Appendix E : Time spent listening

(Handout for ELITS workshop for teachers)

TIME SPENT LISTENING



Researchers have found that more children's and adults' time is spent listening than reading, writing and talking. Both children and adults spend approximately 50% of their communication time listening.

APPENDIX F : Reading Questionnaire**READING QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please tick the relevant box when you are given a choice.

Everywhere else, please write in your answer.

The tick can be bigger than the box.

Name of school

--

Teacher reading background

1. Did anyone read to you when you were a child?

Yes

No

2. If yes, was it:

Regularly (eg. more than once a week)

Quite often

- Not very often

3. If yes, **who** read to you?

- Family member (specify)
- Teacher
- Other (specify)

4. **What** did they read to you?

- Bible
- children's stories
- magazines
- school books
- other (specify)

Current personal reading habits

5. **What** do you read now and in what language?

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> study material | English <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> novels (fiction) | English <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> newspapers | English <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu <input type="checkbox"/> |

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | magazines | English <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | non-fiction | English <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | other (specify) | English <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Why do you read now i.e. for what purpose?

- information
- further study
- relaxation/pleasure
- other (specify)

Teaching

7. Which phase do you teach?

- Foundation
- Intermediate
- Senior

8. How do you encourage learners to read? (What strategies do you use?)

9. At what grade should learners be encouraged to read books other than their workbooks?

10. Why do you say so?

11. What kinds of reading materials do you have in your classroom?

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | storybooks (fiction) suitable for the grade | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | non-fiction books suitable for the grade | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | class readers | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | religious books/bible | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | magazines | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | newspapers | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | other (specify) | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | none | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zulu | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Do you read **stories** (fiction) aloud to your learners in the classroom?

- Yes
- No

If no, please move on to question number 22.

13. If yes, provide some examples of the titles you have read.

14. If yes, how often do you read?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Not Very Often

15. If yes, how long do you read for each time? **For example:** 10 minutes: 30 minutes?

16. **Why** do you read stories aloud to learners?

17. Which language do you prefer to use when reading aloud?

- Zulu
- English
- Both

18. Do learners ask you questions about the stories you read to them?

Yes

No

19. If yes, what kind of questions do they ask?

20. Do you ask the learners questions?

Yes

No

21. If yes, what kind? Provide some examples.

22. Below is a list of statements. If the statement is *true* for you, tick the box. (You may tick a number of boxes.)

- I would like to read stories aloud to my learners but there is not enough time.
- I thought teachers only read stories aloud in the Foundation Phase.
- There are no suitable storybooks in the school.
- Reading aloud does not meet the requirements for the new OBE/RNCS policy.
- There is no period on the timetable for reading aloud.
- I *tell* my class stories.
- Once a child has learned to read it is better for them to read the books themselves.
- I do not enjoy reading aloud.
- Reading stories aloud to learners does not develop their reading skills.

- I do not feel comfortable reading **English** storybooks aloud.
- Reading stories aloud will only work if each learner has a copy of the book.
- I read aloud from *workbooks*.
- I read aloud from *non-fiction* books.
- I borrow books from the nearest library to read aloud to my class?

23. Which do you think is more important?

- Reading for pleasure
- Reading for information
- Both are important

The school

24. Does your school spend some of its norms and standards money to buy *library* resource material?

- Yes
- No

25. If yes, what kind of material? (You may tick more than one box)

- storybooks (fiction)
- non-fiction
- reference books eg. atlases, dictionaries and encyclopedias

26. Which of these ways of promoting reading does your school prefer? (Choose only *one*).

- reading celebrations
- motivating learners to take out books from a library
- setting up classroom collections of suitable books
- establishing a reading programme

27. Does your school have a collection of *suitable* library resource material eg. books given to the school by ELITS?

- Yes
- No

28. If yes, are learners able to borrow these books and take them home?

Yes

No

29. If the answer to 28 is no, please explain.

30. If the answer to 27 is yes, do teachers use these books regularly in the classroom?

Yes

No

APPENDIX G : Workshop Evaluation

ELITS Ilembe District Workshop Evaluation

Please tick the relevant box where you are given a choice.

Everywhere else, please write in your answer.

The tick can be bigger than the box.

Name of school

General

1. There were 3 sections in this workshop. Which sections did you find useful? *You may tick more than one box.*

- Library Management
- Information Skills
- Reading
- All three.

a) Please explain why you found it/them useful.

b) Please explain why the ones that you did not tick were not useful.

2. What was the most useful thing that you learned during this workshop?

3. I still need more help with how to:

(Tick the relevant box. You may tick more than one box.)

- Organise books.
- Use resource material for the development of information skills.
- Integrate information skills into the curriculum.
- Read books aloud for pleasure.

4. It is very important to get books into the hands of the learners. Did you find out how to do this?

- Yes No

Please explain your answer.

5. When you get back to your school do you have a plan to make sure that your learners are able to take books home?

- Yes No

Please explain your answer.

Reading

6. Did you enjoy *listening* to the stories that the facilitators read aloud?

- Yes No

7. Did you enjoy *discussing* the stories that were read aloud?

- Yes No

8. Did you enjoy the experience of reading stories aloud in this workshop?

- Yes No

9. Has this workshop made you feel more confident about reading stories aloud?

- Yes No

10. Has this workshop given you some ideas about *how* to read stories aloud?

Yes No

11. Has this workshop given you some ideas about how to involve learners in discussions about the stories?

Yes No

12. Do you think that you will go back to your school and read stories aloud to your learners?

Yes No

13. Do you think that the other teachers in your school will be interested in reading stories aloud?

Yes No

14. If the answer is no what reasons do you think that they will give?

15. Will you try to convince them to read stories aloud in the classroom?

- Yes No

Please explain your answer.

Format

16. What did you think about the length of the workshop?

- Too long
 Too short
 Just right

17. Would a follow up workshop be useful?

- Yes No

18. If yes, what would you like to cover in a follow up workshop?

19. I need practice:

(You may tick more than one box)

- Choosing the right books to read aloud.
- Reading aloud.
- Asking the right questions to encourage discussion and to help learners to think about what they are reading.

Explain in more detail.

Commitment to action.

20. Now that you have attended this workshop name 3 specific things (one for each section) that you are immediately going to do differently in your classroom that you were not doing before?

1.

2.

3.

APPENDIX H : Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Introduction of follow up visit

It was explained that the visit was to follow up on the reading section of the workshop that had been held. The purpose was to establish if the workshop was useful, if teachers are reading stories aloud to their classes and to give teachers the opportunity to talk about any problems that they might have encountered.

The ‘teacher librarian’ who attended the workshop, other members of staff and the principal of each school, were interviewed.

Teachers who attended the workshops:

1. What do you remember about the workshop?
2. What were the highlights of the workshop for you?
3. What are you doing in the classroom to promote reading?
4. Are you doing anything differently as a result of the workshop?
5. What do you see as the purpose of reading aloud?
6. How do you promote reading for pleasure?
7. Have you tried reading *stories* aloud in the classroom? Why/why not?
8. How do you think reading stories aloud works as a reading strategy?
9. What do you think should be done to develop learners’ reading skills so that they become good, independent readers?
10. Which language do you prefer to use in the classroom and why?
11. Did you provide feedback about the workshop to the rest of the staff?
12. How did you do this?
13. What was the response?
14. Did you explain and demonstrate how to read stories aloud to other members of the staff?
15. What was the response?
16. What was the response to the need to establish a reading programme?

Questions for the rest of the teaching staff

1. Did you receive feedback about the ELITS reading workshop?
2. Explain how this was done. (Who provided the feedback? What were you told? How did the sharing of information happen? Was it formally (a meeting) or informally (general discussion in the staff room)?

3. What do you see as the purpose of reading aloud?
4. Do you think that this is a useful way to promote reading? Why/Why not.
5. Do any of you read stories aloud? Why/why not?
6. What stories do you read?

Questions for the principal

1. What are your thoughts about the ELITS workshop that you hosted at your school?
2. Have you had any feedback from those who attended?
3. Did anything useful come out of it for your school? Please explain.
4. How does your school promote reading?
5. What do you see as the purpose of reading aloud?
6. What do you understand by reading aloud?
7. What do you feel about the new reading policy that requires schools to have a reading programme?
8. What kind of reading programme do you envisage for your school?

Teacher librarian:

1. Explain how you came to be the teacher librarian?
2. As a teacher librarian what do you think that you have achieved?
3. What problems do you encounter?
4. What do you see as the best way to promote reading in your school?
5. Are learners taking books home?
6. Explain the issue system.
7. Questions arising directly out of the reading questionnaire and workshop evaluation.

Informal Observation of:

- The books in the classroom
- The classroom and library reading environments
- The effort being made to encourage learners to read
- Interest and enthusiasm towards reading of:
 - ▶ the principal
 - ▶ the teacher librarian
 - ▶ teachers in the school

APPENDIX I : Features of resilient schools

Improving school quality in South Africa: a study of schools that have succeeded against the odds.

Pam Christie. *Journal of Education*, No.26, 2001.

Table showing Christie's findings:

Features of Resilient Schools	ALL	Teaching and learning was seen as the schools' primary purpose.
		The schools provided demarcated safe and orderly space for teachers and students.
		The schools demonstrated a culture of concern.
		Schools showed a sense of responsibility for themselves and their functioning.
	MOST	Generally principals were strong managers and leaders. (Many of them were women).
		Discipline in a number of schools was linked to the educational vision of the school.
Factors that were not significant	Consistently active and engaged governance structures e.g. parent bodies.	
	Instruction or concrete support from education departments.	
Suggestions for school improvement.	Teaching and learning should be central in developing school quality improvement.	
	Strategies need to be developed to foster responsibility and agency at school level by helping schools identify the sorts of things they are able to tackle for themselves and to encourage them to take responsibility for doing so. Policy makers need to work with teachers as an important target if policies for improving teaching and learning are to succeed.	

Appendix J : South Africa's children cannot read

Almost 80% of South African pupils do not develop basic reading skills by the time they reach grade five, a new international study released on Thursday shows.

The *Progress in International Reading Literacy* study was conducted in 40 countries and carried out locally by the University of Pretoria's Centre for Evaluation and Assessment.

It shows that South African pupils achieved the lowest score compared with children in the other 39 countries.

Only 2% of South African grade-five learners reached the highest international benchmark compared with 7% internationally.

The Russian Federation, Hong Kong, Singapore and Italy were among the countries whose pupils obtained the highest scores.

Almost 80% of South African pupils in grade four and five did not reach the lowest international benchmark, in contrast to only 6% in the rest of the countries tested.

While almost half of the children tested in English and Afrikaans attained the lowest benchmark, between 86% and 96% of children writing in the other nine official languages did not manage to attain even the low benchmark.

The study represents the first baseline study of reading literacy in South African primary schools, across all 11 languages.

South Africa had the largest number of pupils taking part in the study, with 16 073 children in grade four and 14 657 in grade six being tested.

The study shows that early literacy activities at home are important. Good pre-literacy skills that are developed before school are related to higher achievement.

South Africa is behind in introducing more complex reading skills, whereas internationally the more complex skills are introduced earlier. Where more advanced skills are introduced in grade one, achievement is higher.

Few children are exposed to early reading-literacy activities with their families and less than half have books in the home. Also, 60% of South African primary schools do not have a library or classroom libraries.

The study also shows that parents' levels of education are strongly related to reading achievement. -- Sapa

Results from Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

Mail and Guardian Breaking News article.

Pretoria, South Africa

29 November 2007 04:12



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7 MARCH 2007

MRS. JM MACKIE (891161119)
ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Dear Mrs. Mackie

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0056/07M

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"Beyond learning to read: An evaluation of the effectiveness of a reading intervention in the District of KwaZulu-Natal"

Yours faithfully


.....
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Dr. E. Lyster)

2007-03-09