



Exploring how the Reading to Learn pedagogy can support  
Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension in Life Skills

By

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# DECLARATION

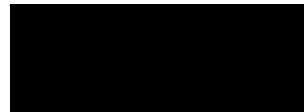
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## **ABSTRACT**

Reading comprehension is an important skill that facilitates the growth of many academic activities for students. Reading comprehension assists students in decoding written information, analysing, explaining, and expressing their own thoughts. The aim of this action research study was to explore how the Reading to Learn (R2L) pedagogy can support Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension in the teaching of Life Skills. This study aimed first to examine how R2L can help learners with reading comprehension; specifically, how R2L encourages active learning and participation from students. Its second aim was to understand what the implications of R2L are on my literacy teaching. The study adopted a critical paradigm as its purpose was to improve my own teaching. Participants in this study were selected purposively as they were the learners in my class, and the aim of the action research project was to improve my classroom practices. Data was generated through pre- and post-tests, lesson observations using video recordings, and reflective journals written by me. The study's data collection period began in May 2021 and concluded in October 2021. The study's qualitative research employed thematic analysis. Additionally, quantitative data were described using a descriptive statistic. The research is underpinned by Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory. The findings indicated that the use of R2L intervention (Scaffolded Literacy Strategies) was highly helpful to this group of Grade 4 learners, as it assisted them to read with understanding. Most learners in the R2L Group improved their test results in the reading comprehension post-test. This could be attributed to the R2L intervention because a comparable increase was not noticed in the control group post-test scores. During my implementation of the R2L intervention learner participation improved. More learners raised their hands and wanted to give answers; during sentence construction, there was interaction among the learners, as they cut out words in jumbled sentences and rearranged them correctly. On the other hand, in the class that were not taught using R2L, learners were not engaged in class discussion, with only two learners raising their hands and answering, while the rest were just listening to me and not responding to my questions. My teaching practice was enhanced by learning the scaffolding method to support my Grade 4 learners' reading for meaning, while I guided them in all the stages of R2L intervention. R2L taught me that every learner can learn if teachers are able to scaffold their learning.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
CA	Creative Arts
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
DBE	Department of Basic Education
KZN	Kwazulu-Natal
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
PA	Performance Arts
PE	Physical Education
PSW	Personal and Social Well-being
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading and Literacy Studies
R2L	Reading to Learn
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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# **Chapter One:**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a guide to and the structure of my research project, that was conducted on how the Reading to Learn pedagogy can support Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension in Life Skills. This chapter starts by outlining the study's focus, purpose, and problem statement. Second, I explain the study's rationale, background, and context, followed by the background to the Reading to Learn pedagogy. Then, I clarify the research questions, why such questions were asked, and how they assisted in achieving the research purpose. Finally, I provide an overview of the dissertation.

### **1.2 Focus and Purpose of the Study**

The focus of this action research project is to use the Reading to Learn (R2L) programme, to explore how this might improve the reading comprehension development of Grade 4 learners in my Life Skills class. R2L is a pedagogy that was designed to help learners struggling with reading (Rose, 2005). The R2L programme was introduced to some schools in KwaZulu-Natal in the year 2010, to support teachers by providing them with tools for teaching reading for meaning and creative writing. It was developed by Dr. David Rose in Australia as a research project in 1998 and was used to start training teachers in the year 2000. The aim of the Reading to Learn pedagogy is to address the needs of marginalized students who find it difficult to access learning from texts, due to low levels of literacy development (RTL South Africa, 2015).

R2L is a nongovernmental organisation in South Africa which provides training for teachers. It provides a five- to eight-day professional learning programme that is delivered through a series of intensive workshops, with classroom practice and study between them (RTL South Africa, 2015). It is explained as a programme sequence that focuses on knowledge about language and pedagogy, careful planning of lessons, and regular implementation of this sequence in the classroom. Teachers also learn the different criteria for assessing learners' growth in writing competencies. In my previous school, learners had challenges with reading comprehension and I looked for strategies to help them. I heard about R2L through a colleague and I decided to attend this training to learn a new methodology, in order to help my learners to become more competent in reading comprehension. After the R2L training, I realised that this pedagogy can be used to support reading comprehension so I started using it.

The purpose of the study was for me to reflect systematically on using R2L pedagogy in my Life Skills class, in order to explore how it may influence learners' comprehension of texts. Reading comprehension is at the heart of many school subjects, as it plays a key role in the process of cognitive development; as such, you cannot learn from a text if you cannot comprehend what you read (Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2008). Reading with comprehension has been highlighted as a major problem in South African schools, and without the ability to read, students will not be successful at school (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Sibanda, 2017).

According to Sibanda (2017), the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 is a challenge in schools. The term "transition" represents the move from Grade 3 to Grade 4, when the language of learning and teaching changes to English. From Grades 1 to 3 in KwaZulu-Natal, students are instructed in their home language, namely isiZulu. For the majority of Grade 3 students, the transition to Grade 4 entails altering the language of instruction, routines and learning methodologies, resulting in achievement loss (Gordon, Peterson, Gdula, & Klingbeil, 2011).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Developing reading comprehension abilities becomes increasingly important for learners as they advance through school, with the focus shifting from learning to read to learning to understand

(Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008; Ness, 2009). Given this reality, it is troubling that so many learners struggle to read. Children from rural schools do not have exposure to reading, neither in their mother tongue nor in English. Most schools do not even have libraries, which is one reason that children battle when it comes to reading comprehension. The research states that many students in South African schools complete Grade 3 with little ability to read and write accurately in their mother tongue (Sibanda, 2017). Reading comprehension is seen to be a major challenge in many South African schools (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). In this study, I decided to bring an intervention, namely of using R2L pedagogy, to see if it could assist my Grade 4 learners struggling with the theoretical part of Life Skills.

The level of literacy in South African schools is in crisis (Trudell, Dowd, Piper, & Bloch, 2012). Literature has shown that most students in South African schools complete Grade 3 without being able to read and write properly in their home language (Sibanda, 2017). According to the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Studies (PIRLS) 2016 study, almost 80% of Grade 4 students in South Africa are unable to read for meaning (Herget et al., 2019). These PIRLS assessments were administered in the students' home language. The PIRLS test also demonstrates that many learners have little understanding of English as a language of learning and teaching (Spaull, Van der Berg, Wills, Gustafsson & Kotze, 2016). Most learners find it difficult to read a comprehension passage and make meaning of the text, both in their mother tongue (isiZulu) and in the first additional language (English) (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007). Those with good reading skills have better chances of academic excellence compared to those who cannot read (Mgqwashu, 2011; Rose, 2011). In order for learners to master all the school subjects, they need to possess good reading skills.

Numerous learners struggle to comprehend what they read. Each learner develops comprehension at a different rate and their amount of help required varies. While some learners require little to no assistance in comprehension, others struggle to maintain attention long enough to effectively retell what they have heard or read. Our objective as educators is to help students improve their reading comprehension. All schools must provide some form of remedial reading instruction to assist struggling students. According to the findings of recent research, there are a number of

fundamental factors that contribute to poor reading comprehension. Among the causes are the complicated process of learning to read, the type of instruction, the decoding method, prior knowledge, a diverse population, and vocabulary development (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

This literacy crisis is also evident in my own Grade 4 classroom in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu District. The ongoing comprehension challenges among my learners inspired me to undertake the current action research in my practice as a professional teacher. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of how using R2L pedagogy can improve the reading comprehension skills of my Grade 4 Life Skills learners. I decided to use R2L pedagogy to support my grade 4 class.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

Life Skills is a required subject for all students. It is divided into three different aspects, namely: physical education (PE); creative arts, which consist of performance art (PA) and creative art (CA); and a theory part, which is made up of personal and social well-being (PSW). Personal and social well-being is the study of how a person interacts with their surroundings and other people. It equips students with the skills necessary to contribute positively to family, community, and society. Learners are equipped with the necessary skills to respond positively to challenging situations, and to recognize, develop, and communicate their abilities, interests, and skills with self-confidence. In order to build a democratic society, they learn values like respecting other people's rights, and being tolerant of cultural and religious differences. PSW is described as a three-topic study area in the Life Skills curriculum, which are: 1) personal development; 2) health and environmental responsibilities; and 3) social responsibility.

The assessment of the topic of personal and social well-being is done through writing. I noticed that my students struggled with comprehension of English texts. For instance, in 2019, out of my class of 70 learners, 15 passed the Life Skills written tasks (which is PSW) at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> term, with marks of 50% and above, while 55 learners achieved results of less than 50%. Therefore, the gap between the students who are doing well and those who are not is wide.

In this action research, I reflected on my practice as a teacher, motivated by witnessing the poor level of my learners' reading comprehension in Life Skills. I decided to conduct this study because I wanted to use R2L strategies to have an opportunity for effective learning to take place. In 2018, I attended a Reading to Learn training for 5 days. Thus, I decided to use R2L intervention in 2021 with my Grade 4 Life Skills class. I wished to determine whether I could enhance the learners' comprehension skills.

"Everyone has the right to an education in the official language or languages of their choice at publicly funded educational institutions, to the extent that such instruction is reasonably practicable," states the Constitution of Republic of South Africa. The South African Schools Act of 1996 section (29) requires provincial governments to develop appropriate language policies, and gives school governing bodies the authority to choose the language of instruction therein (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In South African schools, the problem worsens when, beginning in Grade 4, learners are required to use English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), instead of their mother tongue.

In Grade 4, all subjects are taught in English except for the child's mother tongue, which becomes a subject; this language can be isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, or any other South African language (Sibanda, 2017). According to the South African Language-in-Education Policy (1997), students' mother tongue must be used from Grade R to Grade 3. Thus, learners are deprived of developing English "communicative skills and concepts that would prepare them to engage with the subject matter presented in English in grade 4" (Department of Education, 2011, p.18).

At my school, Grade 4 teachers began searching for possible solutions to the problem of learners' failure to understand the learning content in English. One part of the solution was to use code-switching because this seemed to assist learners in understanding the learning content presented to them in English (Cahyani, de Courcy, & Barnett, 2018; Lin, 2013). Additionally, code-switching plays a beneficial role in clarifying concepts, explaining difficult words, assessing learner comprehension, and reinforcing learners' new vocabulary (Mahofa & Adendorff, 2014; Moodley, 2010). However, even with using code-switching, learners were still struggling with reading comprehension.

Literacy development in South Africa still faces a challenge. Seeing my learners struggling with reading comprehension, challenged me as a Grade 4 teacher to explore how using R2L pedagogy as a reading comprehension strategy, would allow for opportunities for effective learning to take place.

## **1.5 Context**

This study was conducted in a rural Grade 4 class at Kukhanya Primary (pseudonym) in the district of uMgungundlovu (KZN). English is considered a "foreign language" in this community, as it is rarely spoken outside of educational settings. The majority of isiZulu-speaking members of this community are fiercely protective of their culture, language, and traditions, and thus are averse to learning or speaking English, regardless of whether they know it or not. The majority of parents work long hours away from their children. The students are then placed with their grandparents, who are unable to assist them with their homework. Some of the parents are illiterate and also unable to help their children with their homework, while others left school at an early stage and cannot understand English.

## **1.6 Background to Reading to Learn**

Reading to Learn is a genre-based approach (R2L, 2015). It is a set of practices that enables teachers to help all children in their classrooms to read and write at the levels necessary for success (Mgqwashu, 2011; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017; RTL South Africa, 2015). David Rose developed Reading to Learn 20 years ago in Australia, to meet the needs of underprivileged children who found it challenging to access learning, due to a lack of literacy development (RTL, South Africa, 2015). The goal was for them to develop their reading abilities, which are essential for academic achievement.

The Reading to Learn programme has provided professional development to teachers from various schools in KwaZulu-Natal for the past ten years. Some educators attend training individually,

while others attend with a group of teachers from the same school. Reading to Learn South Africa states that educators who have been educated in this technique, have improved their professional practice and that their students' reading and writing skills have also improved (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017; Rose, 2005, 2011; RTL South Africa, 2015). Reading to Learn provides five days of training for the foundation phase teachers and eight days for the senior phase ones. At the training, teachers are given a chance to reflect through discussions on the successes and challenges they encounter in their practice. They are then provided with the research findings of the state of student literacy in South Africa. The training is based on content knowledge in different genres, language structures, as well as assessments. Teachers are introduced to the R2L teaching and learning cycle of six steps through which classroom interaction takes place. The facilitators explain the R2L cycle, while playing the videos showing classroom interaction, and demonstrate lesson preparation and teaching through the cycle. The trainees take home some booklets with the information learned at the training, and videos of teachers teaching in their classrooms. They then bring their books to practise doing lesson plans according to the cycle, and teach each other in groups. After the training, teachers are visited in their classrooms for monitoring and support, until they are confident in their teaching.

I attended a Reading to Learn methodology training, which was a teacher-initiated training. It was recommended to me by a friend, and I paid for it myself. I attended the training for five days. After the training, the R2L trainers visited me to give me support in the classroom. I used this knowledge that I acquired from the training with my Grade 5 learners. I was then asked by my principal to teach Grade 4. My study attempts to find out in what way R2L activities and pedagogy support Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension development. The purpose of the study is for me to reflect on systematically using R2L pedagogy in my Life Skills classroom, and to explore how it may impact learners' comprehension of texts.

The RTL programme was introduced in South Africa in order to address the country's crisis in literacy development. The purpose of this was for students to enhance their literacy abilities which are essential for educational achievement. This method has been used to conduct professional development training, and has therefore been adopted by several schools across the country (RTL South Africa, 2015). For this reason, I became interested in investigating its impact on teachers'

professional practice in the South African context, as most of the research about this programme has been done in other countries.

## 1.7 Research questions

This action research was guided by three research questions, which are as follows:

1. Research question 1: *In what way can R2L pedagogy support the development of Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension?*

In engaging with this research question, I used pre-tests and post-tests to establish the way R2L pedagogy supported Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension. Learners wrote the Life Skills comprehension test in May before the intervention; then I introduced R2L intervention, and learners wrote another comprehension test in October. Test scores helped me to ascertain how R2L pedagogy could support the development of Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension. I was able to compare learners' marks before and after using R2L as an intervention.

2. Research question 2: *In what ways can R2L pedagogy support learner participation?*

In engaging with this question, I explored the contribution of R2L pedagogy to learner participation and engagement in class; this question pertained to my teaching practice. The lessons were recorded before introducing R2L pedagogy, and then more lessons were recorded when I was using it. Classroom observation using video recordings, allowed me to reflect on and analyse my lessons using R2L pedagogy and other lessons not using it. I was also able to track learners' participation and engagement during the lessons.

3. Research question 3: *How does Reading to Learn change my teaching of literacy?*

This question explores how R2L pedagogy can support me to change my methods of teaching of literacy. I used a reflective journal to generate data for this research question, and in this case looking at how R2L had changed my pedagogy. Video recordings of my teaching using or not using R2L pedagogy were used to get more accurate data. I used journal entries, where I reflected on the lessons that I taught using R2L lesson observation criteria. The way that

learners responded to the activities that I gave in my lesson, this offered me the chance to engage in teacher learning (Kelly, 2006).

## **1.8 Overview of the Dissertation**

In chapter one of this thesis, I described the focus and purpose of my self-study research and further explained the rationale for conducting this study. I then provided the background information leading to my decision to conduct it. The three research questions that guided this study were also outlined. I presented myself as a teacher and a researcher in the study, and then described the theoretical perspective that underpinned it. I briefly introduced the methodological approach employed, and concluded by describing how this dissertation is structured.

In chapter two, I give a record of the literature reviewed that is relevant to this study. The literature focuses on definitions of literacy, theories underpinning R2L, scaffolding, and studies of R2L done in SA. The chapter also presents Vygotsky's (1978) Social Learning Theory, which is the theoretical framework used to analyse the data.

In chapter three, I provide a rationale for choosing the research design and methodology used in this study. I also discuss the research approach chosen and the research paradigm used in this study. I further give details about my data generation methods, data collection instruments used, and how data was analysed. I explain the sampling strategy, trustworthiness, and how I adhered to ethical issues throughout this study.

Chapter four presents the findings that emerged from the data generation from the non-R2L Group. I present and discuss the data generated through the pre- and post-test of two Grade 4 classes in one primary school. I also discuss the findings based on the data gathered during video recordings, using classroom observation of a Grade 4 learners' control group (non-R2L Group)

Chapter five presents the lesson observations of the R2L Group in two cycles of action research, and discusses the findings based on the data generated during video recordings, using classroom observation of Grade 4 learners (R2L Group)

Chapter six, the final chapter, is a discussion of the findings, as well as recommendations and the conclusion of the research project

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This introductory chapter provided a detailed discussion of the background of this action research. It also outlined the rationale for engaging in this self-study research, the background of the Reading to Learn pedagogy, and the methodological approach employed in the study. I presented the research questions that guided the study, and the theoretical framework that underpinned it was highlighted. This chapter further gave an outline of the chapters to follow in the dissertation. The next chapter is the literature review.

# **Chapter Two:**

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, I present a thorough analysis of the literature concerning the definitions of literacy, and the theories supporting R2L and scaffolding. I then review the studies of R2L done in SA. Finally, I describe Vygotsky's theory focusing particularly on the key practice of scaffolding.

### **2.2 Defining Literacy**

Literacy is the capacity to read and write at an adequate extent of proficiency that is essential for communication (Jama & Dugdale, 2012; Naidoo, Reddy, & Dorasamy, 2014; Norton, 2010; Rose, 2005). According to the UNESCO definition of literacy, "Literacy is the ability to recognise, comprehend, analyse, produce, communicate and compute utilizing printed and written resources connected with diverse settings. Literacy is a continuous spectrum of learning in order for individuals to attain their goals, enhance their knowledge and abilities, and take part in their communities and society at large" (Unesco, 2017). However, it is considered to not only include all communication behaviours, namely speaking, listening, writing, and reading, but also to understand the thought processes related to concepts, as well as knowledge associated with subject areas (Bouwer, 2004). Broadening access to knowledge and people's ability to share and convey ideas, has traditionally had political and emancipatory implications. Literacy is also a concept that has recently been used to describe a collection of skills (Unesco, 2017) According to Rose (2005), literacy refers to students' capacity to comprehend and follow instructions, using the expected discussion and debate conventions for their grade, genre, and discipline, with the assistance of their educators. The South African curriculum defines literacy as the capacity to gather, analyse, arrange, and scrutinize knowledge, as well as to communicate in a variety of forms utilizing visual, symbolic, and linguistic abilities (Department of Basic Education, 2011b)

## **2.3 Reading Comprehension**

Literacy comprises both reading and writing (Jama & Dugdale, 2012; Naidoo et al., 2014; Norton, 2010). Comprehension is a reading component that refers to the ability to make sense of what you are reading, i.e., comprehension of what you have read. The primary goal of reading is to gain an understanding of the text being read (Goodman & Goodman, 2014; Klapwijk, 2015). My study focuses on reading with comprehension. Reading comprehension is a difficult undertaking that involves the coordination of several cognitive skills and talents. Naturally, reading comprehension is dependent upon proper word decoding. Readers will be unable to comprehend the text if they are unable to recognize (decode) the text's words. Similarly, adequate reading comprehension is dependent upon adequate language comprehension in general (Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro, 2014). Improving children's capabilities in comprehension and language is crucial for encouraging literacy development. Assisting learners to interact with text needs to be done in an engaging way that recognizes their different learning needs (Rose, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). If one does not comprehend what one reads, then the reading exercise becomes pointless.

## **2.4 South African challenges to developing literacy**

Some of the key challenges to developing literacy in South Africa are that teacher knowledge about reading is poor, children do not have books in their homes, and the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is English from Grade 4 onwards.

### **2.4.1 Teacher knowledge about teaching reading is poor**

A teacher's knowledge of literacy instruction is one factor that contributes to the effectiveness of literacy instruction. According to the National Reading Strategy (Department of Education, 2008), many foundation phase teachers in South Africa lack explicit training in teaching reading, making it difficult to assist students with reading difficulties. Many educators have no idea how to teach reading. Too frequently, teachers know only one method for teaching reading, which may not be suitable for all students' learning styles (Department of Education, 2008).

#### **2.4.2 Children do not have books in their homes**

Approximately one million South African children live in homes where neither parent can read (Unesco, 2017). In addition, Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) report that approximately 86% of adult South Africans have attained basic literacy, but this does not imply that they have attained higher levels of literacy. Fewer than 50% of the learners in South Africa who participated in the PIRLS 2006 survey, have access to more than ten books in their homes, while this number hovers around 78 percent globally. In addition to this, there seems to be a connection between the number of books that are kept in the home and the level of success that a student achieves (Howie et al., 2007).

#### **2.4.3 LOLT is English from Grade 4**

One of the challenges faced by learners in SA is the transition from Grade 3 to 4. After 1994, one of the Department of Education's (DoE) primary transformation aims was to ensure that all languages enjoyed equal respect in South Africa (Romaine, 2017). The Department of Basic Education's primary objective, in recognition of students' home languages, was for teachers to instruct learners in their home language from Grade 1 to Grade 3 (Romaine, 2017). However, this medium of instruction changes to English in Grade 4.

"Everyone has the right to an education in the official language or languages of their choice at publicly funded educational institutions, to the extent that such instruction is reasonably practicable" (Republic of South Africa (1996). The South African Schools Act of 1996 requires provincial governments to develop appropriate language policies, and gives school governing bodies the authority to choose the language of instruction in schools. In South African schools, the problem worsens when, beginning in Grade 4, learners are required to use English as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT) instead of their mother tongue. As such, all subjects are taught in English except for the learner's mother tongue, which becomes a subject, which can be isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, or any other South African language (Sibanda, 2017).

The 1997 South African Language-in-Education Policy (Department of Education, 1997) mandated the use of learners' home language as the medium of instruction in Grades R through 3. Thus, learners were deprived of developing English "communicative skills and concepts that would prepare them to engage with the subject matter presented in English in grade 4" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p.18). It is important for learners to be proficient in reading and writing in English, since it is used as the language of teaching and learning (LOLT) from Grade 4. Schools using an African home language in the foundation phase typically switch to English instruction in Grade 4. As much as several schools continue to teach African languages up to Grade 12, they are rarely utilized as a LOLT beyond Grade 3. Only Afrikaans and English are utilized as LOLTs (Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

Most African children struggle when changing over from their mother tongue to English (Sibanda, 2017). Some learners cannot read in their mother tongue, and then they have to change to English when they are in Grade 4. The difficulty is that this shift from learning to read to reading to learn does not occur smoothly for all learners (Pretorius, 2014), particularly in South Africa, where the majority of children do not speak English as a home language. The educational system is confronted with the challenge of how to most effectively equip these students with a second language, namely English (Taylor & von Fintel, 2016). Sibanda (2017) notes that Grade 3 to 4 transitional issues are not solely a South African concern, but also worldwide as well. This implies that nationally and globally, Grade 4 is recognised as a significant period that is essential in a student's learning, and a moment when learners' academic performance tends to drop.

## **2.5 Reading to Learn pedagogy**

R2L is a teaching and learning methodology for literacy development, as well as a professional development programme for teachers (Rose & Acevedo, 2006; Rose & Martin, 2012; RTL South Africa, 2015). Reading to Learn is a set of strategies that enables teachers to support all of their learners in reading and writing, at levels necessary for success (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017, RTL South Africa, 2015, Mgqwashu, 2011). It is an approach for integrating curriculum instruction throughout all stages and grades of education, with a focus on the ability to read

multiple genres of texts with comprehension, and producing meaningful and coherent writing. It was developed as a method that enables teachers to "pitch" a single lesson to a varied group of learners' different abilities and levels of skills. This, it was believed, would reduce the need for different classroom activities to address the requirements of learners with different skills levels, and enable a more inclusive classroom practice (Millin, 2016).

Reading to Learn is a pedagogy based on the genre approach (Rose & Martin, 2012), which is designed to educate students how to write effective contextualized texts. It aims first to enable students to read academic texts and to write them. (RTL South Africa, 2015). The term "genre" encompasses not just literary text forms, but also the predictable and recurring patterns of everyday, scholarly, and literary texts within a given society (Luu, 2011). There are six additional major genres based on their basic societal functions, namely: (1) narratives: telling a story, usually to entertain; (2) recounting: describing what occurred; (3) information reports: present factual information; (4) instruction: direct listeners or readers; (5) justification: provide an explanation for why or how something occurs ; (6) expository texts: these works convey or argue a point of view (Luu, 2011).

According to Rose (2015), R2L allows teachers to engage all students in the same learning activities. As a result, students can achieve success in reading and writing at the grade level and beyond. R2L researchers and creators, such as Rose, say that the programme bridges the gap between learners from different backgrounds and with a variety of learning skills (Rose, 2015). He agrees with Spaul (2016), that differences in student learning patterns could be caused by socioeconomic levels, as well as by parental involvement in their children's education. Rose (2015) maintains that instead of remediating the problem of inequality, teaching the curriculum at the assessed ability level of the individual, keeps the less successful learners far behind others, because the activities of the former are planned to be at a lower level than that of the latter. R2L methodology uses a cycle that provides more intensive support to advance the most successful learners, while accelerating learning for the slow learners (RTL South Africa, 2015).

The RTL cycle helps children to master academic success techniques. Strategies that are used to differ according to the genre. For example, in the stage of joint construction, the strategies used

for narrative differ from those for factual texts. Reading to Learn SA (2015) depicts the six-stage cycle as shown in Figure 1 and described below.

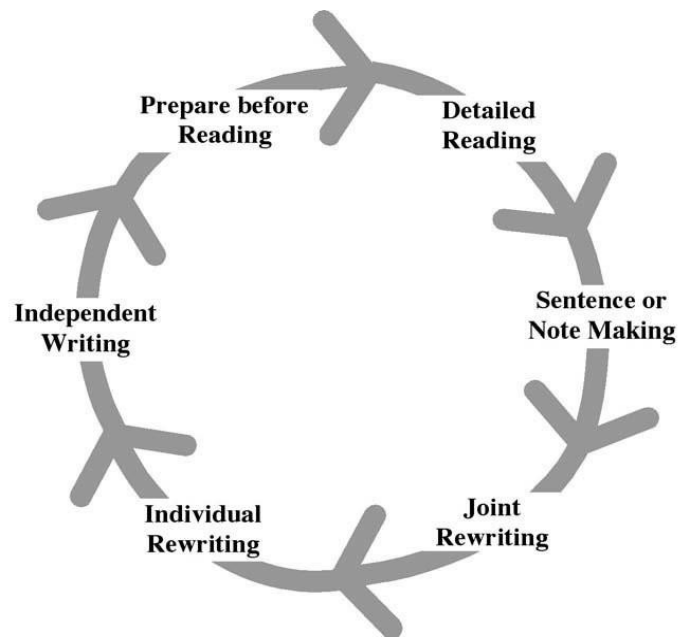


Figure 1. The Reading to Learn cycle (Rose, 2015)

The cycle begins with the stage of *preparing before reading*. Here, the teacher links the text to learners' prior knowledge or personal experience, through questions and a brief discussion. Then the teacher summarises the text's sequence and meaning, and then reads it to the class. The significance of reading to the class is to demonstrate how to pronounce words correctly, and to read with fluency and flow. After that, in the foundation phase, the teacher reads together with the learners.

The second stage is *detailed reading*. Reading to Learn South Africa (2015) describes this stage as the "powerhouse" of R2L because it makes the R2L methodology distinctive. They explain that, besides reading with comprehension, this stage enables learners to understand how the text unfolds and to be able to write a similar text by themselves. In detailed reading, the teacher unlocks the text by giving a summary of each sentence and then reads it to the learners. After that, the teacher

lets the learners identify keywords by asking cue questions, and giving them the position cues in the sentence. After giving answers, the learners' responses are affirmed and the teacher elaborates on the meaning and language, then instructs them to underline or highlight those keywords. During this stage, learners are given strategies to construct meaning by sifting important information in the text, and in this way develop the skills for reading other texts. In factual texts, this is where content is introduced, and sentence structure and vocabulary are developed (Millin, 2016).

After detailed reading, intensive strategies follow, through which a lot of interaction takes place. This third stage involves *sentence construction, spelling, and sentence composition*. In sentence making, the content and language patterns are taught. Learners take control at this stage, as they identify and cut out words from the paragraph taken from the detailed reading passage. The same form of discussion is used as in detailed reading, however, not much support is needed. Spelling is practiced together after the learners have learned to recognize words in and out of the sentence. The words are practiced in spelling patterns. The teacher uses the look-cover-write-check approach (whereby she shows the learners a spelling word, hides it, lets them write it down, and finally, learners check if they got it right). After checking the word for themselves, learners can write the word at least three times, so that it is embedded in memory. Knowledge of spelling helps learners to read and write quickly with accuracy and fluency (Acevedo, 2020). Once learners can spell most of the words in the paragraph, the teacher turns over some of the words or leaves gaps in the paragraph, and gets learners to come up to the board in turn and fill in the missing words for the whole class. This is done until even the weaker learners remember the paragraph. By this time learner can write the paragraph from memory, with the teacher scaffolding the weaker ones.

Then the cycle continues to the fourth stage of *joint rewriting of the text*. For example, in a narrative text, learners brainstorm new ideas, characters, and situations. The teacher scaffolds them in writing a similar story using the same structure. In a factual text, they jointly engage in note-making. This gives learners a chance to go over the keywords identified in the detailed reading. They take turns writing them on the side of the board, constructing meaningful sentences, using those keywords or their synonyms, and underlining or highlighting them in the detailed reading. This activity of replacing words with synonyms introduces learners to paraphrasing texts without plagiarism (Millin, 2016).

The fifth stage is *individual construction*. In a factual text, the teacher removes the joint construction from the board, but leaves the keywords up. The learners rewrite the text on their own using the skills learned in joint construction. They write it to show their understanding of the topic, using the vocabulary on the side of the board. In narratives, they read through the original story, and the new one from joint rewriting, and then discuss the key elements. After that, they write their own stories using the characters and situations that were brainstormed, but never used in joint construction. At this point, some learners are able to write independently, but the teacher is there to scaffold them using organisation, language features, and grammatical structure (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017).

The final stage of R2L is *independent writing*. At this stage, learners write their stories on different topics, using all the skills and vocabulary developed from the above stages. In the factual text, it is crucial that they are given topics on the same genre as practiced in detailed reading (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). The ultimate goal of R2L is to scaffold learners until they become independent writers of any genre so stage 6 is ongoing process learner write in their own time at home and at school. My focus was to support them until they reach this stage 6 since it an ongoing process. A teacher cannot asses them once and say they are now independent writers.

### **2.5.1 Reading to Learn training for teachers**

An extensive professional educator development programme was developed in Australia over a number of years, in order to address the needs of a particular learner population that, due to significant delays in their literacy development, typically found it hard to gain access to learning content through traditional methods. It was developed by David Rose in Australia 20 years ago to address the needs of marginalized students, who had difficulties in accessing learning, due to low levels of literacy development in that country (RTL South Africa, 2015) .

In R2L, teachers are trained with a view that learning is a social interaction between all learners and the teacher, and this supports the ideas of Vygotsky (1978), who believed in collaborative learning among peers interacting with a teacher as a guide. R2L provides a five- to eight-day

professional learning programme that is staged over a series of intensive workshops, with classroom practice and study between these (RTL South Africa, 2015). It is further explained as a programme sequence that focuses on knowledge about language and pedagogy, careful planning of lessons, and regular implementation of this sequence in the classroom. Teachers also learn criteria for assessing learners' growth. The training programme includes the cycle of six steps or stages of classroom interaction, and how these work in classroom practice. During the week of the R2L training, teachers are first given a chance to reflect through discussions on the successes and challenges they encounter in their classrooms. Then they are provided with the research findings of learners' achievements in South African schools. Teachers are then introduced to the R2L teaching and learning cycle of six steps, through which classroom interaction takes place (the training in the teaching of mathematics is conducted separately, so that teachers can realize that although it differs from other subjects, mathematics also uses language).

Training facilitators explain the R2L cycle in different phases, while playing videos showing examples of classroom interaction. They then do lesson demonstrations of teaching through the cycle. After that, teachers bring their own textbooks to the training, so that they learn and practice making lesson plans, which they then use on the last day of training to teach each other in groups. They take away some booklets with the information learned at the training, and videos of facilitators teaching in their classrooms.

Facilitators mentor and support teachers in their classrooms after the training, until they are confident enough to utilize the strategy. Some R2L tactics are difficult for educators to grasp, but with continued teacher support and persistence in practice, positive results can be achieved (Harrison, 2015 cited in Rose, 2015). A training of trainers is held for teachers who have shown a good comprehension of the programme and are eager to learn more. They earn trainers' credentials after completing this course, allowing them to train other teachers (RTL South Africa, 2015).

Teachers learn how to teach learners to identify different genres as they learn about these. The R2L programme is described by RTL South Africa (2015) as "continuous professional teacher development". This refers to the growing number of different developmental activities that teachers engage in, in order to better their professional practice (Day & Sachs, 2004).

Implementing R2L has several challenges. One of the challenges is the contradiction between departmental expectations in terms of curriculum delivery and pacing and the time required for R2L. It may take two lessons to finish all the stages while the official curriculum requires me to use one lesson for a topic and then go on to another. Many teachers seem to agree that when using R2L you need more time because you use it to scaffold the learners which slows you down because no learner is supposed to be left behind. Mawela (2018, p. 33) notes that the preparation is also time-consuming with one teacher in his study saying “I spent the greater part of my weekend preparing for the two weeks”.

## **2.6 Studies done on RTL in South Africa**

Over the past two decades, researchers in South Africa have conducted a variety of empirical studies on R2L. In this section, I describe the studies done in primary as well as high schools in South Africa.

Mgqwashu and Makhathini (2017) conducted an interventionist study in South Africa's KZN province, to determine the role of the Reading to Learn pedagogy in transforming primary school teachers' perceptions of the importance of explicit reading instructions for educational success. The research was carried out at a rural primary school, specifically in Grades 4 and 6. The findings showed that R2L has the capacity to change instructors' perspectives on the explicit teaching of reading within formal education, and erase classroom practices that favour the elite and marginalize most students. The skills that children develop may spell the difference between their academic success and failure. This is why children with a reading background are considered to be successful at school.

Millin (2016) conducted research in the Western Cape province. She used the Reading to Learn methodology in her study, with the objective of determining its effectiveness. Grade 11 students from two Winelands District schools participated in the study. The findings of this study indicated that learners' academic literacy abilities improved, notably in the schematic frameworks of narrative and academic essay genres. According to this study, as a result of the implementation of

R2L pedagogy, the reading abilities of the students were found to have improved, as evidenced by the students' improved writing abilities. Millin's (2016) findings demonstrate how R2L can promote equitable access to learning, for both learners with limited educational backgrounds, or those who were previously marginalized, and those who grew up in homes where they had the opportunity to learn to read prior to entering formal schooling. It is obvious, I believe, from the preceding study that, when teachers guide their students through reading materials stage by stage, these students build their reading abilities, which they will need in the future for any type of schooling (Rose, 2015). Moreover, it is these reading abilities that will enable students to write appropriately.

Mataka, Mukurunge, and Bhila (2020) investigated the role of the Reading to Learn pedagogy, as an approach to improving reading comprehension in a high school class, through scaffolding. The purpose of the study was to determine how Reading to Learn (R2L) could positively influence the literacy development of a Grade 8 class, in a rural South African school. The pre-test revealed that the students' reading skills were inadequate, but after the intervention, a significant improvement was observed. Learner interviews, journal reflections, and learner work served as sources of data.

## **2.7 Theories underpinning R2L**

The R2L pedagogy is underpinned by the three theories which are Vygotsky (1978) socio-cultural theory, Halliday (1985) systematic functional linguistics, and Bernstein (1996) pedagogy discourse. Systemic functional linguistics is the study of the link between language and its social functions. According to systemic functional linguists, language usage is functional, with the goal of creating meanings, which are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged (Halliday, 1985). Additionally, language use is a semiotic process, or a way of creating meaning through choice. Vygotsky and Halliday address what Bernstein (1996) characterized as classroom inequities in his pedagogic discourse on learning, through scaffolding and utilizing language as a functional instrument. Learning is understood as a social process, where all learners may succeed when scaffolding is provided and language is used in real-world circumstances.

Through constant scaffolding and actual language usage, this idea leads to the optimal technique in teaching individuals to learn in such a way that they will all be successful.

When it comes to teaching and learning, Bernstein describes "the discourse which makes specialized skills and their relationship to one another as instructional discourse, and the moral discourse which creates order, relations and identity [as] regulative discourse" which are the two main aspects of pedagogic discourse (Bernstein, 1996, p. 46). Rather than seeing these things as distinct entities, Bernstein argued that the instructional was embedded in the regulative discourse. However, schools and classrooms often draw the line between the transfer of values and skills (Rose, 2005).

Vygotsky's theory of social learning, or socio-cultural theory, is organized around three basic themes: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the zone of proximal development.

### **2.7.1 Social interaction**

Sociocultural theory emphasizes the critical role of social interaction with the educator and parent, in a child's cognitive development, as well as in his or her language and communication skills acquisition. When an adult, such as a teacher, caregiver, or parent, reinforces and stimulates a child's development, she or he learns. Peeters (2019) proposed that learning occurs as a result of interactions with people, objects, and events in the community. Additionally, Dongyu, Fanyu, and Wanyi (2013) asserted that interactions are critical for the acquisition of language and communication skills by children, and act as a channel which facilitates learning. Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interaction is the means by which learning is acquired and shared. Because this learning is shared by groups of people, it facilitates its acquisition and sharing (Vygotsky, 1978).

Scaffolding refers to the interactions between an adult and a child, or between an educator and a learner, which enables the child (or learner) to achieve more than their own efforts alone (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that scaffolding is largely dependent on interpersonal support and the process of adults, or more capable people,

mediating a child's effort to acquire new knowledge. Scaffolding highlights the importance of social interaction in intellectual growth, emphasizing that learning begins at the social or inter-individual level (Gillespie & Greenberg, 2017).

The scaffolding interaction cycle inherent in the R2L pedagogy, defines scaffolding as one of its elements (Denhere, Chinyoka, & Mambu, 2013). Rose & Martin (2012) explain that the scaffolding that happens during the interaction between a teacher and their students in the genre-based literacy intervention, enhances the latter's learning and improves their achievements. A 'Scaffolding Interaction Cycle' is used to accomplish the Reading to Learn methodology's objective. The R2L cycle requires that, as students engage with written texts, teachers must ensure that the former receive the clues necessary to comprehend sequences of meaning at the levels of text, sentence, paragraph, language, and sound/letter patterns. It is crucial that the pattern be repeated throughout the sequence of activities that comprise the scaffolding technique (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017).

Scaffolding has been defined as offering a great deal of assistance to learners during the earliest stages of teaching a new concept, and then withdrawing that support after the students have mastered the subject's concept. A number of methods and levels of support can be provided by the educator. Scaffolding is one of the elements frequently mentioned in debates about educational quality and instructional methodologies. This assistance involves fostering a positive classroom environment such as by having print-rich classrooms, the use of teaching-learning tools, concept repetition of group activities (Amerian & Mehri, 2014; Burns & de Silva, 2005).

R2L provides support to learners, so that they can reach their appropriate literacy level, i.e., reading and writing at their expected level. The scaffolding technique aims to assist learners until they reach their full potential. With the assistance of their teachers and classmates, scaffolding enables students to read and write complicated texts. It accomplishes this by first assisting pupils in comprehending the roles of the language components that comprise a written text, in order for them to read the material fluently and accurately without being overwhelmed. Once a shared understanding of the text's meaning is reached, this is used to scaffold learners'

development of independent control over written work, through spelling and writing tasks (Rose, Gray, & Cowey, 1999).

### **2.7.2 The more knowledgeable other**

Vygotsky refers to parents, teachers, and lecturers as "the more knowledgeable other" or MKO. The MKO is anybody who possesses a higher degree of knowledge or aptitude than the learner, particularly with reference to a particular topic, task, or procedure (Galloway, 2001). In most cases, the more knowledgeable other is an educator or similar responsible adult, but this is not always the case. The MKO can also include a friend, peer, relative, or even a computer. Critical to the MKO's success is that they must be more knowledgeable about the subject being taught than the learner (Galloway, 2001). The MKO has an effect on the zone of proximal development, by assisting children in reaching their full potential and increasing their level of competence.

### **2.7.3 Zone of proximal development (ZPD)**

The term zone of proximal development (ZPD) is used to describe the gap between a child's actual developmental level and his or her expected level, which can be determined through guided problem-solving with an adult (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD is the difference between an individual's actual academic literacy ability and his or her ability and potential, which can occur when he or she collaborates with someone more competent. According to Vygotsky (1978), meaningful learning occurs when two or more persons with varying degrees of abilities and knowledge interact. Thus, the zone of proximal development ZPD occurs when a learner interacts with a more informed expert about a certain subject (Vygotsky, 1978). This interaction entails assisting the student in progressing to and through the subsequent level of knowledge or comprehension (Vygotsky, 1978). Language is an effective tool for assisting learners as they enter and progress through their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

In this section, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of my research. Scaffolding is a teaching strategy in which educators provide learners with a specific type of support as they develop a new concept or skill. In light of this, I will explain Vygotsky's (1978) major contributions to a sociocultural theory of education, and how they impacted this research.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning, which views learning as a social process and the emergence of human intelligence within a community or culture, informs this study. Vygotsky's theoretical framework rests on the premise that social contact is essential for the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Participation in settings such as family life, peer group interaction, school, and the workplace, facilitates learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). According to Vygotsky (1978), cognition is always socially mediated, especially through the psychological tool of language. The foundation of sociocultural theory, is the idea that both language and culture play a role in the creation of new knowledge (Van Boxtel, Van der Linden, & Kanselaar, 2000). Learners first rely on others to introduce them to appropriate ways of doing and being, but as their knowledge and confidence grow, they develop independence. R2L intervention assists students, scaffolding them from a state of being underequipped, to being better equipped with the academic literacy abilities that are essential to succeed in a variety of tasks. Its emphasis is on meaning-based reading (Millin, 2016).

Vygotsky's theory of social learning as a social process incorporates three fundamental concepts: social interaction, mediated learning, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Firstly, interaction is about the manner through which learners acquire information, by engaging with teachers, other learners, and events, and this is done in a collaborative manner (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning in this interactive process happens through the help of others. Then, mediation is an engine that propels learners' development, and occurs when the teacher and parents assist learners in acquiring knowledge (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). It should be noted that the teacher's role in the mediation process, is to capacitate learners with the skills to help them master the tasks at hand. The ZPD is the difference between a student's current academic literacy

ability and his or her potential ability, which is facilitated by the presence of a more capable individual, such as a mentor, peer, or educator.

Students often complete writing assignments to illustrate what they have learned. These tasks necessitate the use of complex language patterns to aid students in their success. However, most students from working class, oral-cultured families would likely fail, if they were left to develop a sophisticated understanding of language on their own. As such, students can achieve higher levels of understanding of academic texts through the R2L methodology, by interacting socially in supportive environments, rather than by developing these levels of understanding solely on their own (Vygotsky 1978).

The more knowledgeable other (MKO) in this study will be me as the teacher, as my role is to help learners in knowledge acquisition and application. This social interaction between the learner and the MKO is the foundation for learning, and can be used to understand how the latter takes place (Vygotsky, 1978).

R2L was developed to use social interaction in supportive situations, in order to assist students in developing higher levels of “academic literacy” skills, i.e., more advanced than students could learn on their own (Rose, 2005). R2L is underpinned by this principle of the teacher supporting the learners until they are able to perform the task on their own.

According to the Vygotskian model, a teacher can help students work at a high level of competence, regardless of their level of independence. The Reading to Learn pedagogy accepts this potential but goes one step further, by assisting all students in a class to operate at the same high level at the same time (Rose, 2005). The teacher in this approach is not simply a source of information, nor a facilitator of a learning environment, but a guide who provides what Bruner refers to as "scaffolding" (Rose, 2005). Scaffolding is used in the Reading to Learn methodology to help all students complete the same high-level assignments (Rose, 2005).

The focus of this research was to examine Grade 4 learners’ reading comprehension. Vygotsky’s concepts of interaction and mediation enabled me to reflect on my own teaching, to understand

how I supported learners in acquiring new knowledge. The concept of interaction was helpful to assess the level of a cooperation taking place in class. The concepts of a more knowledgeable other and zone of proximal development, were used to verify how the teacher uses her knowledge to scaffold learners, until they can independently perform tasks on their own. Vygotsky's concepts were used to understand and analyze data about the classroom interactions between the teacher and learners, particularly in the teaching of Life Skills. Vygotsky regards teachers as playing a crucial role in enabling learners to learn what they could not learn without the support of the former (Vygotsky, 1978).

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a literature review on the definitions of literacy, and explained the literacy problem in South Africa. This was followed by a detailed description of the R2L pedagogy, including the Reading to Learn training and scaffolding. Then the theories underpinning R2L were discussed along with a literature review of R2L studies done in SA. Lastly, Vygotsky's theory of social learning was discussed.

# **Chapter Three:**

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology that were employed in this action research study, exploring the Reading to Learn pedagogy as a strategy that can support Grade 4 Life Skills learners' reading comprehension. The chapter focuses on the following aspects: critical paradigm, qualitative research approach, and action research. The chapter also provides an explanation of the purposive sampling strategy used to yield information about the phenomenon under study, the data collection methods, and data analysis process. Additionally, the measures taken in this study to address issues of trustworthiness and ethics, are presented. Lastly, the chapter concludes with the limitations of the study.

### **3.2 Paradigm**

Researchers use the phrase "research paradigm" in order to refer to a common understanding of how things work. A paradigm is a perspective that helps us make sense of the world (Thuzini, 2011). According to Thuzini (2011), there are numerous lenses through which one might view and comprehend the world, which are: the interpretivist, positivist, pragmatic, and critical paradigms. A paradigm is regarded as a lens through which to observe reality, and a frame of reference through which to organize observations and reasoning. This means that each study paradigm is defined by the manner in which data are gathered and processed. Hence, a paradigm may reflect a specific set of assumptions about the nature of reality, and how we might get a greater understanding and comprehension of it in order to effect change Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2018). A paradigm is also a way of looking at the world and creating frames of reference, for putting together findings and making sense of them (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2017) as well as Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2018) maintain that it is critical for each study to establish its research paradigm, as our perspective on the world shapes our research approach.

Taking into account that I conducted this action research to improve my teaching practice as part of a transformation process(Koshy et al., 2011), this study adopted a critical paradigm. This paradigm is in contrast to the positivist view, which maintains that the world exists “out there”, and that interactions between objects are easily quantifiable. Researchers that use a positivist approach frequently conduct a study using quantitative approaches, such as experiments and surveys, that produce quantifiable outcomes. The critical research paradigm is a way of thinking that advocates for changes in social, educational, political, and economic systems, as well as in all other systems (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Bertram and Christiansen (2014) argue that the critical paradigm is shaped by social, political, cultural, and economic forces, and that our knowledge of the world is subjective and influenced by our social status. This study, therefore, aims at bringing about change through the R2L intervention. As such, the use of a critical paradigm, which allowed all participants, including myself as the researcher, to gain a better understanding of their own selves, others, as well as the world around them, was both relevant and essential for this action research study.

### **3.3. Qualitative Research Approach**

In order to answer research questions, researchers may employ any of the three most prevalent research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. “Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell” (2017, p. 4), is a method for evaluating and understanding the meaning assigned by individuals or groups to social or human situations. It is concerned with the use of words to reveal multiple truths. On the other hand, the quantitative research approach generates data mainly by means of numbers rather than words, this data is then analysed using statistical procedures. Mixed methods research is an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods into a single study in order to provide a broader and more complete vision of a problem (Cohen et al, 2018). Mixed methodologies are employed when both comparative analysis and the development of aspects of the study need to be undertaken comprehensively and in depth. The use of mixed methods overcomes the limitations of quantitative methodologies, allowing the researcher to get a rich information that could be obtained using each

method alone (Cohen et al, 2018). Quantitative data (from testing) was included in this study, but it relied more on qualitative data.

A qualitative approach was used in this study because it "gives participants a voice and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presented behaviours and actions" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 219). When I chose this approach, I reasoned that the in-depth data generated by examining my previous and current teaching and learning experiences, would help me understand how to improve my teaching practice. As a result, engaging in a qualitative study enabled me to conduct an in-depth examination of my own social situation, and as such providing concise and descriptive information about my personal and professional learning and teaching. The study's qualitative nature enabled me to delve into my personal history and to gain insight into my students' perceptions.

The purpose of the action research was to gain a better understanding of how I could improve my reading comprehension instruction, in my Grade 4 Life Skills class. According to Krauss (2005) , the primary objective of qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of human behaviour and experiences, from the perspectives of individuals. Qualitative research techniques permitted the collection of textual data. Additionally, it enabled me to elicit answers to the three research questions and identify ways to improve the results (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

### **3.4. Action Research**

My study used the action research method falling under the classroom-based action research approach.(Koshy et al., 2011) describes action research as a constructive inquiry, in which the researcher builds knowledge about specific topics, by planning, acting, assessing, refining, and learning from the experience. In this study, I engaged in systematic inquiry to act on and improve my teaching practices. Action research is supported by several researchers (Koshy et al., 2011) as a tool used for improving one's practice. "The action research [method] entails action, assessment, and critical reflection, followed by the implementation of changes in practice based on the data acquired" (Koshy et al., 2011, p. 2). Action research entails a spiral of self-reflective cycles that include designing a change, implementing it, and monitoring its process and outcomes.

Additionally, Koshy et al. (2011) highlight that action research entails reflecting on the above procedures and their outcomes, and then re-planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The action research approach helps teachers in identifying needs, documenting inquiry stages, analysing evidence, and generating informed choices that can result in desired outcomes (Cohen et al., 2018). Since action research is concerned with conveying a story and sharing information, mine involved me as the Grade 4 teacher using RTL pedagogy in my teaching practice.

I chose to conduct action research because it enabled me to focus on my teaching practice (Cohen et al., 2018). Action research can be used to analyse the problematic areas therein and attempt to resolve them. In the context of this study, I was concerned about the Grade 4 learners who were struggling with reading comprehension in the subject of Life Skills. I serve as both the “researcher” in this study (i.e., the individual who investigates the effects of an intervention for exploratory purposes) and the teacher, so the researcher and teacher are the same person. As a teacher, I facilitated learning in a classroom context, and was accountable for developing lesson materials and disseminating them in a structured lesson style. In this role, it was crucial to figure out whether the learning process had improved. As a researcher, among other things, I collected data, analysed it, and formulated conclusions and recommendations. While McNiff & Whitehead (2012) characterize action research as a process consisting of three stages, in this study I drew from Kemmis & Mc Taggart (1988), who identified four stages. These are the following:

- 1) Strategic planning;
- 2) Taking action and implementing the plan;
- 3) Observation, evaluation, and self-evaluation; and
- 4) Reflection.

These are elaborated on below.

### **3.4.1 Stages of Action Research**

#### **Action Research Stage 1: Planning**

Koshy (2011) notes that planning involves the development of a learning strategy for resolving some chosen challenges. Planning should encompass all actions that take place during the

teaching-learning process, from start to finish. During the planning stage I prepared or developed:

- (1) Lesson plans;
- (2) Materials and instructions (R2L) that the students had to use;
- (3) Comprehension tests for pre-tests and post-tests - the test consisted of 20 open-ended multiple-choice questions (I created my own comprehension test); and
- (4) The criteria for success.

The criteria for success in this research were developed using the Department of Basic Education assessment criteria (Department of Education, 2008). I devised an intervention method based on the Reading to Learn pedagogical approach.

### **Action Research Stage 2: Taking action**

An action research project requires practitioners to plan and implement an intervention (Koshy et al., 2011), and for this project, I designed and implemented the R2L intervention in one of my Grade 4 classes. I implemented the Reading to Learn pedagogy in my classroom. As with action research, the R2L approach is comprised of stages and cycles that can be revisited as needed. This approach aims to scaffold students' use and writing of genres in the contexts required for economic and social power inclusion.

### **Action Research Stage 3: Observation**

According to Koshy et al. (2011), during observation, an educator must explain the procedure for data collection, which includes the instrument used to gather data and how it is used. I conducted the observation as both teacher and observer. All necessary data and information were gathered on video. As a researcher and observer, I was only able to witness clearly what occurred in class through video recordings. I also used an observation sheet to record students' activity in the classroom, as well as their participation and engagement. I then evaluated the success of the R2L intervention using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

### **Action Research Stage 4: Reflection**

When an individual reflects on their acts or experiences, it is frequently to gain a greater knowledge of those experiences or the implications of those actions, in order to enhance future actions and experiences. Glenn, Sullivan, Roche, and McDonagh (2023) maintain that the process of reflection

routinely develops fresh information for classroom teachers, and their behaviour, which is influenced by this reflection, is extremely important in a classroom action research project, since it is designed to determine if the next cycle step is required or not (Glenn et al., 2023). This type of reflection generates information about these acts and experiences, which enables us to govern them more effectively in the future (Fadhilawati, 2016). In classroom action research, we have no way of knowing the number of cycles that will be used to resolve our particular classroom challenge. Fadhilawati (2016) states that it may just take one cycle if the learners have met the criteria for success at the end of the action research. After doing data analysis, the researcher compares the results of the analysis with the criteria of success. If the outcome of the first cycle action meets the success criteria, the action is considered successful. If the experiment does not meet the success requirements, the researcher should move on to the next step (Fadhilawati, 2016).

### **3.4.2 Strengths and weaknesses of an action research study**

“The main strength of action research is that the researchers don't have to be detached from the situations that they study when using it” (Koshy et al., 2011, p. 25). Some of its advantages include: the ability given to researchers to be participants rather than observers; the ease with which continuous evaluation and modifications can be made as the project progresses; and the potential for theory to emerge from the research. Another strength of action research is that it is a natural method of simultaneously acting, learning, and conducting research. In action research, the researcher is an expert in the topic of study and an active participant in the research procedure (Nel & Wilkinson, 2006). A critical component of action research is that it motivates educators to examine their own practices in order to enhance teaching and learning.

However, action research has weaknesses. It is very difficult to avoid or overcome the bias inherent in doing research on your own practice (Feldman & Minstrell, 2000) . A significant worry is that "action research is inherently biased since it includes the researcher analysing his or her own behaviour" (Carr & Kemmis, 2003, p. 192). “It should be highlighted, however, that interpretations are inherently subjective, since they are motivated by values and interests rather than by actual behaviour” (Evans, 1995, p. 92). The difficulty in measuring changes in teachers’ or students’

learning is another drawback of employing action research. As such, it is quite difficult to avoid or overcome the bias inherent in doing research

There are several other drawbacks of action research, in terms of resources, power relations, decision-making, data production methods, presentation of findings, and ethical concerns. Additionally, the practice and completion of activities may be costly, including travel expenses to the locations of scheduled meetings to conduct the different phases of action research (De Vos, Delpont, Fouche, & Strydom, 2011). These predicaments were easily resolved in this study because all phases of the action research were conducted on one Grade 4 class at the school where I teach, involving myself (a teacher) only. No funds were required for travel to the sites.

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

Methods of data collection fall into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative approaches (Cohen et al., 2018). This action research generated data through a range of methods, such as testing of learners' comprehension, classroom observation using video recordings, and reflective journals. I was able to create a more accurate data by combining several techniques (Gillham, 2005).

#### **3.5.1 Testing (quasi-experimental approach)**

When a researcher wishes to determine the existence of a relationship between two events, or to test hypotheses regarding such a relationship, experimental methods are employed. For instance, an education researcher may aim to determine whether a certain intervention improves student performance (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Tests can be used to determine achievement (what learner is capable of), diagnosis (where a student's strengths and limitations are), aptitude (what a learner excels at), as well as proficiency (how well a student does something) (Cohen et al., 2018). Tests are used to determine: whether a learner has met a specific fixed; how quickly learners can perform; and which abilities a learner has fully grasped (Hambleton, 2012). "For the purpose of this study, the norm-referenced tests were used because these compare learners' progress to that

of their peers” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 567). I was able to compare marks obtained prior to and following RTL intervention, to determine if there were any changes in the learners' scores.

In my study, I conducted a comprehension pre-test for my Grade 4 Life Skills class. Since I teach two classes of Grade 4 learners, I used a quasi-experimental design where I decided to make one class the control group (who would not be taught using the R2L pedagogy), and the other the experimental group (who would be taught using this pedagogy). Thus, the two groups were similar. A quasi-experimental design is used when researchers seek to examine the impact of an intervention, using groups or individuals that are not identical, and where they can control variables only to a certain extent; however, it is still likely that the effect in question can be detected and measured. The Latin word "quasi" means "almost," so this phrase means "almost a genuine experimental design" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

I designed the pre-test so that it would test learners' reading comprehension (Appendix 5). Twenty-five learners from class A and twenty-five from class B, whose parents had signed the consent form, wrote the pre-test. The reading comprehension task required learners to read individually, and then answer the question based on the text they had read. The pre-test was used to assess the ability of Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension skills before the R2L intervention. For the post-test, learners wrote the same test they had written for the pre-test (May and October). I compared the test scores of the pre-test and post-test.

### **3.5.2 Reflective journal**

A reflective journal is a personal activity in which educators keep track of their ideas, thoughts, reflections, and feelings in a range of learning situations (Bassot, 2020). Reflections on one's own or in a group setting are allowed. However, by their very nature, the majority of reflections are undertaken alone, needing some degree of self-discipline. Educators must schedule time for reflecting on situations and activities occurring in the classroom and around the school. By writing frequently, writers quickly develop new perspectives on certain experiences and begin to formulate ideas about possible actions (Makina, 2019).

Journals are educational tools that assist educators to make sense of their instructions, identify attitudes, managerial skills, and ethical considerations of the study. In education, for example, reflection enables teachers to gain knowledge from everyday experiences, by posing questions about the how, why, and what of teaching and learning.

Teachers keep reflective journals in which they record their own observations, reactions, and ideas to pedagogical situations (Bassot, 2020). By maintaining and using these kinds of journals, I was able to make my experiences, thoughts, feelings, and opinions visible, as well as them being an acknowledged component of the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes (Lapp et al., 2008). After every R2L lesson, I would write a reflection on what had taken place in class, and how learners' engagement and participation had been.

### **3.5.3 Classroom observation using video recordings**

Cohen et al. (2018) describe observation as the systematic activity of observing and recording behavioural patterns. Classroom observations were done in the one Grade 4 class using R2L pedagogy and the other one not using it, so that I would be able to compare the two classes. Recording these two classes enabled me to observe my own teaching practice, in both using the R2L intervention and not using it. Three lessons were recorded and observed: one in May, one in July, and one in September 2021. These enabled me to verify if there would be any development in classroom interaction. Classroom observation helped in answering the question: “In what ways does R2L pedagogy support learner participation and engagement in class?”

One of the advantages of classroom observation, is that it enables the researcher to gather firsthand information about events as they occur naturally (O'Leary, 2020). On the other hand, Cohen et al. (2018) state that people display a distinct behavior when they are being watched. Video recordings can provide a more “raw” observational record of “natural” human behaviour in real time, while also preserving the event's sequence. Video recordings can overcome the observer's partial view of a single event in that a video can be shared with several other researchers (Cohen et al., 2018)

In this study, I was both a teacher and a researcher, meaning that I was a participant and observer, thus I asked another educator to do a video recording while delivering a lesson. I recorded one lesson in term one before introducing R2L, another one in the second term after introducing R2L, and a final one in the third term during an R2L intervention. I watched the videos to reflect on my practice, and to see if the Reading to Learn pedagogy had changed learners' participation and engagement. By watching the videos, I was able to mull over the activities that took place in the classroom and reflect on my own practice. To mitigate potential bias, I saved the lesson observation video recordings on my USB stick and gave these to my supervisor(s) to validate the data.

### **3.6 Sampling and Recruiting Strategy**

Since it is not possible to include everyone in a research study, sampling is the process of selecting a smaller, more manageable group of people to participate in it. The study participants were selected purposively. Purposive sampling refers to the researcher's deliberate selection of individuals, groups, or objects to include in a sample (Cohen et al., 2018). Purposive sampling is when a researcher deliberately selects a part of or a complete group in a population, and the events or the settings that they will include in the research. It is often small-scale research that does not intend to generalize, therefore the targeted group does not represent the broad population, but only itself (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). In purposive sampling, "researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample based on their judgment of their typicality" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 103).

The participants were 50 learners, averaging around 9 to 10 years of age, from two Grade 4 Life Skills classes. My focus was on the class taught using R2L pedagogy (class A) and the other not using R2L pedagogy (class B). The learners were split equally between the two classes, with 25 learners in each.

This action research study focused on how using the Reading to Learn methodology might improve the reading comprehension development of the Grade 4 learners in my Life Skills class. Learners were recruited by first explaining the nature of my study. I first requested permission from parents

and asked them to sign the parents' consent forms (see appendix 4), where I explained to them the nature of this study, that the learners were not forced to participate in it, and that there would be no direct benefits in monetary terms. The learners also had to sign the assent forms (see appendix 3). I spoke to them face to face while I wrote letters (consent form) to their parents. For ease of access, I decided to ask the children from my own Grade 4 class to participate in the study. By doing so, I would not be disturbing another teacher's lessons. I explained to the children in my class that I wanted to improve learners' reading comprehension in Life Skills (PSW), using the Reading to Learn pedagogy. I described to the entire class, in detail, the different activities in which they would be involved. In addition, I explained to the children that consent would have to be obtained from their parents or guardians, and that all the activities would be video-recorded. The children were asked to volunteer their participation and were allowed to withdraw at any time.

### **3.7 Cycles of the Action Research (CAR)**

Classroom action research (CAR) requires teachers to make every effort to develop their enquiry in as few cycles as feasible (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The study took place between May and October 2021, and was conducted over the course of ten lessons and two classroom action research cycles, as shown in Figure 2 below.

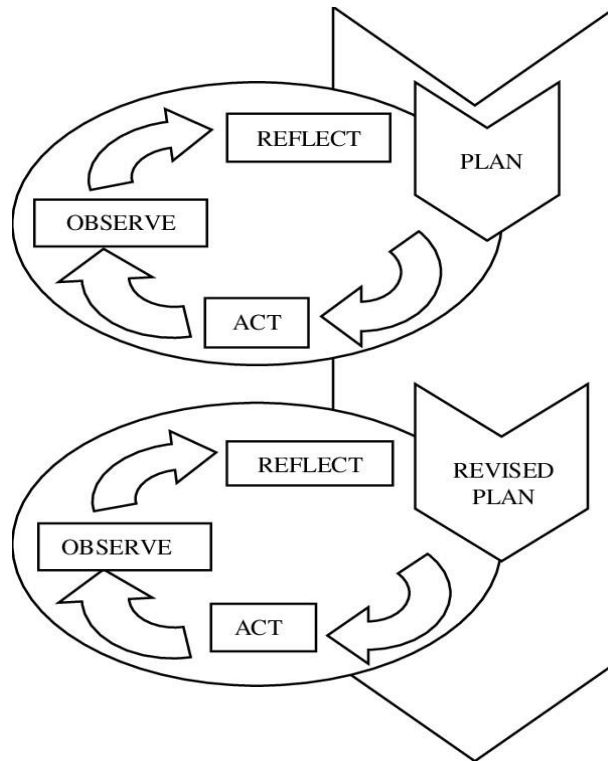


Figure 2. *Spiral model of action research cycles (Kemmis & Taggart, 1988)*

The two classroom action research (CAR) cycles were made up of 12 lessons, during which I implemented five stages of R2L, including: (1) preparing for reading, (2) detailed reading, (3) sentence construction, (4) spelling, (5) sentence making, and (6) joint construction. Based on Kemmis and McTaggart's Spiral Model, each CAR cycle in this study consisted of four major phases or stages, namely: (1) planning, (2) implementation, (3) observation, and (4) reflection. The purpose of this action research, which was conducted within two six-day cycles of the school's timetable, was to improve my teaching practices by implementing an R2L intervention. It was hoped that the action research would enable my students to better comprehend the reading comprehension (PSW) sections of the chosen subject (Life Skills). Ultimately, I sought to enhance my practices in order to facilitate the transformation and enhancement of my students' academic performance. The four stages of the two CAR cycles will be described in the next section.

### 3.7.1 Classroom Action Research Cycle 1

#### 1. *Planning*

During this planning stage, I designed the lesson planning for lessons in cycle 1, which consisted of 12 lessons from May to August 2021, or 10 weeks in total. The first AR cycle occurred from May to August 2021. I organised the teaching materials for lessons in cycle 1, I made sentence strips and spelling word cards, and charts. I developed the RTL observation tool (refer to Figure 3), to observe the state of the learning process. I prepared assessment tasks in the form of Life Skills comprehension pre- and post-tests (refer to Appendix 2); the tests were in the form of open-ended questions, as well as a multiple-choice section which consisted of 20 questions, with a total of 20 marks. Learners who achieved marks of 50%, were considered successful in reading comprehension, while those who got below 40% marks were considered unsuccessful.

#### 2. *Action (act)*

During the second stage of AR, the five stages of the R2L scaffolding interaction cycle were implemented. According to the time allocation and learners' pace, it was not possible to finish an RTL cycle in one day. Therefore, three steps were done in one lesson, and then the other two the next day. A description each stage with the time taken to go through it, shown in brackets, is outlined in the section that follows.

##### *R2L Stage 1: Prepare before reading (10 minutes)*

This initial phase of RTL involves the educator preparing a text for reading, and reading it aloud to students (Rose, 2005). Students learn to comprehend what is read, by listening to how it is read and constructing meaning, with the teacher's assistance. The educator then summarises the text. The teacher also elaborates on difficult terms or concepts, and provides synonyms as needed, to aid students in understanding these.

*R2L Stage 2: Detailed reading (20 minutes)* Here, the teacher prepares learners for each sentence, by paraphrasing its sequence and meaning, and then reading the sentence with the learners. This enables the learners to identify and mark key words with meaning and position cues, and helps to confirm their responses.

*R2L Stage 3: Sentence making (30 minutes)*

The teacher writes sentence on cardboard strips, ask learners to cut strips sentence by sentence, and then asks the learners to jumble up the sentences and put them back in the original order. The teacher uses words from sentence making to cut off letter and syllable patterns, and involves the learners in practising pronunciation and spelling, by looking, covering, writing, checking, and writing again – first for the pattern and then the whole word.

*R2L Stage 4: Joint reconstruction (30 minutes)*

Groups of students rewrite the text using the terms for which they have taken notes. A collaborative rewriting of the material that was read aloud and underlined in the detailed reading, takes place in the fourth step, during which students provide synonyms for the significant words.

*R2L Stage 5: Individual reconstruction (30 minutes)*

This stage is the same as the joint rewriting stage, except that the learner does it on his or her own. Factual texts are rewritten using notes, and learners construct their individual version of a comparable text.

*R2L Stage 6: Independent Writing*

This stage is a daily written work that the learner does after the intervention which may not form part of the lesson.

### **3. Observe**

While I was unable to observe my students closely during the lesson, due to my involvement as participant and observer, I used video recordings to observe their reactions to the R2L methods that I was using. For instance, I observed students underlining key words and collaborating to reassemble sentences. I also took note of which students were actively engaged in the activities. Additionally, I observed the reconstructed texts that students wrote. At the conclusion of each lesson, I used a classroom observation sheet to document students' participation and growth (see

Appendix 6): this gave me immediate insight into whether or not the students participated in the class and/or learned something from it.

#### ***4. Reflection (reflect)***

Reflection is crucial to action research because it enables the researcher to “rewind”, and examine what occurred and how it could be improved (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p.72-73). The R2L approach, like the action research model, also consists of stages and cycles that can be revisited if necessary. After the first AR cycle, I realised that learners’ reading comprehension in Life Skills had not improved. Some learners were struggling with constructing their own sentences in the sentence construction stage, thus the second AR cycle was needed, so that I could make some changes. I also realised that during the first two lessons, the detailed reading was not done properly, therefore I revisited my lesson plan and made changes accordingly.

### **3.7.2 Action Research Cycle 2**

#### ***Revise the Plan***

The second cycle was based on the reflections from the first cycle. That is the reason that I undertook the second cycle from September till November 2021, consisting of 10 weeks, by revising the first cycle. From the reflection on the first cycle, it was noted that the second one was needed. For the second cycle, the same five stages of R2L were repeated as well as the action research cycle. As the educator (researcher) and observer, I provided feedback on the analysis and discussion. The second cycle concluded in October 2021 with the completion of a post-test.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Action researchers need to identify patterns within their data to understand the nature of their interventions (J McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This process of data analysis leads to data interpretation, grounded in the values that underpin the study. To understand the nature of the intervention in the current study, and how it supported the participants’ perspectives about teaching and learning, a thematic approach was used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that traditionally, qualitative research employed thematic analysis. It entails

poring over information and data in order to detect any recurring trends. A theme can be defined as a group of related categories that share a common meaning. This approach displays considerable exploratory dominance. It is typically guided and developed by researchers who have no prior understanding of the topic matter; thus, they are unaffected by any prejudices or preconceived notions.

In my journal, I wrote how I used phases of reflection and action throughout the research process. At each stage of the project, I reflected on my experiences and altered my activities based on what I learned (Cohen et al., 2018; McNiff, 2009). I used descriptive analysis after video reflections: I did this by starting to collect data from the video recording of the lesson, and from that, I was able to track learners' engagement and participation. I also used thematic analysis from the reflective journal notes: this consisted of the data collected from my classroom observation, and which I wrote in my reflective journal. Throughout the study process, I kept a reflective notebook in which I detailed my thoughts and actions at the various stages (Cohen et al., 2018; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009).

The data was collected from learners' test scripts: they wrote a Life skills comprehension pre-test in June 2021, and a post-test in September 2021. I also used descriptive data analysis to create bar graphs, to explain whether there were any changes in learners' marks. The procedure consisted of comparing the test results and data from each cycle, using a table of student scores as the basis for the comparison between the control group (non-R2L Group) and the experimental one (R2L Group).

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

Conducting an action research project raises complicated ethical problems which are absent from more typical forms of research. A researcher's ethical obligations are defined by the norms or principles they must follow both before and after their research is completed, according to Cohen et al. (2018). Amongst these norms and principles, are nonmaleficence and beneficence. Nonmaleficence implies that no damage is caused to any of the participants, including wrongdoing, and should be prevented via careful assessment of the research design. Beneficence refers to the fact that there should be a direct benefit to the participants, such as increased understanding of the

subject at hand and/or improved abilities (Cohen et al., 2018). The challenge with this study is that the control group (non-R2L Group) did not benefit from the R2L intervention, as only the experimental group (R2L Group) benefited. It was unethical for me to introduce the R2L to one group while leaving the control group out that created a gap between the two groups. My plan was that from October after they write post-test, I will introduce R2L to the control group, as well as when they are in grade 5 the following year. From the beginning I planned to use the intervention for the control group if it was clear that R2L was worthwhile. Learners' reading comprehension skills improved in the experimental group, while my teaching practice also improved.

I did not cause any physical or emotional harm to my students or the school where the research was done. There were no situations that might embarrass, shame, or instil fear in the learners, or where they would be given misleading or deceiving information. Concerning the video recordings, I obtained informed consent to record the lessons from the management of the school (see appendix 2) and from parents (see appendix 4) and learners were clearly informed of their rights.

As a rich source of data, action research can be beneficial to schools, academics, and the general public (Nolen & Putten, 2007). In this type of research, educators/learners have the choice to not participate if they so wish, and there is no punishment for doing so (Cohen et al., 2018).

I requested permission from the KZN Department of Basic Education (DBE) (refer to Appendices 1), and from the school principal where the study was conducted (refer to Appendices 2). After getting permission from KZN DBE, I was then able to apply for ethical clearance from UKZN's ethical clearance committee. Since I was working with learners, who were minors, I needed to request for permission from parents/guardians; as such, I had to get them to willingly sign the consent forms on behalf of their children to allow them to be part of the study (see Appendix 4). I discussed participation rights with the learners, specifically their freedom to withdraw from the research if necessary. Learners were also given assent forms (when a minor signs an assent form, it shows that they are willing to participate in the study and have read and understand the terms of participation) (see Appendix 3)

I ensured that all ethical considerations were adhered to during the research. Respect for human dignity and autonomy were honoured. Everyone who took part knowingly and willingly offered their informed consent (Cohen et al., 2018). I assured my participants of the confidentiality of their identity throughout the study, and that I would do that by using pseudonyms, not their real names. Information collected from the participants was not disclosed to anyone except my supervisors, and it remained confidential at all times. I also explained to the learners the purpose of my study. I kept the camera at the back of the classroom and making sure the faces of learners were not visible.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

Given that an action research study is a self-reflective activity, trustworthiness is a top priority (Cohen et al., 2018). As such, the researcher must be able to back up any findings with facts, provide a clear trail of evidence, and demonstrate reflexivity. This study employed the action research approach. Trustworthiness was essential in order to improve the quality and authenticity of the findings. The term "trustworthiness" represents measures used by some authors to evaluate the validity of qualitative research (Bryman, 2016), which are credibility and confirmability (Cohen et al., 2018). For the purpose of this study, I engaged these trustworthiness criteria.

### **3.11 Credibility**

Shenton (2004) defines credibility as the degree to which the findings of a study correspond to reality. This is one of the most major concerns that needs to be resolved in order to guarantee a study's trustworthiness. According to Shenton (2004), one key to ensuring credibility is to employ well-established qualitative research methods, such as video recorded observations and reflective journals; these were all used in this research. Using these methods aided to resolve the study's credibility issue. Additionally, this aided in reaching data saturation. Cohen et al. (2018) describe data saturation as the utilization of two or more separate data gathering methods, in order to investigate one aspect of human behaviour. As previously stated, this study employed three distinct methodologies (testing, classroom observation using video recordings, reflective, and journal). According to Shenton (2004), combining different methods compensates for their individual

limitations and maximizes their respective benefits. Certainly, the use of diverse methods in this thesis contributed to the study's credibility.

### **3.12 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the measures used to ensure that the findings of a study are as close to the participants' experiences and views as feasible\_(Cohen et al., 2018). This indicates that the researcher's opinions and prejudices should have no bearing on the study's findings. A researcher's bias can be minimised by using triangulation, according to Shenton (2004). It has been noted that this study employed a variety of approaches (testing, classroom observation using video recordings, reflective journals) to assure both credibility and confirmability, which contributed to the study's reliability. As such, the data collected from each source could be confirmed by the other sources(triangulation).

### **3.13 Limitations of the study**

The limitation of using action research was my level of honesty and sincerity, since I was both a participant and the researcher in it. Another limitation was that this research focused exclusively on one school, and did not include all the schools in uMgungundlovu District. Some participants were not available on certain days, due to learners coming on alternate days during the Covid-19 pandemic, so I had to ask my fellow colleagues to give me extra lessons to cover the required work. The sample size was small. The factors that could have affected the end results on post-test could be as a result of the personal maturity of the learners, or familiarisation because post-test and pre-test was the same learners may be familiar with the test questions.

### **3.14 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology and design of the study. This study was situated within the critical paradigm because it advocates for bringing change in a classroom environment; as such, it intended to explore how the Reading to Learn pedagogy could support Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension in Life Skills, as well as to improve my own practice. The features of action research and its strengths and weaknesses were outlined, and purposive sampling for this

study was explained. There was also discussion of the data generation methods used, which in this research were the reflective journal, testing, and classroom observation using video recording. A basic description of data analysis was presented. Finally, ethical considerations and issues of validity and trustworthiness were explained

# **Chapter Four:**

## **Exploring the Research Problem**

### **4. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the action research design and methodology used in this study, while this one focuses on the research problem. The first step in any action research study is to gain a clear understanding of the problem. I did this by generating data from a comprehension test, and from video recordings to observe my own teaching. In this chapter, I present and discuss the data generated through the pre-test of Grade 4 class at my primary school. A description of how the Life Skills comprehension test was developed to measure learners' reading competence. Then the result of the pre-test was analysed. Lastly each lesson observation is then presented and analysed according to the three concepts of Vygotsky's theory, which are: social interaction, mediated learning, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The transcribed video-recorded lesson was also coded according to the three categories of Vygotsky's concept.

### **4.1 Measuring the Learners' Reading Competences**

In May 2021, fifty Grade 4 learners wrote a pre-test to establish the level of their comprehension skills. In order to measure their reading comprehension performance, I developed a Life Skills comprehension test as a pre-test (see Appendix 5). The requirements of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) state that tasks must be set using the following cognitive development levels: low order questions (knowledge and recall); middle order questions (comprehension and application); and higher order questions (analysis, evaluation and synthesis) (Department of Basic Education, 2011). There were three distinct kinds of questions included on the test for this study, which were: multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, and closed-ended questions. Regarding cognitive demand, some questions could be answered through recall.

In the multiple-choice section, questions 1, 2, and 3 asked lower order questions (where the answer could be easily extracted from the text), while questions 4, 5, 8, and 9 asked middle order questions (explain concept and use information in a new way). Lastly, questions 6, 7 and 10 asked higher order questions (create own ideas and justify your view). This test data was then used to provide baseline data which would assist in answering research question 1, namely: How does R2L support reading comprehension?

Given that the aim of this research question is to assess whether the learners' reading comprehension show any improvement using the R2L intervention, this section focuses on the analysis of the pre-test result, since this directly addressed how R2L supports reading comprehension.

#### 4.2. Results of the pre-test

Since I teach two classes of Grade 4 learners, I decided to make one class the control group (who would not be taught using the R2L pedagogy) and the other class the experimental group (who would be taught using the R2L pedagogy). Table 1 that follows, shows the reading comprehension test results of all the Grade 4 learners.

*Table 1. Average, median, minimum and maximum result for R2L Group and non-R2L class*

PRE-TEST	R2L CLASS (experimental) N=25	NON-R2L CLASS (control) N=25
TOTAL TEST MARKS	20	20
AVERAGE MARK	4.92 (25%)	6.28 (30%)
MEDIAN MARK	3	6
MINIMUM MARK	1	3
MAXIMUM MARK	10 (50%)	11 (55%)
NUMBER OF LEARNERS WHO PASSED (50% +)	1	3

The pre-test was conducted to compare the learners' comprehension ability, before the implementation of the Reading to Learn pedagogy. As shown in Table 1, the respondents' pre-test median score was 3 for the R2L class and 6 for the non-R2L one. The minimum mark for the non-R2L Group was 3 and for the R2L Group it was 1. Meanwhile, the average mark was 4.92 for the R2L class and 6.28 for the non-R2L one, while the maximum mark was 50% for the experimental groups and 55% for the control group. The results show that the non-R2L Group achieved a slightly higher average than the R2L Group.

This test data shows that the Grade 4 learners were achieving an average of between 25% to 30% for this English comprehension test in May 2021. These results will be compared to the post-test results in Chapter 5.

The next section provides a description and analysis of the classroom observation data of the non-R2L Group.

### **4.3 Classroom Observation of my Life Skills Lesson before Using R2L**

In this section, I present the classroom observation data from two Life Skills lessons that I taught before I implemented the Reading to Learn strategies. The purpose of this was to reflect on my teaching practice when I was not using the R2L methodology.

The data regarding lesson observations are presented in two columns. In the left-hand column, a description of the teaching and learning activities of the lesson is provided. Classroom activities are described as episodes, with the teaching and learning activities have been coded as Episode 1, Episode 2, and so forth. In the right-hand column, three concepts from Vygotsky's theory of learning are used to analyse the data. I used three essential learning-supporting components, which should be prioritized by teachers, in order to help students through the zone of proximal development:

- Being in the company of someone who knows more than the learner does (a more knowledgeable other).

- Social interactions with a competent tutor that permit the student to observe and improve their skills.
- Scaffolding or supportive activities offered by the teacher or a more capable peer, to assist the learner as he or she is guided through the ZPD (McLeod, 2012).

## 4.4 Lesson Observation of Class A (non-R2L Class): Lesson 1

### 4.4.1 Brief overview of the lesson

The purpose of the lesson was for learners to understand the concept “emotions”, which falls under the personal and social well-being topic of the CAPS curriculum (see Figure 3 below).

LIFE SKILLS GRADES 4-6			
SECTION 3			
TEACHING PLAN			
3.1 OVERVIEW OF TOPICS			
3.1.1 Personal and Social Well-being (PSW)			
Topics	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
1. Development of the self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal strengths</li> <li>• Respect for own and others' bodies</li> <li>• Emotions: understanding a range of emotions</li> <li>• Dealing with conflict</li> <li>• Personal experience of working in a group</li> <li>• Bullying: appropriate responses to bullying</li> <li>• Reading for enjoyment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-concept formation</li> <li>• Receiving and giving feedback</li> <li>• Coping with emotions</li> <li>• Relationships with peers, older people and strangers</li> <li>• Reading skills: reading with understanding and using a dictionary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-esteem: body image</li> <li>• Abilities, interests and potential</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Problem solving skills in conflict situations</li> <li>• Self management skills</li> <li>• Bullying: getting out of the bullying habit</li> <li>• Reading skills: reading with understanding and fluency</li> </ul>

Figure 3. CAPS Life Skills Intermediate Phase for Grade 4–6 (Department of Basic Education, 2011)

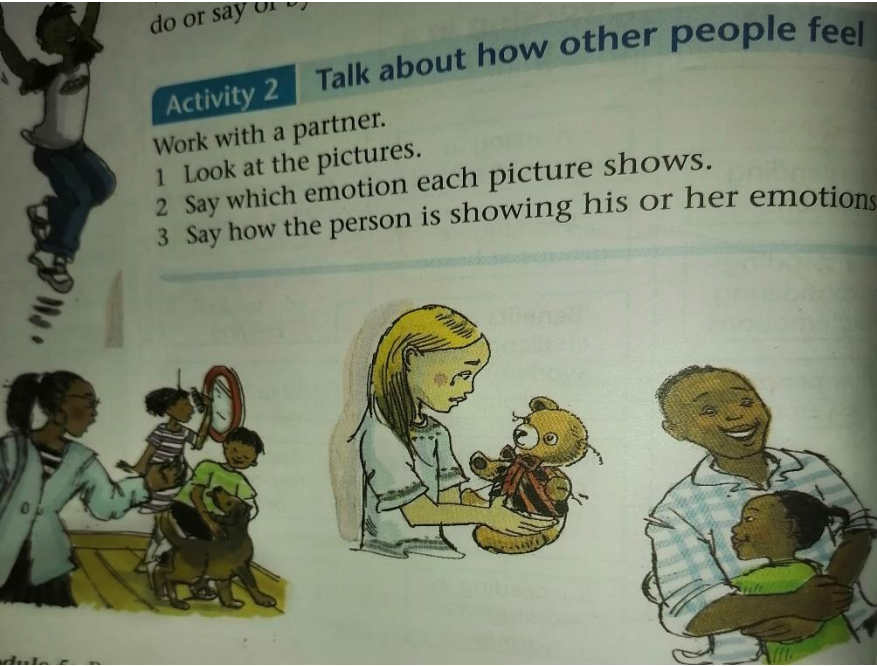
Learners are required to learn how to protect themselves from acts of bullying, give examples of these, and appropriate responses to bullying, i.e., where to find help (Department of Basic Education, 2011a).

The number of learners present in the class was 25. There were six learners seated together in groups. There was adequate space between the desks. Because of this, I was able to freely move from one group to another. The resources used were the chalkboard and chalk, which I used to write notes on the board, learners text books, and worksheets. The class was clean and tidy.

The lesson was divided into three episodes. **Episode 1** was a discussion among the learners on how they show how they are feeling. In **Episode 2**, I showed them pictures of people expressing different emotions, and the learners had to identify these emotions through discussions in pairs. In **Episode 3**, I gave the learners an activity where they had to write their own examples of emotions, not the ones in the textbook. Some learners repeated the emotions that had already been given, whereas they were supposed to write their own examples.

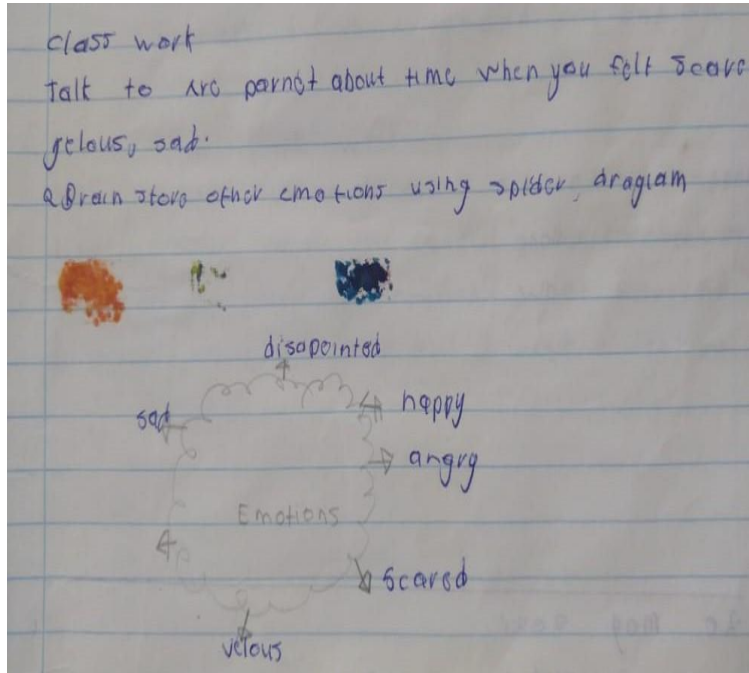
#### 4.4.2 Description of lesson 1 observation: Grade 4 (non-R2L class)

<p><b>Lesson Topic: Emotions</b>          08:00 to 9:00 (1 hour) - 03/05/2021          Subject: Life Skills          Purpose: To understand concept ‘emotion’</p>	<p><b>Analysis of lesson using Vygotsky’s concepts</b></p>
<p><b>Episode 1(activity )</b>          T: Good morning grade 4.          L: Good morning teacher.          T: How do you show how you feel?          L1: By laughing.          L2: Crying.          T: Do you think about how other people feel?          L1: Sometimes.          T: Every day, things happen that make us feel happy, sad, or angry - we call these feelings emotions. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt emotions?          L2: Yes, I felt angry when my mother bought my sister a bicycle but not me.          T: There are positive [make us happy] and negative [feel bad] emotions.          Angry falls under negative emotions, happy falls under positive emotions.</p>	<p><b>Analysis of Episode 1</b></p> <p>In this activity I did not scaffold sufficiently because I did not <b>prepare to introduce the concept of emotions. I asked learners for examples of their prior knowledge.</b></p> <p><b>Scaffolding</b>          I asked learners questions to link to their everyday knowledge.</p>

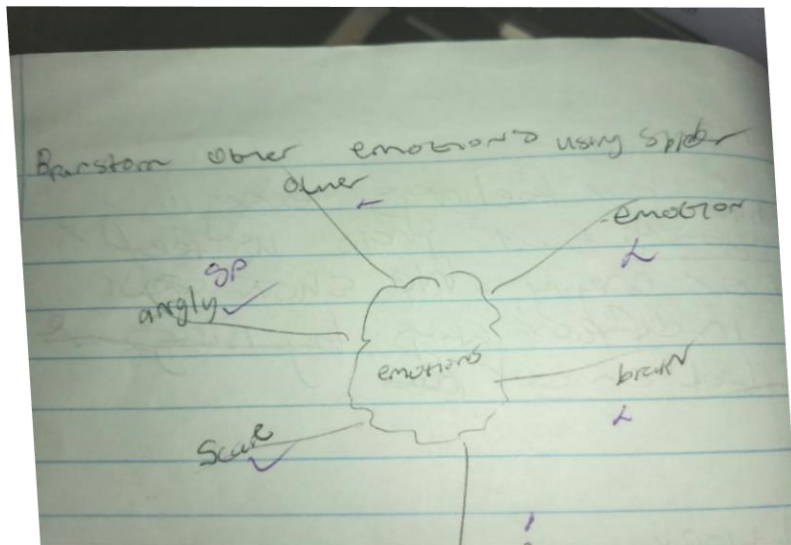
<p>Talk to your partner about a time when you felt, scared, jealous, happy, sad, or loving.</p>	
<p><b>Episode 2 activity</b>  [Learners talked to each other for 3 minutes]  T: I will show you a picture and you tell me what you think the picture is showing - what emotions [shows picture of a boy smiling].  L1: A happy boy.</p>	<p><b>Interaction</b> took place where learners were talking to each other about times where they felt those emotions.</p>
<p>T: What does picture number two portray? What emotion?  L2: Mother is angry.  T: What is picture number three showing? What emotion?  L1: Girl is sad, crying.  T: What is picture number four portraying? What emotion?  L3: Loving.</p>	<p>I used pictures to help learners answer questions (<b>scaffolding</b> using pictures as a resource).</p>
	
<p><b>Episode 3 activity</b>  T: Now that we understand “what are emotions”, there are feelings that you saw on the pictures - there are many different emotions. Brainstorm ideas,</p>	<p><b>Scaffolding</b></p>

draw a mind map, write the word 'emotion' in the middle, and write other ideas. [Work was done individually] [30 Minutes]

Class work produced by LEARNER 1



LEARNER 2



I drew a mind map on the board showing learners how to design their own mind map.

This activity took about 30 minutes because they had to write their own examples of emotions, not the ones in the textbook.

Learner 1 repeated the emotions that were already given in class, whereas the activity required that they had to brainstorm other ideas.

The task was thus not achieved. The learner either did not understand that he needed to write DIFFERENT emotions, or he did not have the vocabulary in English to do so.

Learner 2 repeated the words from the class discussion, by writing words that were in the second question of the class activity/work (e.g., brain, other emotions).

The task was thus not achieved. As with Learner 1, the learner either did not understand that they needed to write DIFFERENT emotions, or he did not have the vocabulary in English to do so.

**Reflective journal: Date 03 May 2022**

*Topic: Emotions*

*Duration: 1 hour*

*What I observed after the lesson was that I did not introduce the concept of emotion properly. I did not give learners background knowledge. I used scaffolding by showing different pictures to learners of different emotions. By giving them pictures, I assisted them to identify the emotions.*

*I assumed that learners would be able to identify ‘other’ emotions on their own. Most learners were not able to understand the task; about 6 learners could understand the term ‘other’ emotions and were able to write some other emotions. The rest struggled with the task. What I realized was that I, the **MKO**, had withdrawn the scaffolding too soon, thinking that learners were now capable of doing the task on their own. What I realised was that my teaching seemed to be teacher centred. I did most of the talking. I needed to make my teaching more learner centred, allowing for more interaction. During this lesson, I provided very little scaffolding.*

*Figure 4. Data: Reflection on Lesson 1*

## **4.5 Discussion of non-R2L Lesson 1**

The following discussion draws on the data of the transcribed lesson, and my own reflection on it. There was some evidence of scaffolding, for example, I drew a spider diagram for learners to explain the task. I used pictures to help learners answer questions (scaffolding using pictures as a resource). However, the scaffolding was not enough and it was withdrawn earlier than expected, which left learners having difficulties answering questions in the class activity.

This meant that only seven learners achieved the task, while eighteen did not show evidence of this. This showed me that most learners did not understand the task. This may be because they missed the words “other emotions” in the task instructions. That was the key question, in which they had to write their own emotions, and not the ones they had learned about in the textbook. Other learners may have lacked the English vocabulary to be able to describe other emotions. In my reflection after the lesson, I noted that I had not introduced the concept of “emotions” properly; after greeting the learners, I just jumped into asking them questions to check their prior knowledge.

I gave learners the task, assuming that they were going to be able to do it on their own, without the help of the teacher. In other words, I did not offer learners enough scaffolding to assist them to move through the ZPD. Moreover, only two learners had participated in answering questions during class discussions.

#### 4.6 Lesson Observation of Class A (non-R2L Class): Lesson 2

This lesson had the same class structure as was described in the previous lesson. The topic of this lesson was “bullying”. The annual teaching plan in the CAPS documents under the topic of “Development of Self”, requires teachers to educate learners about bullying and appropriate responses to it (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). The lesson was divided into three episodes. For **Episode 1**, I shared a story (experience with bullying) about a time when I was bullied at school, to get learners to understand the topic. In **Episode 2**, there was a class discussion between learners about bullying, where they interacted with each other. In **Episode 3**, I read a story to learners and explained difficult words to them; they then read the story out loud and had a class discussion, where they interacted with each other. Learners did the class work on their own, and there was no scaffolding for them, as they had to do the work on their own without any help.

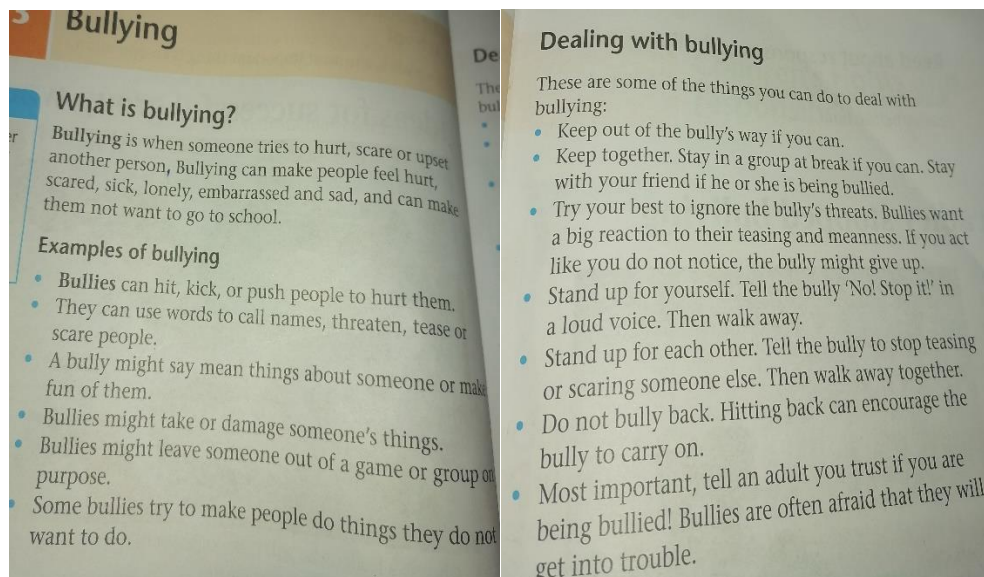


Figure 5. Copy of the text for the lesson taken from the Grade 4 Oxford Successful Life Skills learner book (Clitheroe et al., 2012)

**4.6.1 Description of lesson 2 observation: Grade 4 (non-R2L class)**

<p><b>Lesson Topic: Bullying</b>          09:00 to 10:00 (1 hour) - 11/05/2021          Purpose: To understand concept 'bullying'</p>	<p><b>Analysis of lesson using Vygotsky's concepts</b></p>
<p><b>Episode 1:</b></p> <p>T: Good morning grade 4.          L: Good morning teacher [chorus].          T: I have a little story to share with you. When I was doing grade 2, there was this girl who was always taking my lunch. I was scared to tell my teacher so I rather stayed hungry.          T: Have you ever been in situation where someone treated you badly? What happened?          L1: I was once beaten by my friend because he wanted my pen.          T: And then what did you do?          L: I told my mother.          T: Ok grade 4, our topic for today is bullying - bullying is when someone tries to hurt, scare or upset another person. [Have class discussion about bullying]</p>	<p><b>More knowledgeable other</b></p> <p>When I shared a story with learners, I was trying to get learners to understand the topic interaction with an interaction show (<b>MKO</b>) - in this case the teacher had knowledge or experience about being bullied.</p>
<p><b>Episode 2</b></p> <p>L: [Discuss as a class what bullying is]          T: I will first read the explanation and explain new words, then read together with you [learners], and then you read the story on page 62. Discuss the explanation of bullying.          [Learners will read the story and have a class discussion, with each learner having a copy of the text in front of them]          T: There are different ways you can avoid bullies. What are those ways? [The answer to this question was not in the story and learners had to answer from their general knowledge]          L2: Tell your big brother.          T: Who else can you tell?          L1: Teacher and your mother.</p>	<p>Having a class discussion falls under <b>interaction</b>, where I interacted with the whole class by having a class discussion; the learners are also interacting with each other.</p> <p>When reading the story to learners, I explained the difficult words and discussed the explanation (which was <b>scaffolding</b>).</p>

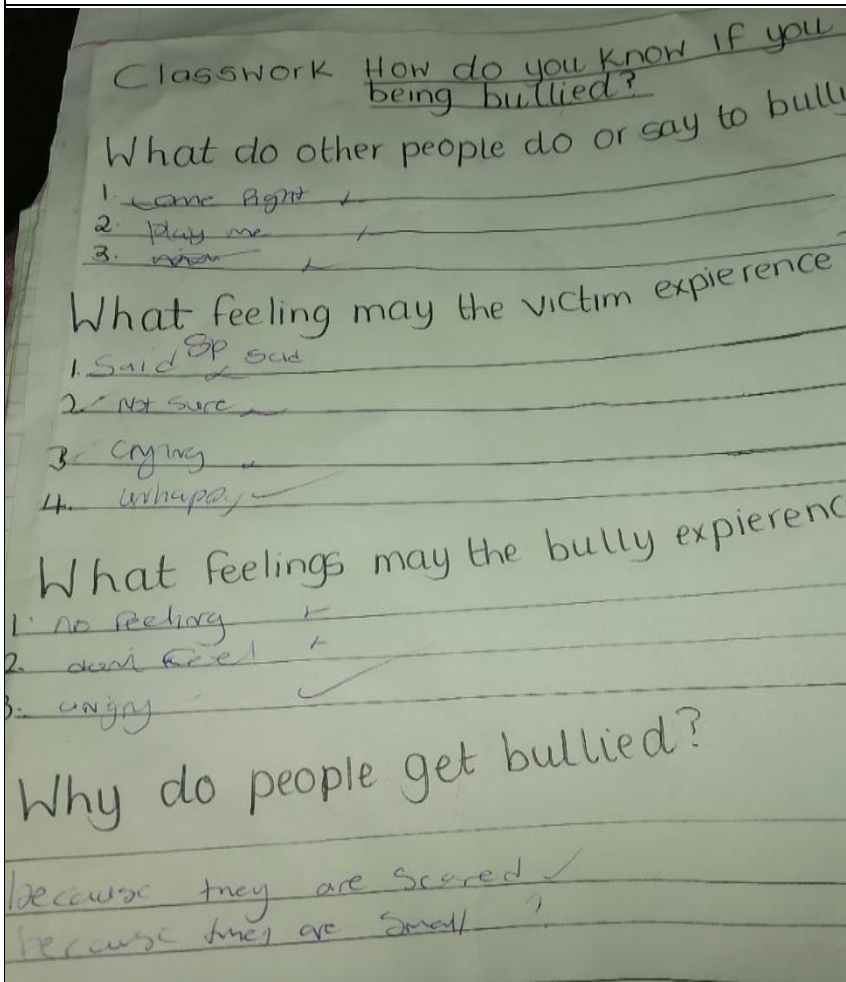
### Episode 3

[Learners work as a group to discuss ways of helping someone who is being bullied. Learners talked to each other for 2 minutes and brainstormed ways of stopping bullying.]

T: [Gives learners class exercise based on the text that was read, and also recalls the emotions that they learnt from the previous lesson - they had to complete this exercise in their exercise books.]

[Learners answer the questions individually]

During the activity, the learners talked to each other, brainstorming ways of stopping bullying (**interaction** takes place).



The class work required learners to work on their own to show their understanding of the concept bullying.

About five learners were able to answer questions. Ten learners struggled to complete the task, while another ten didn't even try the task, as it was too hard for them.

I did not scaffold this task. The questions were connected to the text that we had read, and for one of the questions they had to refer to the previous topic's lesson on 'emotions'.

**Reflective journal: Date 29 July 2022**

*Topic: Bullying*

*Duration: 1 hour*

*What I observed after the lesson, was that this time I had given learners background information about bullying, by sharing my story or experience of bullying. In that way, learners were able to get an idea of what we were talking about. They were able to link this with everyday knowledge since an example was given. As I was marking the task, I realized that the questions were a bit difficult for them. I assumed that learners would be able to write the task on their own, but in this case very few learners could. Learners were not able understand the task - about 8 learners could understand the term bullying and were able to answer the questions. What I realized was that I did not spend enough time on the text.*

*Figure 6. Reflection data on Lesson 2*

#### **4.7 Discussion of non-R2L Lesson 2**

Scaffolding took place at beginning of lesson when I read and explained the text and explained the difficult words but after that it was not visible during the rest of the episodes of the lesson. Thus, I believe that I did not provide enough scaffolding. What I also realized was that learners did not have sufficient English vocabulary, with some them answering in isiZulu during the class discussion (their mother tongue). Only eight learners could understand the task and were able to answer correctly, while seventeen of them were struggling with it. The pre-test results revealed that learners have a problem with reading comprehension, so it is possible that they did not understand the instructions of the task or have the English vocabulary to respond adequately.

## **4.8 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the data generated through a pre-test with two Grade 4 classes at one primary school. The findings from the pre-test revealed that most learners did not do well. The findings based on the data gathered using classroom observation, during video recordings of Grade 4 learners (non-R2L Group), were discussed and presented together with the data from my reflective journal. The findings show that there were times when I did not provide sufficient scaffolding, and that learners were not able to answer comprehension questions.

## **Chapter Five: R2L Action Research Cycles**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the identification of a problem, through data generated through pre-tests and reflection on my teaching practice. From the results of the pre-test, there was evidence that learners were struggling with Life Skills reading comprehension. My reflection on my teaching indicated that I was not providing sufficient scaffolding for the learners, and they were not able to successfully complete the written class activities. Therefore, I decided to introduce an intervention (R2L methodology) that would assist them with reading comprehension skills and improve their English vocabulary.

In chapter 4, the nature of the problem was established. In this chapter, I focus on the implementation of the planned action, which is to use the Reading to Learn methodology in my classroom. I generated data by video recording my teaching of Grade 4 learners and by reflecting on these lessons. I also administered a post-test to my two Grade 4 classes.

## 5.2 The Action Research Cycle

The stages of the AR cycle (Plan, Act, Observe, and Reflect) are represented graphically below.

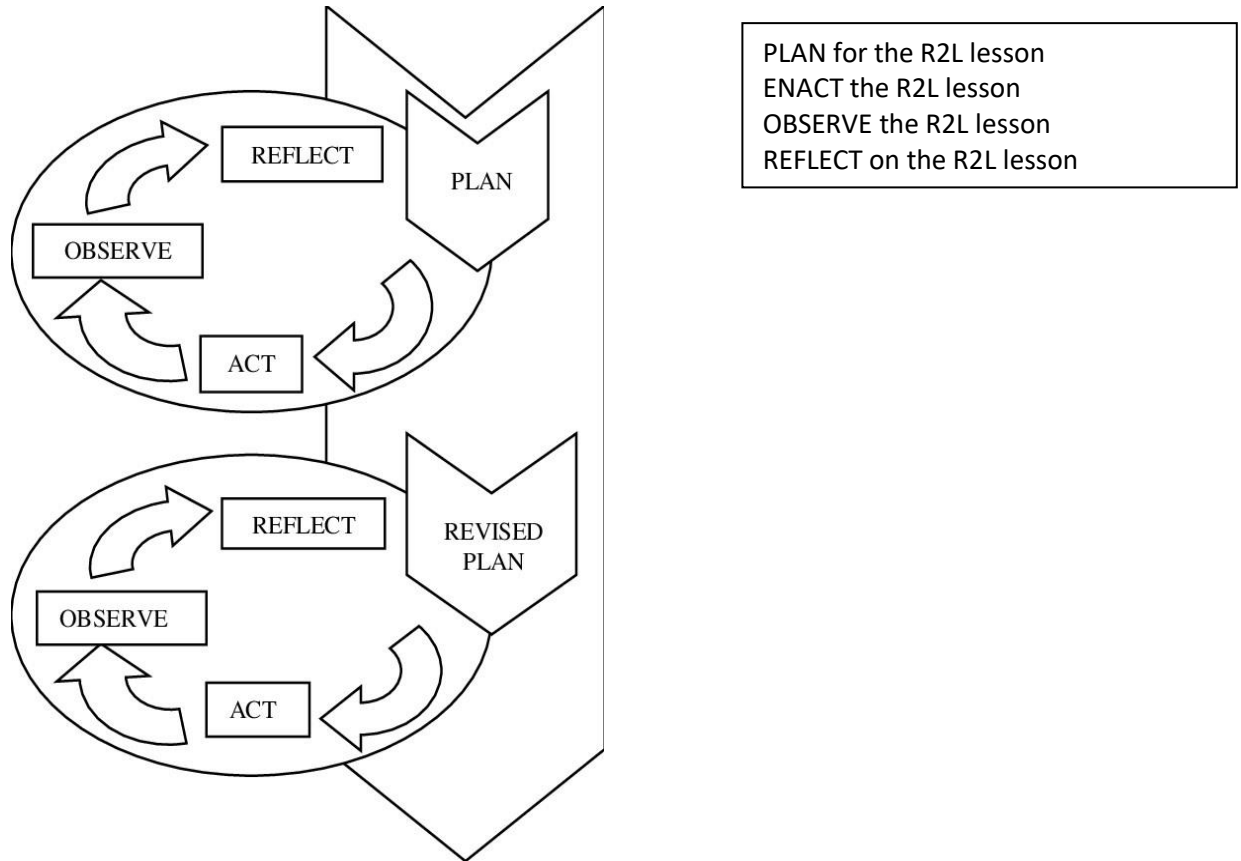


Figure 7. Spiral model of action research cycles (Kemmis & Taggart, 1997)

## 5.3. Action Research Cycle One (Two Lessons on Emotions)

### 5.3.1 Action Research Step 1: Planning

The purpose of this lesson was for learners to understand the concept of emotions. I selected a text from the Life Skills learner book, which I was going to use for the R2L lesson. I planned to only do three stages of the R2L cycle in one lesson because of the limitations of the school timetable (time allocation) for Life Skills (PSW lesson), while I would complete the other two stages in a separate lesson. The resources that I used were: sentence strips, spelling words, and chart for sentence making (filling in the missing words chart).

### 5.3.2 Action Research Step 2: Action

*Brief overview of the lesson, using the Reading to Learn methodology.*

Classroom environment: there were twenty-five students in the class, of which six were seated in a group. There was adequate room between each desk, which allowed me to move freely from one group to another. The class was therefore not overcrowded. The **resources** used were: a chalkboard and chalk, which I used to write notes on the board; learners' textbooks; and worksheet. The class was well lit and there were charts on the wall.

The lesson was divided into five episodes. In **Episode 1**, I provided learners with some background knowledge of the text (R2L Stage 1: Prepare for reading): this provided support to the weaker learners (in reading comprehension). For **Episode 2**, during detailed reading, I asked learners cue questions like, "At the beginning of the sentence we see a word...", "Next we see...", "Then .....; these enabled the learners to understand the text better. I encouraged learners by affirming them using such words excellent, wonderful, good, etc. In **Episode 3**, during sentence making, learners had interactions with the text and asked questions like "What...?", "Who...?", "Where...?", etc.; learners cut out sentence strips, jumbled the sentences, and rearranged them together as a group (**interaction**). I selected five words from the text, broke them into syllables, show them to learners, and then hid them; next, I let them write these down, and then showed them the correct word. Learners were given the text with missing words, for which they had to use the words on the board to complete the activity.

### 5.3.3 Action Research Step 3: Observation Lesson 1

The lesson observation data has been divided into two columns. In the left-hand column, a description of the teaching and learning activities is provided. Classroom activities are described as episodes. In the right-hand column, the lesson was analysed using the concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

<p><b>Description of lesson observation: Grade 4 (R2L CLASS)</b></p> <p>Topic: Emotions</p> <p>09:00 to 10:00 (1 hour) - 20/10/2021</p> <p>Purpose: To understand the concept ‘emotions’</p>	<p><b>Analysis of lesson using Vygotsky’s concepts</b></p>
<p><b>Episode 1:</b></p> <p>This is the text (from grade 4 Oxford Successful Life Skills textbook, page 32) that was used in the first lesson of the R2L intervention:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>Emotions are feelings. Every day, things happen that make us feel happy, sad or angry. We call these feelings emotions. We all feel different feelings and emotions. We don’t always know what a feeling is called or what we should do when we feel them. We show our emotions in different ways: by the things we do or say or by the looks on our faces. There are positive and negative emotions.</i></p> </div> <p><b>Prepare before reading (R2L Stage 1)</b></p> <p>T: Good morning learners.</p> <p>L: Good morning teacher [in a chorus].</p> <p>T: The first sentence tells us what feelings are, then the names of different emotions, that we don’t always know what we feeling, and lastly, it tells us that there are good and bad feelings. Our topic for today is about emotions. [Teacher reads the text aloud; each learner has a copy of the text.]</p>	<p>I provided learners background to the text, and read the text to them. This provided <b>scaffolding</b>, as I was supporting the weaker learners with poor reading skills</p>
<p><b>Episode 2:</b></p> <p><b>Detailed reading (R2L Stage 2)</b></p> <p>T: Grade 4, how can you tell that this is the beginning of sentence?</p> <p>L1: By a capital letter.</p> <p>T: Wonderful, how can you tell that this is the end of the sentence?</p> <p>L2: By full stop, question mark and exclamation mark.</p> <p>T: Excellent. Sentence number one begins with what word?</p> <p>L3: Emotions</p> <p>T: Good, before emotions put 1, and after, number all your sentences. [They numbered the rest of the sentences]</p>	<p>When I asked learners how they could tell that this was the beginning of a sentence, scaffolding helped them to understand better [<b>scaffolding</b>].</p>

T: At the beginning of the sentence, there is a word that tells us what we are talking about. What is that word?

L: Emotions [in a chorus]

T: Wonderful. Underline the word **emotions**. Emotions are what?

L4: Feelings.

T: Good. Please underline the word **feelings**. There is a word that tells us that it happens daily. What is that word?

L5: Every day.

T: Excellent, please underline the word **every day**. There is a word that tells us that it takes place. What is that word?

L6: Happens.

T: Excellent, underline the word **happens**. That does what?

L7: Make.

T: Wonderful, make **who**?

L8: Us.

T: Good. Underline the word **us**. Make us do what?

L9: Feel.

T: Excellent. Underline the word **feel**. There are three emotions they mentioned. Name them.

L10: Happy, sad, angry.

T: Underline the words **happy, sad, angry**. In sentence number two, what do we call these feelings?

L8: Emotions.

T: Excellent. Underline the word **emotions**. Sentence number three tells about everyone does what?

L9: We all feel. T: Brilliant. Underline words **we all feel**. What word tells us that we don't have the same emotions?

L12: Different feelings.

T: Excellent. Underline the words **different feelings**. And what?

L13: Emotions.

T: At the beginning of sentence number four, what does 'we' refer to?

L11: People.

When I affirmed a child, I gave her encouragement. As I was asking more questions, **scaffolding** took place. I had **knowledge (MKO)** about punctuation, so I asked learners questions that would lead them to identify the correct punctuation.

T8: Brilliant. Underline the word people. What is the word that means not usually?

L3: Don't always.

T: Good. Underline the word don't always. Don't always know what?

L2: Feeling is called.

T: Good, underline the word called. There is a conjunction or a joining word they used. What is that word?

L5: Or.

T. Wonderful. Underline the word or. Or what we should do ... there is an adverb that tells us about time, what is it?

L7: When.

T: Wonderful. Underline the word when. When we what?

L1: Feel them.

T: Excellent, underline the words feel them. We do what?

L2: Show.

T: Excellent. Underline the word show. We show emotions in what?

L3: Different ways.

T: Wonderful. Underline the words different ways. The last sentence states that there are good emotions. What is that word?

L7: Positive.

T: Good, underline the word positive. There is the word that means the bad emotions, what is that word?

L9: Negative.

T: Excellent, underline the word negative.

**Episode 3:**

**Sentence making (R2L stage 3)**

T: Now grade four, we are doing sentence making: I will give each group sentence strips that you will have to cut and jumble up, and then reassemble in the right order.

[The learners work in groups according to their seating]

*What are emotions?      time (when)?      what takes place?*

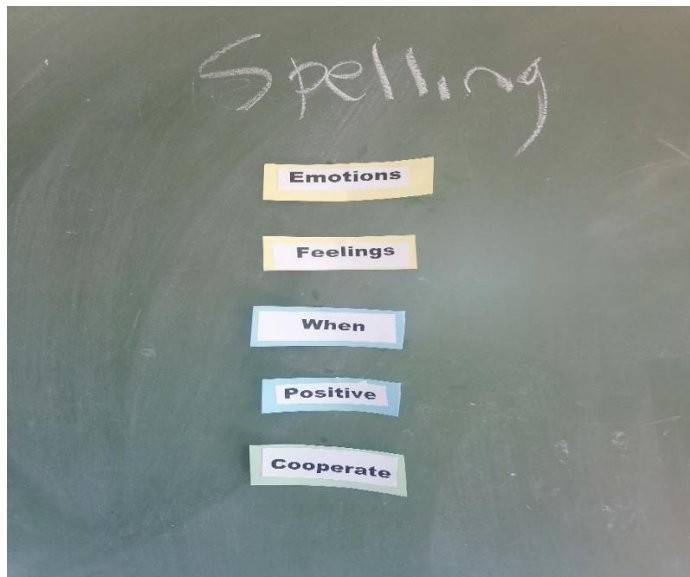
**Emotion are feelings/, every day/, things happen/**

During the sentence making, there was **interaction** with the text, as I was asking questions that learners answered and cut out sentences.

that does what?      What emotions? (conjunction) <b>that <u>make</u> us feel/ <u>happy</u>, <u>sad</u>, <u>or</u></b>	There was also interaction among learners in a group: they took turns
We don't do what?      know what?      conj.	to cut out the words and also
<b>angry.</b> / We <b><u>don't</u></b> always/ know what a <b><u>feeling</u></b> is or what? <b><u>called</u></b> / or what we <b><u>should do</u></b>	worked together to rearrange the text. There was also scaffolding: I was guiding learners by asking
When we feel what?      we show what?	them questions, giving them
<b>when we feel <u>them</u>.</b> / We show our <b><u>emotions</u></b> in In what way?      By the things we what? <b><u>different</u></b> ways:/ by the things we what?	sentence strips, which were <b>scaffolded</b> resources.
Conj.      or what?	
<b><u>do</u></b> / or <b><u>say</u></b> or by the looks on our faces/	

[Learners read the sentences out loud and I ask the cue question; they also answer questions, cut out the words, jumble them up, and then reassemble them in the right order. I walk around and check sentences.]

**Spelling**



T: I will break one word into syllables, let's read first word. E/mo/tions, read it again.

[Then I hide it and ask learners to write it down]

[Learners read it twice, and write down the word E/mo/tions]

When I was showing the word and breaking it into syllables, I was **scaffolding** learners. It was easy for learners to recall these words and write them down

I selected 5 words from the text and taught learners to spell and break the words into syllables

T: I will break one word into syllables, let's read the first word. Feel/ings, read it again,  
 [Then I hide it and ask learners to write it down]  
 [Learners read it twice, and write down the word Fee/lings]  
 T: Look at the second word: Wh/en.  
 [Let them read it twice, hide it, and ask learners to write it down]  
 [Learners read the word, and write it down]  
 T: Look at the word Po/si/tive, read it, then write it down.  
 [Learners read the word twice and write Po/si/tive]  
 T: Look at the last word Co/ope/rate  
 [Learners read the word twice and write the word Co/ope/rate]

**Sentence Writing**

[I put up the sentences with the key words blocked out, ask the learners to read the sentence, and fill in the missing words. Learners fill in the missing words individually - words were not given so learners had to write them down on their own. I walk around to see that learners are writing the missing words, then I check when we do the corrections and marking that they wrote the correct words.]

**We all \_\_\_\_\_ different feelings and  
 \_\_\_\_\_. We don't \_\_\_\_\_ know  
 what a feeling is \_\_\_\_\_ or what we  
 \_\_\_\_\_ do when we feel \_\_\_\_\_.**

[**scaffolding**]. Hide the word: when I was hiding the words, which I knew, I let the learners write them down 3 times, then I showed them the correct spelling

This is where I gave learners support so they could reproduce the sentences (**scaffolding**). The words were on the board, and they just had to pick the correct one. Highly scaffolded sentence from the text. Most learners were able to do this task.

### 5.3.4 Action Research Step 3: Observation of Lesson 2

<p><b>Description of lesson observation: Grade 4 (R2L CLASS)</b></p> <p>Lesson 2</p> <p>[This lesson continued with the same text on Emotions, and focused on the R2L stages of joint construction and individual construction.]</p>	<p><b>Analysis of lesson using Vygotsky's concepts</b></p>
<p><b>Joint construction (R2L stage 4)</b></p> <p>T: Good morning class</p> <p>L1: [chorus]: Good morning teacher</p> <p>T: Today we are going to do joint construction.</p> <p>[Sticks pieces of paper with key words on the board]</p> <p>T: Ok, what did we talk about yesterday?</p> <p>L2: Emotions</p> <p>T: Good. It was emotions. Come and take that word and stick it on the board. We are doing what we call a joint construction. [Writes 'joint construction' on the board.]</p> <p>[A boy sticks the word 'emotions' on the board.]</p> <p>T: Emotions are what? [About 3 children stick up their hands]</p> <p>Emotions are your feelings, write it on the board.</p> <p>L3: [Child comes and writes 'are your feelings']</p> <p>T: There is an adjective that means 'daily', what is it? [Many children have their hands up]</p> <p>L4: [Child comes and writes 'everyday']</p> <p>T: What happens every day?</p> <p>L5: Things happen [Learner sticks it up on the board]</p> <p>T: That does what? [Many children have their hands up]</p> <p>L6: Make us feel</p> <p>T: Make you feel? What emotions? Name them.</p> <p>Ok, there are three things that the person may feel. What are those?</p> <p>L7: Happy</p>	<p><b>Scaffolding</b></p> <p>Review the key words which were underlined in the previous lesson. Learners take turns to write the new sentence on the chalkboard, with the help of the teacher (<b>highly scaffolded</b>).</p>

T: What is the second one

[Learner comes to board]

L8: Sad and angry

T: [Teacher reads the text together with the learners]

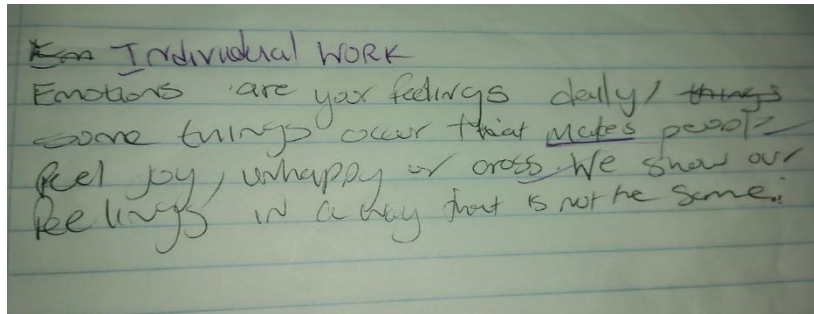
***Joint writing text***

Emotions are your feeling, everyday some things happen that make us feel happy, sad or angry. We show our emotions in different ways.

**Individual writing (R2L stage 5)**

T: Grade 4, you are going to do individual work where you rewrite the sentences in your own words. [Learners paraphrase]

[Learners work on their own and re-write the sentences. They wrote the individual work, while the joint construction was still on the board].



During individual writing, some learners were able to paraphrase some words, and wrote their work a little differently from the joint construction writing. Other learners had difficulties in writing the correct punctuation and spelling. About 17 learners were able to successfully complete the task, and 6 of them repeated what we wrote in the joint construction, while 2 did not attempt to write at all.

### 5.3.5 Action Research Step 4: Reflection

What I observed when I was introducing R2L pedagogy in class, was that learners at first were a little confused by the method. However, quite a few learners were answering my questions about the text. As the lesson progressed, more learners were enjoying the lesson and participated. After the lessons, I watched the video recording and realised that my teaching practice had improved. I developed explicit understanding of the ways in which text works and is knit together. R2L pedagogy introduced me to different genres which are used to help learners to read and write effectively across the curriculum. R2L provided me with scaffolding strategies that enabled me to

support learners in each and every stage of the R2L intervention. I used to think that I knew my learners, but R2L made me realise that I assumed that I knew them, whereas I did not. I realised that learners operate at different levels and they need different support. R2L taught me that every learner can learn if teachers are able to support them.

**Reflective journal: Date 20 May 2022**

*Reflection on the R2L lesson on topic: Emotions*

*Duration: 1 hour*

*Date: 20 May 2021*

*What I observed after I watched the video, is that when I implemented the R2L intervention, I skipped the part where I had to ask questions to check their prior knowledge. Some learners were struggling to number their sentences, and some were a bit confused and could not keep up. Some were eager to participate; as I was watching the video, I saw one learner who did not pay attention at all, and who was busy paging through his textbook. Another mistake I made was to leave the joint construction text on the board; this allowed some learners to repeat what was written in the joint writing text. So, I needed to rectify those mistakes in the next lesson.*

*The engagement was better than I expected as most learners were excited. I saw some learners who don't usually answer in class raising their hands. When it came to spelling, some learners were struggling with spelling, but for some, with the help of breaking up the word into syllables assisting them, [and therefore] they were able to get the words right. I would say the method really did help them; learners were able to fill in the missing word on their own and quickly. Learners were able to do the task, so I would say scaffolding was sufficient.*

*Figure 8. My reflective journal*

My observation from watching the lesson was that I had *skipped* the part where I had to ask questions to check their prior knowledge. Since the R2L intervention was new to them, some learners were struggling to number their sentences, and one learner was not paying attention during the lesson. The scaffolding was highly visible in the lesson; I gave them background knowledge about the text and explained difficult words, so in that way I was giving support to the poorer readers. During the sentence making stage, learners interacted with each other; each took turns to cut out the sentences and jumble them, and then they worked together to rearrange the sentences.

## **5.4 Action Research Cycle Two**

### **5.4.1 Action Research Step 1: Planning**

As I mentioned in the reflection part of AR cycle one, the videos showed that in the first R2L stage, I skipped the part where I had to engage with learners' background knowledge, and that one of the learners did not pay attention at all. Some learners repeated what was written in the joint writing text, because I did not remove it from the board; so, in the second AR cycle, I removed the joint text when it was time for them to do their individual writing. After the first AR cycle, I realized that the second cycle was needed, because although many learners were engaged and participated, and had finished the class activities, some were still struggling.

This lesson's objective was to comprehend the notion of “bullying”. I selected a text from the Life Skills learner book, which I was going to use for the R2L lesson. I planned to only use three stages of the R2L cycle in one Life Skills lesson, because of the school timetable (restricted time allocation), while I completed the other two stages in a separate lesson. The resources that I used were: sentence strips, spelling words, and charts for sentence writing, where learners had to fill in the missing words. In my lesson planning for the second cycle, I made sure that I drafted questions to check learners' prior knowledge, and followed that lesson plan. In the first AR cycle, I did not move around the classroom much, which resulted in some learners not paying attention. In AR cycle two, I decided to move around to observe that all the learners were paying attention. During COVID-19, the Department of Education assigned educational assistants to help out in all the schools. Each grade was assigned an assistant teacher. One was assigned to assist in my class, therefore I ask that assistant teacher to help me by checking that all the learners were engaged.

### **5.4.2 Action Research Step 2: Action**

There were twenty-five students in the class, with six of them seated in a group. There was sufficient space between the desks, allowing me to move around freely from one group to another.

The class was not overcrowded. The **resources** used were the chalkboard and chalk, which I used to write note on the board, learners' text books, and a worksheet. The class was clean and tidy.

The lesson was divided into five episodes. In **Episode 1**, I provided learners with some background knowledge of the text (prepare before reading); this provided support to the weaker learners (in reading comprehension). In **Episode 2**, I asked learners questions like, "How can you tell that this is the beginning of the sentence?" These questions led learners to observe punctuation marks. I encouraged learners by affirming them, with words such as excellent, wonderful, good, etc. In **Episode 3**, during the sentence making, learners interacted with the text, asking questions like: what, who, where, etc. They then cut out sentence strips, jumbled the sentences, and rearranged them together as a group(**interaction**). I selected five words from the text, broke them into syllables, showed them to the learners, and then hid them; I let them write each word down and then showed them the correct word. Learners were given text with missing words, for which they had to use the words on the board to complete the activity. In **Episode 4**, together with learners, I reviewed the key words which were underlined in the previous lesson. They took turns to write new sentences on the board. In **Episode 5**, the learners paraphrased the sentences that we had written in the joint construction, and wrote them in their own words.

### **5.4.3 Action Research Step 3: Observation of Lesson 1**

**Lesson Topic: Bullying**

**09:00 to 10:00 (1 hour) - 31/05/2021**

**Purpose: Understand concept ‘bullying’**

Analysis of lesson using

**Vygotsky’s concepts**

Bullying is when someone tries to hurt, scare or upset another person; bullying can make them not want to go to school. Some bullies can make people do things they don’t want to do. There are some ways you can do to deal with bullies. Keep out of bullies’ way. Stand up for yourself. Tell the bully: “no, stop it!” in a loud voice. Bullies can be stopped.

**Prepare before reading (R2L Stage 1)**

T: Good morning learners

L: Good morning teacher [in a chorus]

T: In life you come across people who will mistreat you because you are different, for example small, big, dark, light, etc. Some will even go to a point where they will hit you for no reason. we call that bullying. [I gave each learner a copy of the text]: [Learners look at the text]

T: The first sentence tells us what is called “to threaten someone who is weak”, then how people can force others to do wrong things, and gives strategies on how to deal with these kinds of people, and lastly, it tells us the way to stay away.

T: [Read the whole text aloud]

**Scaffolding**

I provided learners background to the text before reading it to them.

**Detailed reading (R2L Stage 2) - Episode 2**

T: Grade 4, how can you tell that this is the beginning of sentence?

L1: By a capital letter

T: Marvellous, how can you tell that this is the end of the sentence?

L2: By full stop, question mark and exclamation mark

T: Excellent. Sentence number one begins with what word?

L3: Bullying

**Scaffolding**

When I asked learners how they could tell that this was the beginning of sentence, that was **scaffolding, which** helped them to find the punctuation in the text.

T: Good, before bullying put number 1. Sentence number one ends with what word?

L4: School [learner chorus]

T: Write number 2 after the word school, then number the rest of your sentences

L5: [They number the rest of the sentences]

T: At the beginning of the sentence there is a word that tells us what we are talking about. What is that word?

L: Bullying [in a chorus]

T: Wonderful. Underline the word **bullying**. Bullying is what?

L6: When

T7: Good. Please underline the word **when**. When who?

L4: Someone

T: Excellent, please underline the word **someone**. There is a word that tells us that they attempt.

L8: Tries

T: Excellent, underline the word **tries**. Try to do what? There are three things they mentioned, what are those?

L9: Hurt

T: Marvellous, underline the word **hurt**, what is the second word?

L10: Scare

T: Excellent, underline the word **scared**, the last word is what?

L8: Upset

T: Excellent, underline the word **upset**.

T: The second sentence begins with a word that tells us that it is not all of them. What is that word?

L7: Some

T: Good, underline the word **some**. Some what?

L6: Bullies

T: Excellent underline the word **bullies**. Can make who?

L8: People.

Affirming learners by saying words like marvellous, gives them encouragement.

T: Good, underline the word **people**. Make people do what?

L9: Things

T: Excellent, underline the word **things**. Things they?

L7: Don't

T: Excellent, underline word **don't**. Don't want to what?

L12: To do

T: Excellent, sentence number three states that there are some what?

L11: Ways

T: Good, underline the word **ways**. There is a word that tells us that you will sort the bullies out. What is that word?

L13: Deal

T: Brilliant, underline the word **deal**. Deal with who?

L14: Bullies

T: Good, underline the word **bullies**. Beginning of sentence number four, there is a word that tells us to stay away.

L15: Keep out

T: Good, underline the word **keep out**. Keep out of the bullies what?

L6: Way

T: Wonderful, underline the word **way**. At the beginning of sentence number five, there is a word that tells us that you should defend. What is that word?

L7: Stand up

T: Wonderful, underline the word **stand up**. For who?

L8: Yourself

T: Excellent, underline the word to **yourself**. Stand up for yourself by telling the bully what?

L2: Stop

T: Excellent, underline the word **stop**.

**Sentence making (R2L stage 3)**

T: Now grade four, we are doing sentence making. I will give each group sentence strips that you will have to cut and jumble, and then reassemble in the right order.

L: [The learners are working in groups according to their seating]

*What are we talking about? When, who? Does what? To do what name 3 things?*

**Bullying is when someone tries to hurt, scare**

*Who? Bullying does what?*

**or upset another person, bullying can make**

*Make who? Not want to do what? some what?*

**them not want to go to school. Some bullies**

*Can do what? Make who? Do what? They what?*

**can make people do things they don't want**

*To what?*

**to do.**

### Spelling



### Sentence Writing

T: [I put up the sentences with the key words visible on the board, and then asked the learners to read the sentences and answer the questions]

L: [Learners fill in the missing words individual.]

T: [Then I walked around to see that learners were writing the missing words; then I checked when we were doing corrections and marking, that they wrote the correct words.]

During the sentence-making activity, there was interaction with the text, as students responded to my questions and cut out sentences. In addition, there was interaction among group members, who took turns cutting the words, and worked together to rearrange the text. There was also scaffolding; I guided students by asking them questions and providing them with sentence strips that were scaffolded resources.

I selected 5 words from the text and taught learners to spell them and break them into syllable [scaffolding]. Hide the word - I would hide the words (which I knew) and let learners write them down 3 times, then I would show them the correct word.

<p>Some _____ make _____ do things they don't want to do. _____ are _____ you can do to _____ with _____.</p>	<p>This is where I gave learners support, so they could reproduce the sentences (<b>scaffolding</b>). The words were on the board and they just had to pick the correct one. Highly scaffolded sentence</p>
	<p>from the text - most learners were able to do this task.</p>

#### 5.4.4 Action research Step 3: Observation of Lesson 2

<p>This lesson continued with the same text on bullying, and focused on the R2L stages of joint construction and individual construction.]</p>	
<p><b><u>Joint construction (R2L Stage 4)</u></b> [This lesson was a continuation of the previous lesson, since I did not manage to finish all the stages because of time allocation for the life skills PSW period, so I had to continue in this lesson.] T: Good morning class L1: Good morning teacher (chorus) T: Today we are going to do the joint construction. [I stick pieces of paper with words on the board: <b>bullying, someone, hurt, someone, away, school, stay</b>] T: Ok, what did we talk about yesterday? L2: Bullying</p>	<p><b>Scaffolding</b> Review the key words which were underlined in the previous lesson. Learners take turns to write the new sentences on the chalkboard with the help of the teacher (<b>highly scaffolded</b>).</p>

T: Good. It was bullying. Come and take that word and stick it on the board. We are doing what we call a joint construction. [I write 'joint construction' on the board.]

L3: [A girl picks up a word from the board and sticks it on the other side of the board, where we are making up the joint sentence construction]

T: Bullying is what? [About 5 children stick up their hands]

L4: It is when someone...

T: Wonderful, write it on the board.

L5: [Child comes and writes 'is when someone']

T: Tries to do what? [Many children have their hands up]

Ok, there are four things that the person may try to do. Tries do what?

L6: Tries to hurt

T: Wonderful, tries to hurt. Come and write the word 'hurt'.

[Learner comes to board]

T: What does 'it' refer to?

L7: To bullying

T: It can make who?

L3: A person

T: Wonderful, come and write the word 'person'

[Learner comes up and writes the word on the board]

It can make a person feel what

L1: Bad

T: Excellent, and do what?

L2: And stay away from school

T: Good [Learner comes and writes on the board]

*Joint writing text*

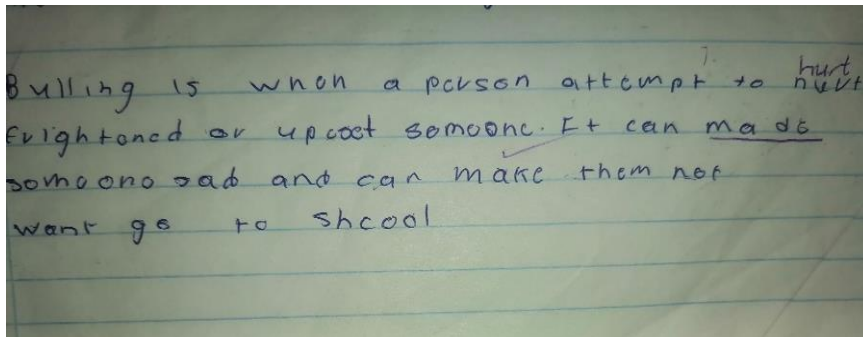
Bullying is when someone tries to hurt, scare, or upset another person. It can make a person unhappy, and stay away from school.

Most learners were able to write the text individually. About 21 of the learners were able to paraphrase and 4 of them tried, but there was not much difference from the joint construction.

**Individual Writing (R2L Stage 5)**

T: Grade 4, you are going to do individual work where you re-write the sentences in your own words [learners paraphrase].

[Learners work on their own and rewrite the sentences, and this time I removed the joint writing from the board]



**5.4.5 Action Research Step 4: Reflection**

After the lesson, I watched the video and wrote an entry in my reflective journal. The aim was to establish the effectiveness of the R2L intervention, and to reflect on how the methodology improved teaching and learning in the classroom. In the first cycle when I started introducing the R2L methodology, learners showed slow development, but in cycle 2 there was more progress. This time around, more the learners were engaged (e.g., most raising their hands compared to previous lesson). The use of the intervention resulted in a positive change in learners' ability to

rewrite the text themselves. Learners were much more engaged and they all wanted to participate. When I asked questions, almost the whole class would raise their hands. Learners were able to complete their task quickly

**Reflective journal: Date 31 May 2022**

*Topic: Bullying*

*Duration: 1 hour*

*Date: 31 May 2021*

*What I observed after I watched the video, was that when I implemented the R2L intervention for the second time, learners' engagement was better than before, and they were eager to learn.*

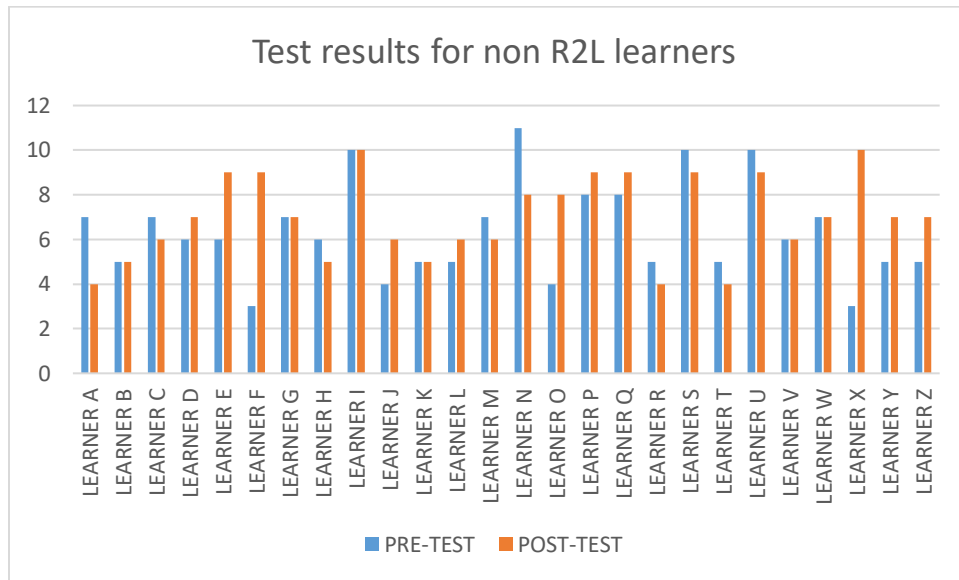
*Learners could number their sentences correctly, because this was the second time they were using the R2L pedagogy, so it became more familiar. R2L pedagogy is highly scaffolded, meaning that it helps me to support learners in the classroom; it is built on giving learners the opportunity to be successful in the classroom. Using the R2L intervention really did help learners to master the topic and to read with understanding.*

*Figure 9. Data: Reflective journal*

In the second cycle, learners were familiar with the R2L intervention, so the participation and engagement were better than in the first cycle; the learners were paying attention during the lesson and participating. The scaffolding was highly visible in the lesson; I gave them background knowledge before reading the text and explained difficult words. In that way, I was giving support to poor readers (**scaffolding**). There was also scaffolding when I was guiding learners by asking them questions that led them to the answers, and giving them sentence strips that were **scaffolded** resources.

## 5.5 Comparing the Test Results

The following graph shows the result of comparing the pre- and post-test of the R2L and non-R2L groups. The results of the post-test showed that the R2L group's scores improved more compared to the non-R2L class.



*Figure 10. Control group (non-R2L Group): Scores obtained for reading comprehension questions in the pre-test and post-test.*

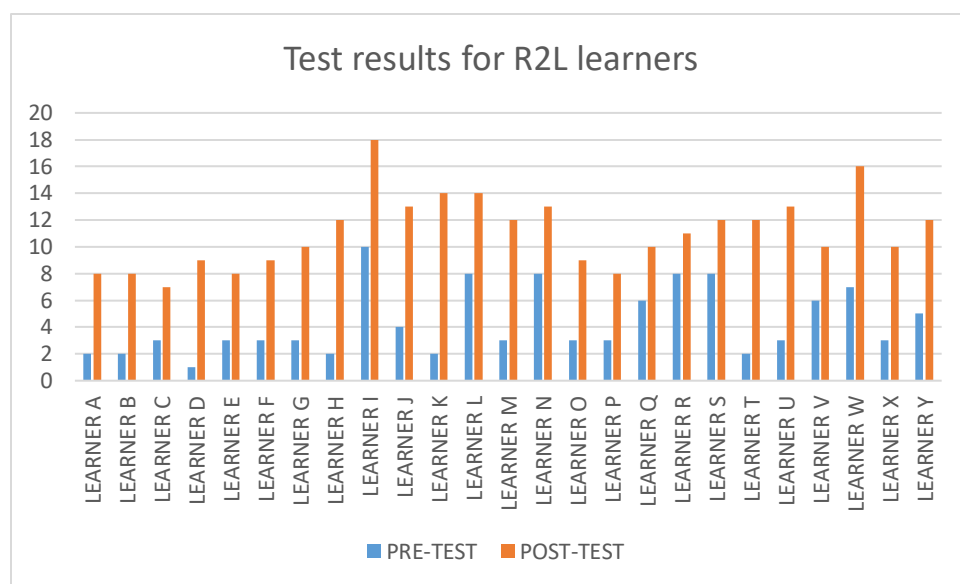


Figure 11. Experimental group (R2L Group): Scores obtained for reading comprehension questions in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 2. Comparison of the experimental and control groups' scores according to the number of students who showed an increase or decrease in their marks

	R2L (Experimental)	Non-R2L (Control)
No of students (%) who decreased by 1 – 3 marks	0 (0%)	8 (32%)
No of students (%) whose marks stayed the same	0 (0%)	8 (32%)
No of students (%) who improved by 1 – 3 marks	1 (4%)	6 (24%)
No of students (%) who improved by 4 – 6 marks	13 (52%)	2 (8%)
No of students (%) who improved by 7 – 9 marks	6 (24%)	1 (4%)
No of students (%) who improved by 10 - 12 marks	5 (20%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL number of students	25	25

In the R2L experimental group, all twenty-five students improved their performance in the post-test, with thirteen students increasing their marks by 4-6 points, six improving them by 7-9 points, and five improving them by 10-12 points. There were no students whose performance decreased in the post-test or whose performance remained the same.

In the non-R2L control group, only nine students improved their performance in the post-test, with +6 and +7 marks being the two largest increases. However, there were eight students whose performance decreased in the post-test, with -1 and -3 points being the two largest decreases. There were eight students whose performance remained the same.

Table 3. Average, median, minimum marks and maximum marks of the R2L (experimental group) and NON-R2L (control group)

	R2L (EXPERIMENTAL GROUP)			NON-R2L (CONTROL GROUP)		
	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	Difference	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	Difference
AVERAGE	4.92	11.44	+6.52	6.28	6.92	+0.64
MEDIAN	3	10.5	+7.5	6	7	+1
MINIMUM MARK	1	7	+6	3	4	+1
MAXIMUM MARK	10	18	+8	11	10	-1

Table 3 above reflects the average, median, minimum and maximum scores out of a total mark of 20, for the experimental group and the control group. The shaded columns present data for the **experimental group**, which shows that the minimum for the pre-test and post-test marks increased from 1 to 7. However, the median score increased from 3 to 10.5. The maximum mark increased from 10 in the pre-test to 18 in the post-test. The average class mark increased from 4.92 to 11.44 (+6.52 points).

It can be seen from the above table, that for the **control group**, there was an increase from 3 to 4 points in the minimum for the pre- and post-test marks. The median score also increased by only 1 mark, from 6 to 7 points. The maximum mark decreased from 11 in the pre-test to 10 in the post-test. The average class mark increased from 6.28 to 6.92 (+0.64), which is very small increase.

Thus, it can be noted that in the experimental group, most learners' test results in the reading comprehension test increased. In this way, we may conclude that the R2L methodology helped learners enhance their reading comprehension performance. In fact, it appears that due to this

intervention, reading comprehension scores climbed considerably, but a comparable increase was not seen in the control group's post-test scores.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the lesson observations of the R2L Group in two cycles of action research. The data demonstrated that the R2L intervention led to an improvement in students' reading comprehension abilities. The R2L pedagogy improved literacy through the six-step scaffolding interaction cycle, by equipping students to read, read with comprehension, and become better writers. Learners were much more engaged and they all wanted to participate, as well as being able to complete their task quickly when scaffolded. The pre- and post-test results reveal that the group who received support through the R2L intervention, showed great improvement. The next chapter presents a discussion on the findings, recommendations for further research, and the conclusion of the study.

## Chapter Six:

# Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

My discussion is based on synthesising the findings from Chapters 4 and 5. The aim of this action research, was to explore how the Reading to Learn pedagogy can support Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension in Life Skills. Action research was employed where pre- and post-tests were conducted to generate quantitative data, and lesson observations using video recordings were conducted to generate qualitative data. The study aimed to address the following three research questions:

RQ1: *How does R2L support reading comprehension?*

RQ2: *How does R2L support learner engagement and participation?*

RQ3 *How does R2L change my literacy practice?*

The study employed Vygotsky's theoretical framework to establish a connection between its findings and the existing literature. This chapter presents a conclusion discussion of the findings, recommendations, and areas for future research.

### 6.2. Summary of Key Findings

The first research question that I discuss here is: *How does the R2L support reading comprehension?*

The findings presented in Chapter 5 show that after the R2L intervention, most learners in the R2L experimental group improved their test results in the reading comprehension tests. In this way, we may conclude that the R2L methodology helps learners enhance their reading comprehension performance. As demonstrated in Figure 12, due to this intervention reading comprehension scores climbed considerably, but a comparable increase was not noticed in the control group's post-test scores. Learners' average scores increased from 25% out of 20 in the pre-test to 55% in the post-

test, which accounts for an increase of 35% in average scores. In the non-R2L Group, the percentage of students whose score marks decreased in the post-test was 32%, with an equal percentage showing no change in their scores. Meanwhile, in the R2L Group, all the learners increased their scores in the post-test after the R2L intervention. The comparative analysis of students' average scores confirmed that, indeed, these improved after the implementation of R2L, which is similar to the findings in a study by Becerra, Herazo, García, Sagre, and Díaz (2020).

The study reveals that R2L can really support learners' reading comprehension. R2L does this by scaffolding learners, and focusing on the text in a detailed way. During the preparation reading, I wanted learners to understand the text, so I linked it to their prior knowledge or personal experience, and gave them a sentence summary. During the detailed reading, I read the text sentence by sentence in order to elaborate on difficult words and paraphrase sentences, so that weaker learners would understand. I also asked comprehension questions using 5W (what, when, where who, how) questions. The scaffolding support included the strategies of sentence making, spelling, and sentence rewriting. When comparing this to my teaching of the non-R2L Group, there was little engagement with the text, while in the R2L methodology, I engaged more with the text by reading it aloud, and working in detail with the meaning of words.

The second research question that I discuss is: *How does R2L support learner engagement and participation?*

From lesson observations in relation to learner engagement and participation in the classroom, I was able to answer research question number two. During my implementation of the R2L intervention, learner participation improved, for instance, most learners raised their hands and wanted to give answers. During sentence making, there was interaction among learners, as they cut out words, jumbled sentences, and rearranged them. Whereas in the class that did not get the R2L intervention, learners were not engaged in class discussion, with only two learners raising their hands and answering, while the rest were just listening to me and did not respond to my questions. Therefore, I can say that R2L did change learners' engagement and participation (Mataka et al., 2020). Whenever learners gave answers, I would affirm them, which also encouraged them to participate, and built their confidence to engage in class activities.

The findings indicate that there was a high level of support in the R2L scaffolding strategy, which means that even weaker learners could respond to the use of positioning cues, such as “look at the beginning of sentence”, or sequence cues such as “then the writer goes on to tell us”. In this way, I engaged with the text and asked specific questions about it that every learner could answer. Likewise, Millin and Millin (2014) implemented R2L to accelerate L1 literacy skills in tertiary education in South Africa. According to the findings, even the weakest learners made substantial improvements in their comprehension test results. Throughout the course of this study's intervention, I guided the students in their comprehension and production of everyday activities, and gradually reduced my assistance as they advanced.

The third research question that I discuss is: *How does R2L change my literacy practice?*

The R2L pedagogy suggests that teachers scaffold learners' literacy development, until they are able to read with understanding on their own. This supports Rose and Martin's (2012) claim that ongoing scaffolding enables constant literacy development, particularly among learners with limited success in school. I realise from the findings that the non-R2L Group were struggling with their class activity, because I did not scaffold them enough; some knew the answers, but did not have the English vocabulary to give them, while others answered in isiZulu.

The R2L intervention changed my teaching of literacy. As a teacher, R2L has equipped me with the knowledge of genre (genre refers to the purpose of a text). The R2L pedagogy has helped me unpack texts and make meanings clear. R2L has equipped me with strategies to help learners to read for meaning and knowledge of analysing the language patterns in different texts, to make patterns familiar through repeated practice. I guided learners to use language patterns in the joint rewriting and individual rewriting stages. I accomplished this by scaffolding student comprehension of the content using a 6-step R2L cycle that was carefully constructed. First, the teacher prepares students by paraphrasing the sentence before it is read aloud. Then, students engage in the learning task, as the teacher guides them with position and meaning cues, to identify the key words in the sentence. Finally, the teacher confirms and expands on the students' responses, by clarifying the actual meaning of the words, or how they make sense in the context of the text. The implementation of R2L pedagogy has improved my teaching of literacy, and the majority of my learners now respond to questions and can rewrite the text in their own words; their

performance in comprehension has also improved (Millin, 2016). Mataka et al. (2020) study confirmed that R2L equipped teachers with strategies to help learners to read, read for meaning, and be better writers.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this action research, I suggest that R2L should be used by teachers from Grade R all the way through Grade 12. In this way, students can be ready for Grade 4, while being able to handle the demands of the curriculum as well as the extra cognitive demands that come with learning in a second language. Reading to Learn needs to be included among the contemporary approaches to improving literacy across the curriculum in South Africa. Teachers should receive training on the use of R2L to aid their students and children, like it is done in other nations like Australia. Finally, other educators should do research on Reading to Learn in other learning areas like Natural Science, Technology, etc.

### **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn on the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to answer the research questions (outlined in Chapter 1), reached conclusions, and made recommendations from the study. The aim of this action research study was to explore how the Reading to Learn pedagogy could support Grade 4 Life Skills learners' reading comprehension. The study revealed that the R2L pedagogy, through the six-step scaffolding interaction cycle, accelerated literacy, by equipping students with the ability to read, read with meaning, and become better writers. The findings also stress the need for teachers to participate in a critical analysis of their teaching practices, and be on the lookout for alternative approaches to effectively instruct students.

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# Appendix 1: Gatekeeper Permission: KZN Department of Education



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
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Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7059

Mrs Nonjabulo Busisiwe C. Dladla  
215 Flora Road  
Oribi Village  
PIETERMARITZBURG  
3201

Dear Mrs Dladla

## PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

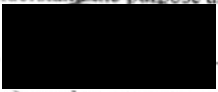
Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPLORING HOW READING TO LEARN PEDAGOGY SUPPORTS GRADE 4 LIFE SKILLS LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION"** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 17<sup>TH</sup> December 2020 to 10<sup>TH</sup> March 2023.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 17<sup>TH</sup> December 2020

gROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## Appendix 2: Gatekeeper Permission: School Principal

<b>DECLARATION OF CONSENT</b>	
I <u>PHILLIP V. ZUMA</u>	(Full names of the school principal) have been informed about the study entitled <b>Exploring how Reading to Learn pedagogy supports grade 4 Life Skills learners' reading comprehension</b> by Nonjabulo Busisiwe C Dladla.
I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.	
	<u>15/12/2020</u>
SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL	DATE

## Appendix 3: Learner Assent Forms

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

### APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

#### Information Sheet and Consent for learner to Participate in Research

Project title: **Exploring how Reading to Learn pedagogy supports grade 4 Life Skills learners' reading comprehension**

Date:

Dear Learner

My name is **Nonjabulo Busisiwe C Dladla**, Master of Education student from University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

The purpose of this research is to see how I can help develop your reading comprehension in the Life Skills learning area. In my research I will be doing lesson observations using video recordings. You will write a pre-test and post-test where the aim is to check your reading with understanding. You will be taught using Reading to Learn methodology.

After the teaching and supporting your class, I will need to check your Life Skills scripts to check how well has your reading comprehension developed after being supported. I will take your pre-test and post-test script and keep it with me. I will be able to check your reading comprehension development. I am asking if you can allow me to do the pre-test and post-test and lesson observation and see how your reading comprehension improves.

I can assure you that I will never share what I find in your script and in the video tape with any one and I will not show your name in any way but I will be using numbers (e.g learner 1, 2-6).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [ndladla67@gmail.com](mailto:ndladla67@gmail.com) or my supervisor Prof. Carol Bertram, [BertramC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:BertramC@ukzn.ac.za), and or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details below.

---

I (Name) ....., a learner in grade 4 ..... have been informed about the study, **“Exploring how Reading to Learn pedagogy supports grade 4 Life Skills learners reading comprehension.”** by *Nonjabulo Busisiwe Dladla*.

I understand the aim and ways to be followed in this research.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the research and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at 076 902 0976 or [ndladla67@gmail.com](mailto:ndladla67@gmail.com) or Prof Carol Bertram at (033) 260 5349.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

I hereby assent to be present during:

Observation of Life Skills lesson YES / NO

Document analysis of the Life Skills scripts YES /NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Learner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix 4: Parents' Consent Forms**

# **UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)**

### **APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants**

#### **Information Sheet and Consent for your Child to Participate in Research**

Project title: **Exploring how Reading to Learn pedagogy supports grade 4 Life Skills learners' reading comprehension**

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is **Nonjabulo Busisiwe C Dladla**, Master of Education student from University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

Most learners struggle to read with understanding. Therefore, I will use Reading to Learn methodology as a way to help learners develop their reading comprehension in Life Skills learning area. Learners will write a pre-test in March and after 3 months they will write a post-test to check if there are any development in their reading comprehension.

This study will also involve lesson observations using video recordings of the Grade 4 Life Skills learners. This will help me track the learner's participation and involvement in class and their reading improvement.

Your child is a learner in this class, and thus I am requesting your consent.

The focus of the classroom observation will be on the teacher's intervention and on the development of the child's reading comprehension in Life Skills. Learners' work will also be analysed. Your child's script will be selected for analysis. Ethical research practices require that you are aware of the study and give your consent on behalf of your child. Please know that there are no anticipated risks or harm to your child. The data will not be made public in any way and will only be used for research purposes. If selected, your child's test script will be returned to the learner on the same day.

Confidentiality will be highly observed and the school, learners and the teacher's identity will be protected. Therefore, pseudonyms will be used for the learners, the teacher and the school to ensure the integrity and confidentiality.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [ndladla67@gmail.com](mailto:ndladla67@gmail.com) or my supervisor Prof. Carol Bertram, [BertramC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:BertramC@ukzn.ac.za), and or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details below.

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## PARENTAL/ GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM FOR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION

I (Name)..... the parent/guardian of  
..... (child) in grade 4 ..... have

been informed about the study, **“Exploring how reading to learn pedagogy supports grade 4 Life Skills learners’ reading comprehension”** by Nonjabulo

*Busisiwe C Dladla.*

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that s/he may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at 076 902 0976 or [ndladla67@gmail.com](mailto:ndladla67@gmail.com) or Prof Carol Bertram at (033) 260 5349.

If I have any questions or concerns about my child's rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

**Research Office, Westville Campus Govan**

**Mbeki Building**

**Private Bag X 54001**

**Durban**

**4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609**

**Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)**

I hereby provide consent for my child to be present during:

Observation of Life Skills lesson  
Document analysis of the Life Skills scripts

YES / NO  
YES /NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Parent/Guardian**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix 5: Comprehension Test Used for Both Pre-test and Post-test

**Kukhanya Primary School 2021**  
**GRADE 4      TERM 1**  
**Life Skills Comprehension (20 Marks)**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_      **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Read the following story and then answer the questions based on it.**

Pete is feeling very sad and frightened. His parents have just told him that they are getting a divorce. They are selling the house and moving, each to a different place. They told Pete he must decide which of them he wants to live with during the week and which one at weekends. They also said he should start going through his cupboards and decide what he can throw out because he will be moving to a much smaller place.

Until that moment, Pete had no idea that his parents were getting divorced. He now thinks it must be his fault. He feels guilty and ashamed. Suddenly, there are so many decisions to make. Pete feels completely overwhelmed. He runs out of the house and down the road to his friend Sam's House. When Sam sees Pete he says, "Hey, what's up, Pete?" Pete bursts into tears. He sits with Sam for hours. Pete talks and talks and Sam listens. Sam's mother phones Pete's parents to ask if Pete can have supper at their house and spend the night. She cooks the boys one of their favourite meals.

1      The best title of this story is "The day Pete needed a good ..."

- A    Man
- B    friend
- C    pet
- D    teacher

(1)

2      His parents told him that they are getting ...

- A    Married
- B    divorced
- C    rock
- D    house

(1)

3 Who sat with Pete for hours?

- A Mother
- B Sam
- C Jack
- D Parents

4 Name two emotions that Pete felt

---

5 What did Sam's mother do to make Pete feel better?

---

6 What are the two emotions Pete felt when he heard that his parents were getting divorced.

---

7 Why did Pete bursts into tears?

---

---

(1)

(2)

(1)

(2)

(2)

## Appendix 6: Ethical Approval Letter from UKZN



11 May 2021

Mrs Nonjabulo Busisiwe Dladla (220101312)  
School Of Education  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Dladla,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002643/2021  
Project title: EXPLORING HOW READING TO LEARN PEDAGOGY SUPPORTS GRADE 4 LIFE SKILLS  
LEARNERS READING COMPREHENSION  
Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 April 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 11 May 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix 7: Reading to Learn: Observation Tool

### Reading to Learn: Primary/High School Factual Texts Observation

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Mentor:</b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>School:</b>
<b>Grade:</b>	<b>Topic:</b>
<p><b>Shared Text Reading:</b> Has the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepared the learners for the text by relating it to their own experience and/or previous knowledge/teaching?</li> <li>Provided an overview by summarising the texts sequence and meaning?</li> <li>Elaborated on the text by accessing their own experience/ knowledge; explained new concepts; or shared their feelings/opinions about the text?</li> <li>Given a closer reading of the whole text with the students following?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Detailed Reading:</b> Has the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepared learners for each sentence by paraphrasing the sequence and meaning of each sentence and read the sentence with learners following?</li> <li>Enabled learners to identify and mark key wordings with meaning and position cues and <b>affirmed the learners' responses?</b></li> <li>Instructed learners about what wordings to underline?</li> <li>Elaborated key meanings by defining new terms, or related issues to their own experience or feelings?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Sentence Making (Optional for High School):</b> Has the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written a paragraph on cardboard strips, sentence-by-sentence?</li> <li>Asked learners to jumble up sentences and put them back in the original order of the paragraph?</li> <li>Chosen sentence/s and used the same cue questions as in detailed reading to enable learners to cut up sentence wordings?</li> <li>Asked learners to jumble the wordings and then put the sentences back in the original order and reread the text?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Spelling (Optional for High School):</b> Has the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used words from sentence making to cut off letter and syllable patterns?</li> <li>Involved learners in practising pronunciation and spelling by looking, covering, writing, checking, and writing again – first the pattern and then the whole word?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Sentence Writing (Optional for High School):</b> Has the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read sentence strips again?</li> <li>Removed key words from the sentence/paragraph and asked learners to write the whole sentence/paragraph putting in the missing words?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Note Taking and Joint Construction:</b> Has the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shown the students how to write underlined key wordings of the text as notes on the board and supported them write these key wordings/notes on the board?</li> <li>Read the text again and reminded learners of the text pattern using the notes on the board?</li> <li>Involved the whole class in thinking how and what to write following the original text patterns?</li> <li>Allowed students to take turns to write new sentences on the board?</li> <li>Helped students use the examples of the original text and the joint construction to write their own text using their notes?</li> </ul>	

## Appendix 8: Turnitin report

