Unit 5: The Scarborough model: Weaving the strands together.

In this Unit you will find the following sections:

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   5.2.1 Background knowledge
   5.2.2 Vocabulary knowledge
   5.2.3 The importance of verbal reasoning
   5.2.4 Literacy knowledge
   5.2.5 Developing comprehension strategies in the classroom
5.3 Word recognition
   5.3.1 Phonological awareness
   5.3.2 Decoding
   5.3.3 Sight recognition

Thinking about a skilled reader, the following questions come to mind:

- What does being a skilled reader entail?
- How do we know when children have understood what they have read?

We will outline a range of comprehension strategies that teachers can teach their children. These strategies will support children in learning to read with understanding. We recommend students work with these strategies in their own reading, over and above using them when working with children.

In most classrooms there are significant numbers of young children who have difficulty learning to read, or who may be reluctant readers. These children need to practise with relevant and interesting reading materials of a good quality, as well as requiring constant support in learning the know-how of reading. In addition, they should be taught which comprehension strategies they can draw on, and how to apply them.

The Scarborough model, which takes an integrated approach to early literacy, offers useful ideas for understanding the various aspects of learning to read and write, especially in addressing the transition from Grade R to Grade 1. This model also aligns with Guided Reflection as a means to integrate student teachers’ theoretical position with their practice in the classroom.

5.1 An overview of the Scarborough model

The Scarborough model provides a conceptual framework which allows readers to consider the different aspects, or strands, that contribute to skilful reading. The model was developed by Hollis Scarborough (2002) at a time when the concept of emergent literacy was gaining broad-based acceptance. As we have noted, for many decades before this it was thought that learning to read was only possible when schools provided formal instruction. The emergent literacy perspective forced a re-think of previous theories about how and where children learn to read and write. Scarborough too, was catapulted into this new terrain.
Scarborough (2002:97) writes:

*It is now abundantly clear that reading acquisition is a process that begins early in the pre-school period, such that children arrive at school having acquired vastly different degrees of knowledge and skill pertaining to literacy.*

Her particular research interest was on the differences in the speech and literacy development of pre-schoolers, and in particular whether ‘at risk’ children whose emergent literacy capacities were undeveloped, would encounter future reading difficulties at school. If this could be proved, Scarborough’s intention was to develop guidelines for designing screening tests, which would identify ‘at risk’ children.

Scarborough (2002:97) presents the Scarborough Model, in this way:

*Skilled readers are able to derive meaning from printed text accurately and efficiently. Research has shown, that in doing so, they fluidly co-ordinate many component skills, each of which has been sharpened through instruction and experience over many years.*

Figure 3, below, offers readers an overview of the Scarborough Model:

![SCARBOURGH MODEL](image)

**Figure 3:** Early Literacy Development (Scarborough, 2002: 97).

The above diagram shows two key competences required for skilled reading: comprehension and word recognition. Each competence consists of clusters of knowledge and sub-skills. Firstly, we present a summary of the model, and then carefully consider the knowledge and sub-skills Scarborough suggests we must co-ordinate and develop.

Scarborough’s (2002) analogy for skilled readers begins with early language development and evolves to illustrate the complexities of the reading process.

Scarborough chooses a rope as a symbol for understanding reading. In the diagram, eight different threads are twisted into two strands of rope that are woven together into a single, strengthened length of rope.
Scarborough’s Reading Rope helps us to understand reading development.

The top rope, seen as ‘language comprehension’, consists of strands representing background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, language structure, verbal reasoning and literacy knowledge. The bottom rope shown as ‘word recognition’ consists of strands which represent phonemic awareness, decoding and sight recognition.

Even though the two ropes are initially separate, they must both work together to form a strategic reader. Word recognition skills are developed separately at the beginning of the process but then need to be built up specifically so that they can purposefully support all the other strands of the rope. A crucial message of this method is that a reader cannot miss out on any part of the strands of the rope as they are all dependent on each other. Teachers therefore, need to ensure the coordination of these skills by implementing inclusive reading programmes in their classrooms.

With ongoing regular reading the knowledge and sets of sub-skills required for language comprehension and word recognition, become increasingly automatic. For skilled readers, each is executed with less effort and thought, and becomes more and more automatic.

A more careful consideration of the different components follows.

### 5.2 Language comprehension

“The essence of reading is making meaning.”

_Cohen, R. (2008:16)_

Comprehension, or understanding, implies constructing meaning from text. This is a fundamental goal of reading, as true for Grade R as it is for Grade 12. Throughout school, children have to read to acquire, comprehend and use increasingly complex systems of information and specialised knowledge in a range of content areas.

It is therefore important for children, from early in primary school, to develop the know-how of reading, which includes knowing when and how to apply a range of comprehension strategies. Although some skilled readers appear to learn these strategies spontaneously, for the most part, children require explicit teaching.

Some teachers assume that understanding is automatic for a child who correctly and fluently reads the words in a text. This, however, is an inaccurate and risky assumption. One of the commonest reading problems Intermediate Phase teachers identify, which typically is rated in second position, is that there are children who can read, but who read without understanding. (The first reading problem tends to be children who have not learnt read, despite having reached the Intermediate Phase.)

Scarborough (2002) isolates five aspects that constitute comprehension. By implication, teachers would need to attend to the development of each one. These components are discussed below.
5.2.1 Background knowledge

For Scarborough (2002) background knowledge or prior knowledge refers to the experiences, knowledge and concepts each child carries around, all the time, in his or her head. Prior knowledge forms the base from which new knowledge develops, and which readers make constant use of as they read. Without prior knowledge, a reader may be able to read all or some words. The reader, however, is unlikely to understand them. For example, most readers will be able to read this Spanish sentence. But is it understood?


‘Schemata’ is a useful concept for understanding how the brain organises the immense volumes of information it constantly receives. Schema theory proposes ideas about the way knowledge is structured and stored in memory. A central principle of schema theory is that much of what we know is “stored in complex relational units known as schemata (the plural of schema). Schemata are like containers into which we store particular experiences we have.” (Hall, 2003:102).

Hall (2003) says as children develop schemata, and continue producing new networks of knowledge, their prior knowledge increases. Consequently, children with exposure to a content- and concept-rich curriculum, and who also have learning opportunities out of school, are likely to develop strong schematic knowledge bases, which they bring to the act of reading.

In the following reflective activities, students will focus attention on the role of prior knowledge.

**Student reflection activity 21: Children’s prior (background) knowledge**

Work in small groups. The activity may take one to one and a half hours.

**DVD 1: Grade R, Chapter 2: Unlocking Prior Knowledge 00:25 – 04:09**

1. Read Questions 4a and 4b below, to help to focus your viewing of the DVD lesson.
2. View the above DVD clip.
3. Discuss the following questions:
   a. Identify and make a short list of the moments in this lesson where the student teacher gives the children opportunities to access their prior knowledge.
   b. Do you think the children in this class are given sufficient opportunities to articulate their own thinking? Consider the student teacher’s ability to encourage the children to articulate (put into words) their own knowledge and questions: How aware is the student teacher in the DVD of the need to do this? Substantiate your view.
4. Why do you think it is important for children to articulate their knowledge when they are busy learning?
   a. What does ‘their talk’ allow them to do? Consider the relationship between thinking and talking.
   b. Other than talk, in what other forms can prior knowledge be expressed, e.g. dance? Give an example of each form of expression you identify.

5. Have you noticed a particular technique the student teacher uses immediately after most of the children speak?
   a. Comment on why the student teacher is doing this. How do you think the children respond to this technique? How does it add to what is being learnt?
   b. Where do you think this technique could be most useful? Give reasons for your views. Consider both mono-lingual and multilingual classrooms. As a whole class, discuss interesting points and ask questions that have emerged during this session.

6. Look again at the student teachers’ approaches: what would you do differently and why?

7. Some learners are dressed in uniform, others not. Do you think this might influence their behaviour? And the teacher’s behaviour towards them? Why are learners required to wear a uniform? How do you think learners (and their parents) perceive this requirement?

**Student reflection activity 22: Extending learners’ knowledge**

Students work in small groups.

**DVD 1, Grade R, Chapter 2, 00:25 – 8:47**

1. Read all the instructions before you begin.
2. You will work with the same DVD chapter that was used in the previous Student Reflection Activity, but now you need to consider all three student teachers.
3. Before you watch the DVD:
   a. You will need a blank A4 or A3 page. Write the heading, as in the example below. Divide the page into 3 equal columns, with a column for each student teacher.
   b. Identify as many occasions as you can, where the student teachers extend the children’s knowledge. Write and list, on your page, each occasion you notice this happening. (It will be quicker if each group member chooses one student teacher to focus on.)
4. After compiling a record of when each student teacher extends the children’s knowledge:
   a. Comment on the effectiveness of each student teacher in extending children’s knowledge.
   b. Where were opportunities lost?
   c. Why is it important that teachers extend children’s knowledge?
   d. What theory of learning are you drawing on in order to answer the question that is immediately above?

5.2.2 Vocabulary knowledge

Telling and reading stories to young children is recognised as one valuable way of expanding their vocabulary and knowledge of the world. The more that children listen to stories and read texts themselves, the greater is the potential to develop their vocabularies. On the other hand, this is not likely to occur if the stories are of a questionable standard. Too often, children in South African schools are underestimated, as may well occur elsewhere, when the stories they meet in schools come from basal readers or workbooks. For this reason, great attention needs to be given to the books children have available to read and the stories teachers tell children.

In an interesting comparison, Nagy and Anderson in Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002) estimate that the number of words read a year by a middle school child who is an avid reader, might approach 10 000 000, compared to the 100 000 of a reluctant reader. An interesting question arising from this is, ‘How similar, or how different, are the reading resources the avid and reluctant readers have access to at home and at school?’ In classrooms where children become enthusiastic readers, there is a clear association between their access to a wide range of books and their interest in reading, according to Presley et al. (2001).

Purcell-Gates’ research (2004:37) points out that children who have stories told or read to them regularly score significantly higher in their knowledge of vocabulary; in addition, the more linguistically complex the written texts are, the higher the children’s scores on concepts of print and the alphabetic principle. This has important implications for Grade R and Grade 1 teachers.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTENDING CHILDREN’S TALK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recording each student teacher’s efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teacher 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glossary

Alphabetic principle - The learner’s ability to link sounds to written letters
If children are to develop strong schematic knowledge-bases and associated good vocabularies, they must be exposed to texts and books of different complexities. These should include small, easy books with predictable text that they read independently or read and discuss with a friend as well as texts of a much richer and more complex quality. In other words, the children need exposure to texts where the language, concepts and ideas are multifaceted and complex. The stories that Grade R and Grade 1 teachers tell or read, and the Big Books the children read, are well suited to having fairly complex story-lines, characters, settings, plots, vocabulary and illustrations.

**Student reflection activity 23: Status of literacy in Grade R and Grade 1**

Students work in pairs or small groups.

1. Spend some time in a classroom examining and evaluating the status of literacy in the classroom environment. Concentrate on the physical manifestations of literacy, such as:
   a. How much print is there in the classroom?
   b. How varied is the print children see around them in the classroom. For e.g. what do they see on the walls around them?
   c. How much of the print is generated by the children?
   d. How much is generated by the teacher?
   e. Is all the children’s work displayed, or only the ‘best’? What messages does this give the children?
   f. What facilities or resources are there for free writing?
   g. How are the books displayed?
   h. How many books are there?
   i. How old or new are the signs, notices and wall displays?
   j. What messages does the physical manifestation of literacy give? When the children ‘read’ the print available in the classroom, what messages does the physical classroom give the children?

2. Write a report on your findings or present a verbal report in a plenary session.

3. Discuss interesting points or questions that arose in your discussion.

Ideas for many of these observation points are from Wray, Bloom & Hall (1989: 65).

Presley, Allington, McDonald, Block & Morrow (2001), who examined and described what highly successful Grade 1 literacy teachers do, report that literature features prominently in their Grade 1 classrooms. Some books are read by the teachers and some by the children.

There is a direct relationship between low-level reading resources and children’s low vocabulary levels.
Student reflection activity 24: The use of resources in learning

Grade R DVD 1 – Chapter 3: Learning a new sound, 06:27 – 08:30

1. Look particularly at the use of the masks in this lesson.
2. Assess how effectively the masks are used in this lesson.
3. Think generally about the use of resources in language lessons
   a. Theorise why the use of resources are important for young children’s learning.
   b. In your theorising, discuss: What is the role of resources:
      • in acquiring and practicing new language
      • in enriching and extending learning
      • in developing rich, inner, imaginary realms?
4. Using your theory, suggest how you would optimally use the masks if you were to teach this lesson.

Words do not exist in isolation. They always are used in specific contexts, such as print on clothing, calendars, shopping lists, newspapers, bus tickets, books and chalkboards. Some teachers keep a dedicated space on their chalkboard for words that children bring from the outside world to class, where they are written up and discussed.

Class libraries ideally require a range of texts to enable children to expand their vocabularies. These should include non-fiction, fiction, poetry, dictionaries, reference material for children and teachers, as well as texts the children have written. These would be texts or books created by the class in shared writing activities, as well as texts or books written by individual children. All post-1994, South African language curricula advocate that new words are best learnt in the context of materials the children are reading.

One approach is to teach new vocabulary systematically by introducing children to the new words before they read a passage. A different approach is to ask the children to identify the words that are ‘new’ to them after reading a text. Doing this is often informative, as teachers tend to make assumptions about what vocabulary children have acquired.

Meta-language

Today most language education curricula include the need for children, including young readers, to develop their meta-language. In other words, children should not only read a text, and talk about a text’s content, but they also need to become familiar with concepts and words that are closely associated with language and literacy, such as: ‘word, sentence, paragraph, story, idea, well written, not so well written, cartoon, photograph, beautifully illustrated, boring illustrations, poem, advertisement, information text,’ and so on. Children also should learn to talk about the words writers chose for their texts, so that the words have a desired effect on the reader. For example, the repetition of ‘dark’ in the traditional rhyme below, which conjures up a dark night where there is no moon shining, may scare the listener.

In a dark, dark forest there was a dark, dark house.
And in the dark, dark house there was a dark, dark room.
And In the dark, dark room there was a dark, dark cupboard.
And on the dark, dark cupboard there was a dark, dark, box.
And in the dark, dark box there was a . . . (snake/ scorpion / ghost, etc)

Children love to suggest these words.

Children also can discuss the different ways writers create humour in texts. Can illustrations depict humour? Can a story line be funny? Can words make readers laugh? For example, Pamela Allen’s *Mr McGee and the Biting Flee* will guarantee a room full of laughter. Children could be asked to discuss how Pamela Alan, who is both the writer and illustrator, creates the humour.

Grade 1 children can also learn how to talk about the way language or images are used, for example, how words or illustrations can rouse readers, so that they feel emotions, such as humour, fear, happiness, anger, and sadness.

Lastly, Scarborough (2002) points out that problems in children’s reading comprehension often result from them not knowing words in the spoken form, which has various consequences. Children may not have adequate background knowledge and may have poor inferential skills, making them unable to ‘read between the lines’.

**Student reflection activity 25: Storytelling**

Students work in small groups.

**DVD 1 Grade R, Chapter 3: Teaching a New Sound with a story, 00:28 – 2:54**

1. View the DVD clip, which shows the student teacher telling the story of *Olly, the Octopus*.
2. The transcript of the story-telling is below. Refer to the transcript when you think about the following questions. Discuss the storytelling you see on the DVD. Make use of these questions to guide your discussion.
   a. What is the primary purpose of this story?
   b. Does the story provide interesting detail for the listeners? Refer to the transcript and identify the detail.
   c. The student teacher tells the children that Olly lives in Cape Point, which is a Cape Town nature reserve. The children who are filmed attend a Cape Town school. Do you think the student teacher provides this detail to the story purposely or not? How is this detail linked to the children’s experiences and knowledge?
   d. How engaged are the children in the story, whilst it is being told?
   e. What do you think are the reasons for their responses to the story?
3. The purpose of this basic story is to use it as a key resource in a phonics lesson. Discuss how a teacher could take advantage of, build on and develop this story further, on another day? You can use any of the ideas below, or work solely from your own ideas.
MAIN CHARACTER: Think about the main character, Olly. What do they know about Olly? Are there other interesting details that could be developed? How?

OTHER CHARACTERS: Similarly, are there interesting personality details, or events, or descriptions that might involve Olly’s friends?

QUESTIONS: The children can be asked what questions they have about the story.

SETTING: Where does the story happen? Children who become familiar with the idea that stories have settings, and often more than one setting, will be able to include settings in the stories they write. In this way, their creative writing becomes more skilful.

STRUCTURE of STORY: Identify what happened at the start, in the middle and at the end of the story. In doing this, children learn that many short stories have a similar structure: a beginning, middle and end. Children who become familiar with the idea that stories have a beginning, middle and end will find it easier to write a simple summary of a story. Some also will learn to use this structure in the stories they tell, draw, or write about. In this way, their ability to compose stories becomes more skilful.

DEVELOP PREDICTION SKILLS: The children can create the next episode. What happens when Olly and Olivia meet?

Transcript of storytelling, at an ex-model C school, in Sea Point, Cape Town:

Several children stand in front of the class and hold masks in front of their faces as the teacher reads the story.

Olly, the orange octopus, lived in the sea near Cape Point. He was a happy young octopus who often liked to visit his four best friends. He swam to the edge of the water and first met up with his friend Oscar, the otter. Oscar was sitting on a rock in the sun. They chatted for a while and then Olly said he must be going. “Where are you going?” asked Oscar. “I am going to see Oupa, the ostrich,” said Olly. Oupa was an old ostrich who often came down to the beach to visit the octopus. Oupa had a long neck and bent down to greet Olly.

While they were talking, Olly’s friend, the osprey, flew down from the sky and came by to say hello.

He told them he had been flying over the sea and was now very tired so he sat on the sand to rest. Olly the octopus, started moving his eight legs and said he had to go.

“Where are you going?” asked Oupa and the osprey. “I have to go and visit my friend Olivia, the ox,” said Olly “She is a very odd ox as she likes to eat olives and omelettes.”
So Olly, the orange octopus, swam off to the other side to go and see Olivia, the odd ox.

Kuhl’s remarkable, thought-provoking research (2010, 2014) with infants established that babies require face-to-face interaction to motivate and stimulate language learning, whereas babies who watch and listen to an adult on television, or listen to an audio recording where the adult uses the exact same words as those used in a face-to-face interaction, do not learn new language.

_In other words, learning language is not simply a technical skill. It cannot be learned by listening to a recording or watching a show on a screen. Instead, it is a special gift that is handed down from one generation to the next._

(Roehrich, 2013)

Kuhl’s ground breaking research (2010, 2014) has shown that infants of three to six months naturally listen intently to language. Babies up to the age of eight months recognise, discriminate and take statistics of the most common sounds they hear in their home language, as well as in any language they listen to. In other words, babies are able to listen to languages they do not know, and have not heard before, yet will take statistics and remember the most common sounds (phonemes) in these languages.

... _they’re doing pretty fancy statistics. There’s a computational component to what it is that the kids are doing. And there’s also, interestingly, a social component. And the argument I’m going to make in this talk is that the social brain, the social component is gaining or guiding or enabling the computational component._

(Kuhl, 2010)

After eight months, as babies turn their attention to acquiring home languages, their brains lose this extraordinary capacity.

Kuhl’s research shows that the first year of a baby’s life is the first critical period of development. By six months of age babies can discriminate sounds from any of the languages in the world, something adult brains cannot do. Kuhl argues that no computer in the world has solved the problems that very young human minds solve in the first year of their lives, when they acquire language.

_And what it illustrates is that between 0 and 7 the kids are brilliant regardless of how many languages you put in front of them, that they’re exposed to, they will acquire those languages with great skill. And beyond the age of about 7 there’s a systematic decline. Decline can be seen at 8 to 10 years, at 11 to 15 years, and 17 to 39. I guess that’s most of us in this room, maybe all of us in this room, we kind of drop off the map._

(Kuhl 2010)

By the time they are five years old, most children have mastered the rules of grammar, gender and pragmatics (Nemeth: 2012). This learning can be characterised as learning without-knowing-you-are-learning. This means we seem to instinctively know things about
our home language(s), but experience difficulty in explaining how or why we know a rule. This type of knowing is also referred to as ‘tacit knowledge’.

The NCS CAPS Home Language (DBE, Foundation Phase Home Language, 2011) writes about how children at school gradually learn to become aware of language structures:

*Learners will learn how language structures and conventions are used, and will develop a shared language for talking about language (a ‘meta-language’) so that children can assess their own writing and other texts critically, focusing on meaning, the effectiveness and accuracy (of the texts they read or their personal writing). They also will be able to use this knowledge to experiment with language, to build meaning from word and sentence levels, to whole texts, and to see how a text and its context are related. Through interacting with a variety of texts, learners extend their use of vocabulary and correctly apply their understandings of language structures and conventions.*

5.2.3 The importance of verbal reasoning

Grade R and Grade 1 teachers are able to play a crucial role in broadening and extending the uses of spoken language. This is important, as Whitehurst and Lonigan, (2002), Purcell-Gates et al, (2004) and others emphasize, because children with greater use and understanding of spoken language will become good readers.

Some children live in homes where talk inclines to be mostly functional and regulatory. For example, this is talk to maintain discipline, manage social arrangements and up-hold domestic routines, such as preparing for school, and may be used less often for other reasons, such as for self-expression, to explore thinking itself, and imaginary realms.

Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002) make the interesting observation that the developmental link between talking and reading has generally been ignored in teacher education and research literature. This is hard to understand, as any Foundation Phase teacher is able to identify children with large vocabularies, whose greater command of spoken language correlates with high reading scores. In the same vein, Hall (2003) advocates that most reading problems can be prevented by, among other things, developing and enhancing children’s talk.

In Grade R and Grade 1, the shared reading of enlarged texts (e.g. Big Books, posters, shared writing texts), talk about books in the library corner, popular TV programmes and children’s games, all provide opportunities to support children’s talk and development of verbal reasoning skills.

Discourse can take place during and after reading. Children who regularly have opportunities to express their half-thoughts, ideas, opinions and questions about what they read, will develop deeper understandings of these texts. These children could be described as active rather than passive readers: they develop views about what they read and what interests them, and may know which text types they enjoy reading, and which they do not. This active form of reading is supported in South Africa’s National Curriculum Policy (DBE, General Aims, 2011: 24 – 25), where teachers are encouraged to teach children to become active, creative and critical learners. This is expressed as:
• reading to encourage an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths
• learners who are able to collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.

Questions to promote verbal reasoning and deep comprehension
Asking questions can be regarded as an art. The intention of open-ended questions is to encourage the opening of children’s minds, as they allow children and teachers to create knowledge together. In other words, these are questions to which the teacher does not have a ready-made answer.

Below are Chambers’ (1993) four core questions we can ask children. Although the questions appear to be easy and straight-forward, they are able to reach deeply into young children’s thought processes. At the same time, when asked the core questions almost every child in a class will volunteer his or her ideas.

Core Tell Me Questions
Was there anything that you liked about this story (or text)?
• Was there anything you disliked?
• Was there anything that surprised you? (Or puzzled you?)
• Were there any patterns that you noticed?

Each of these questions can be asked in turn, allowing several children to answer each one. Children are not expected to offer clever answers, but instead to say what seems obvious to them. Children should be allowed to call out short replies: a one word answer, a phrase, or a sentence. In particular, the opportunity to speak should be given to quiet and shy children. Teachers who work with these questions are likely to find their children’s ideas often bring about fresh, and sometimes startling insights.

General Tell Me Questions
In addition to the core questions, Chambers notes that the questions below can be asked of any book or story. They will help children broaden their use of language and thinking by bringing into conversation a range of ideas, information and opinions. Thus, children’s understanding of books will grow significantly.

• Has anything in this story ever happened to you?
• Which character did you like the most?
• When you first saw the book, before you read it, what did you think it would be about? . . . Now that you’ve read the book, is it what you expected?
• Have you read other stories (poems, information books) like this?
• Did you ever get to know what the characters were thinking about? Do you sometimes think like this?
• Were you ever told what the characters were feeling? Do you sometimes feel like this?
• While you were reading, were there any words or phrases, or other things to do with the language that you liked? Or did not like?
• When you think about the book now, after all we’ve spoken about it, what is the most important thing in the story/text, for you?
• We’ve listened to each other talk of all sorts of things about this book. Were you surprised by anything someone said?
• What would you tell your friends about this (fiction or non-fiction) book?

Chambers (1993:91) comments,
This is a long list (of questions). It is not intended that every question is asked every time. Or that the questions should be doggedly plodded through, in the order set out here. Our experience of using the ‘Tell me’ approach is that after a while the framework sinks into the back of the mind; then we don’t consciously use it. We begin to listen more attentively to the questions the children generate themselves – and use those as springboards for discussion.

Children who have regular opportunities to talk in focused ways about the stories they hear or read (fiction and non-fiction) and about popular TV programmes, are learning to develop verbal reasoning skills, and to create deep understandings of texts and other modes of communication, such as television or film.

**Student reflection activity 26: Asking questions to help children understand**

Students work in small groups.

![DVD icon]

See DVD 1 Grade R, Chapter 2, 00:27 – 04:08

1. Watch the DVD clip, paying attention to the questions the teacher asks.
2. Work with a story the group members know well.
3. Plan and write down 6 – 10 carefully chosen *Tell Me* questions (core and general).
4. The questions should allow Grade Rs or Grade 1s to deepen their understandings of a story they have listened to. Choose questions that will allow children to:
   a. think and talk about a story
   b. voice their own thoughts, questions and interpretations of the story
   c. develop meta-language (talk about language: sentences and words).
5. Sit with one other group and present your questions to each other. You may add additional questions to your list, after listening to the other group’s presentation.
6. Where possible, use the story and questions when you next work with young children.
7. These could be children in your family, neighbourhood, or in a school.
   a. Observe the children carefully when you ask the questions
   b. Reflect on which questions were the best in encouraging children’s thinking and talking.
8. Report back to the class on the experience and your reflection.

As children’s reading, comprehension and vocabulary increases, the way is opened for more complex skills to develop, such as higher-order reasoning skills. According to Schieffer, et al., (2002) these include the ability to analyse and speak about the underlying logic of a text,
such as being able to identify language patterns. These reasoning skills in turn develop other higher-level thinking skills, for example, being able to predict the outcomes, make deductions and draw conclusions about texts or events, as well as recognize figurative language and construct their own understanding and meaning from the texts they engage with.

5.2.4 Literacy knowledge

**Student reflection activity 27: The world of print**

Work in pairs

**DVD 1 Grade R, Chapter 2, prediction skills, 00:25 – 06:27.**

After you have watched this clip, discuss the questions below, then read the text below. You might want to come back and watch the clip again after reading, because you might notice things that you didn’t notice the first time.

1. What do you think of the teachers’ questioning techniques during these clips?
2. How is the teacher going about identifying the children’s prior knowledge?
3. Compare and contrast the different questioning levels that the teachers are using in the 3 different classroom environments
4. How and why has the teacher in each classroom adapted (simplified or advanced) her questions to accommodate the classes they are teaching.

As young children become increasingly conscious of, and familiar with, a world rich in print, knowledge continues to develop about language, in its many variations, purposes, forms and structures.

There are commonly-accepted forms of different types of printed material. These forms are referred to as ‘print conventions’. This multi-faceted knowledge about print conventions, for example, includes knowing that in many, but not all, languages we typically read a book from left to right, from the top of a page to the bottom and from the front to the back of a book. Children also need to learn how to hold a book and turn pages, and know which pages to read and which to ignore. Additionally, they learn that a full stop shows the end of a sentence and that a new sentence is marked by capitalising its first letter. However, in the case of poems, the conventional use of capital letters and full stops do not apply as a general rule. It is possible to write a poem in lower case letters, or only capital letters, and not use any full stops. Children also learn that books are written by writers who may also illustrate their writing, or artists may illustrate the text.

Children who are encouraged to ‘read’ the illustrations on book covers also discover that illustrations give clues about the content of the book. The same convention applies to the illustrations inside books: children learn that illustrations alone can ‘tell’ a story (e.g. wordless books); or can provide additional information (e.g. in information books). Some books offer a dual narrative where half the story is told through the words on the page and the remainder is told through the illustrations, and so the reader has to read both the words
and illustrations to construct meaning and understand the story (e.g. Rosie’s Walk by Pat Hutchins).

Children learn they can also create their own stories, or non-fiction texts, with ‘reading’ illustrations. Children who learn to ‘read’ pictures are learning to predict, a cognitive skill that is crucial in reading. Skilled readers seldom read every word in a sentence. Instead, they constantly use prediction strategies to forecast the approaching words of a sentence. They also predict the meaning of unknown words by passing over the ‘unknown’ word and reading on, and then inferring meaning from the new word in its context. There may be a momentary pause to confirm the success of the strategy, or the brain, having conferred a satisfactory meaning, is as likely to continue reading with no delay. Readers may also enjoy predicting how a story might develop, or end. Children can become skilled at using prediction strategies, when taught that reading is always a meaning-making activity.

Children learn to recognise many concepts of print (print conventions) by telling stories, reading books and from exposure to multimodal and digital texts from the time they are infants. Thoughtful Grade R and Grade 1 teachers will encourage children to regularly notice and discuss print conventions during the school day. Young children with these cognitive resources are far more likely to make successful transitions into Grade 1 and beyond.

*Multi-modal texts are those texts that have more than one ‘mode’ so that meaning is communicated through a synchronisation of modes. That is, they may incorporate spoken or written language, still or moving images, they may be produced on paper or electronic screen and may incorporate sound. Different types of multimodal texts that students commonly encounter in their educational environment in print form are picture books, information books, newspapers and magazines. Multi-modal texts in non-print form are film, video, and increasingly, those texts through the electronic screen such as email, the internet and digital media, such as CD Roms or DVDs.*


Like the conventions of printed media, the conventions of multi-modal texts are multi-faceted. Children and teachers together can explore, identify and discuss the conventions that inform the structures and forms of these texts.

**Schools lacking reading resources**

In homes or schools where there is a lack of reading resources beyond basal readers and workbooks, these concepts can be broached easily and creatively. For example, children can create non-fiction texts, also called information texts, and stories to match the pictures they draw, or pictures cut out of newspapers and old magazines. The texts and stories, which can be kept in the book corner for children to enjoy, should include titles, the writers’ names, the year the story was written, page numbers, and so on. A teacher can also invite the children to instruct her to write a word (e.g. ‘ice-cream’) or phrase (e.g. ‘my friends’), or sentence (e.g. ‘I’m playing soccer’. ) on a page the child has illustrated. This writing may be done in the child’s home language or the LoLT, or both. When doing this the teacher would explicitly talk about the conventions followed by writers in most official South African languages. Thus, writers write from left to right, from the top of a page to the bottom, insert headings or sub-headings for new sections and number each page. Whenever a child’s written work is displayed on a classroom wall, teachers and children can discuss various
print conventions. A teacher or granny reading a book to 3 - 6 year olds could work in the same explicit manner, drawing the children’s attention to the conventions of print. In engaging in literacy activities such as these, children’s understanding of print conventions continues to develop.

5.2.5 Developing comprehension strategies in the classroom

In the past, not all teachers taught young children strategies they could use when reading, especially strategies that would help them understand what they were reading. Today, based on numerous research studies, we know that most children who achieve high levels of reading and writing competency are taught by teachers who focus on regular, explicit teaching of strategies that children can use when reading. These strategies develop a range of cognitive skills. The comprehension strategies given in this section are elaborations of Hall’s (2003) ones.

Research evidence shows that children, at all levels, benefit from being taught comprehension strategies. What we are teaching children to realize is that reading needs to be seen as an active, meaning-making process. Everything we read can be understood. We do not read for the sake of reading. Instead, we read to understand and we read for a purpose. Purposes vary, so for example, we read for enjoyment, or to follow instructions, or to read a map or directions, or we read soccer fixture tables. In other words, we also do something with the texts we read.

(Hall 2003:101)

How readers consciously process information

We know that skilful readers use a range of strategies whilst they read texts. Wray & Lewis, cited in Hall (2003: 104), offer a very useful description of the kinds of cognitive activities that go on as we interact with texts, especially non-fiction. Grade R and Grade 1 teachers should be able to use or adapt a number of these strategies for working with their children. See, for example, the points below and the Know – Want to know – Learnt (KWL) chart on the next page. The strategies are best used when they are modelled by teachers, for example, when doing shared reading and shared writing with the children.

Children who read with understanding do the following. They:

1. Draw on prior knowledge. The KWL chart below is useful for this.
2. Have a purpose for reading, the more precise the better. For example, for a teacher to ask children to find out about dinosaurs is too broad and vague. Rather give a specific purpose, such as ‘find out the size of dinosaurs so that I can draw scale pictures of them on the chart’.
3. Learn to use appropriate strategies. Teachers need to model the strategies, so that children can also learn how to apply them.
4. Interact with the text, e.g. they underline, highlight, number, make word webs, mind maps, and so on. Teachers need to model this strategy, showing children how to interact with texts. Shared writing texts are an excellent way to model these strategies, as teachers can underline, circle and highlight words on chalkboards.
5. Monitor understanding as they read. Teachers can ask children to stop every so often and think about what they have read. Can they talk about it? If not, they have not understood what they have read, so they must go back and read again. Another
strategy is to construct a simple mind map of the facts they remember. After reading a text together as in shared reading, make a mind map, using shared writing, to list the important points they remember, the questions they have or what else they would like to know on this topic.

6. Make a record (or, for older children, take notes).
7. Evaluate information – recognise information that is old or wrong, and so on.
8. Assist memory.
9. Communicate the information they read, through discussions, drawing, acting, writing, dancing. (Hall, 2003:104)

Another researcher, Duffy, cited in Hall (2003:104), reminds us that comprehension strategies are always about constructing meaning. They are not skills that can simply be taught by drill methods. In addition, being strategic is not just about knowing the strategies, but is about knowing how and when to use them. This applies as much to children learning to read, as it does to informed teachers who, as professionals, should be trusted to develop their approaches to teaching. Teachers have to begin with children, not with methods or resources or programmes.

Ways of developing comprehension strategies

1. Explicitly teach comprehension strategies
It is recommended that teachers explicitly explain the skill that they want their children to learn, how and why to use it, and why it is useful.

   **WHAT:** For e.g. ‘Today we are going to learn . . . What this means is . . .’
   **WHY:** ‘This is important because . . .’
   **WHEN:** ‘You can use this strategy when . . . . Tomorrow I want you to tell me when you applied this strategy.’
   **HOW:** The teacher explains exactly how to use the strategy, being explicit and using self-talk so that children can listen to their teacher’s mind working. This shows children what to say to themselves as they employ the strategy. The teacher can also illustrate the strategy with a personal experience of hers.

2. Generating questions for information texts: asking WHAT questions
This strategy can be used in groups, small groups, and by individuals. Before a non-fiction text is read, children brainstorm what they know about the topic, and list these facts as bullet points in a **KWL chart** that is divided into 3 columns, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What do you Know?</strong></th>
<th><strong>What do you Want to know?</strong></th>
<th><strong>What have you Learnt?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the knowledge you already have?</td>
<td>When you think about this topic, what would you like to know?</td>
<td>What are the interesting things you learnt when we read the text?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Mental imagery In imagery training for comprehension, children are taught to create a visual image of the text as they read it. When they do this they need to interpret the text. Visualisation is especially suited to reading a sentence or short passage.
Imagery training improves memory, assists in making connections and supports inferential reasoning. The idea is that the image the child creates will help keep the meaning of the text in his or her memory.

4. Graphic organisers
This is a diagram teachers can draw, after their children have listened to or read a text. The diagram records the text’s key concepts. Graphic organisers and story maps also function as summaries. Teachers need to show children how to create a graphic organiser. There are several ways of drawing one. Graphic organisers can be: a circle or oval with the topic written inside it, and with the main ideas written around the circle. Graphic organisers of fiction texts are sometimes called ‘story maps’. Here is an example:

**Story structure and story mapping**
These are ways of helping children identify the content of a story and the way it is organised into a plot structure. Understanding that a story has a setting, a few events, some characters and often a problem that needs to be dealt with, will help children understand the ‘who, what, where, when’ and ‘why’ of stories, as well as what happened. Teachers can teach children to think about these five questions:
1. Who is the main character?
2. Where and when does the story occur?
3. What did the main character(s) do?
4. How did the story end?
5. How do you think the characters felt?
In summary
Readers must focus on comprehension, if they are to understand what they read.

Scarborough (2002) acknowledges that reading is a multi-faceted activity and that readers need to develop the cognitive knowledge and skills that have been described in this unit. The concepts and skills listed under Scarborough’s (2002) ‘language comprehension’ component, will become more strategic over time, as the child reads for meaning and in doing this, learns and develops background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Similarly, the concepts under ‘word recognition’ become more automatic with practice. These concepts combine to create a knowledge and strategy base with which to read fluently.

The focus on teaching children to use strategies when they read, to support their comprehension, is crucial. It is suggested that these skills are taught in an explicit manner, for the best results. Through the use of developmentally appropriate pre-reading activities in Grade R, children who are taught these cognitive skills are well equipped to meet the Grade 1 language and literacy requirements. Their experience of the transition into Grade 1 is more likely to be positive.

Children who enter Grade 1 without this knowledge are often considered at risk for reading failure. This makes Grade R a critical year in a child’s preparation for thinking, reading and writing.

As the writers point out, new theories do not require us to ‘throw out all the ideas about learning or methods of teaching’ that are associated with earlier theories. Indeed, if we think about how ideas emerge, we soon realise that new ideas often are built on older ones.

5.3 Word recognition
For Scarborough (2002) word recognition consists of three separate yet closely linked elements: ‘phonological awareness’, ‘decoding’ and ‘sight recognition’. We will consider each of these separately.

First, let us look at the importance of listening in general:

- Listening is the first mode of language human beings acquire
- It is central to all learning
- Of the four modes of language it is the most used and the least taught
- Listening is not the same as hearing
- It is an activity of the mind and not the ear
- It involves thinking and reasoning
- It is an active process
- Listening activities prepare the child for both reading and writing, because the thinking process is similar in both
- Listening is essential in the phonic component of learning to read
- Phonics requires the ability to discriminate between sounds and the identification of initial and final sounds of words

Glossary
Phonics – the relationship between sounds and the spelling of words.
It is misguided to teach listening skills in isolation as this gives little thought to the contexts in which learning occurs.

At this point, it is helpful to review the importance of perceptual development. Perception refers to the meaning the brain gives to information it receives through the sensory organs. All learning therefore takes place through the perception of the senses as the brain makes contact with the surrounding environment.

You may want to guide your students to look for learning activities for perceptual development.

### 5.3.1 Phonological awareness

Family members who notice children playing with language and who join the game are, without knowing it, supporting the development of phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness involves the ears; it is entirely auditory and does not involve seeing or reading words in print.

Whereas phonological awareness is part of children’s natural development of acquiring home language(s), phonics is different, and is a way of teaching reading, in which the associations between letters and sounds are emphasized.

In early learning centres and in Grade R, teachers may focus intentionally on improving children’s sensitivity to the sounds of language, through a range of playful activities. In doing this children’s phonological awareness is further developed.

**How can preschool teachers support phonological awareness?**

The early years are an ideal time to nurture and extend their explorations. Thoughtful preschool teachers will listen and note children’s spontaneous play with the sounds of language, and encourage it, even joining in themselves.

> For young children, developmentally appropriate phonological awareness activities are a form of play. Riddles, games, singing, and dramatization will bring on laughter, silliness, and experimentation.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009)

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**Student reflection activity 28: Phonological awareness**

Begin this activity working independently, then work in groups of four.

1. Think of your home language. What rhymes, riddles and songs can you remember, where there is an underlying play on the sounds of words?
2. Where have you noticed toddlers or young children playing with words, perhaps stringing them together in pleasing ways, or combining sounds to create nonsense words? What examples can you recall?

3. Discuss your answers to Points 1 and 2 in small groups of four students.

4. Plan three phonological activities that can be used in a Grade R or Grade 1 lesson. Record these activities in a book or on a page. (File this page after the lesson.) Use examples from your own life experiences. You may also use or adapt any of the activities immediately below.

5. Use a plenary session to share your activities. Also discuss any questions that may have arisen in this session.

6. The next time you plan a Grade R or Grade 1 lesson include games or activities that allow children to develop phonological awareness.

**Suggestions to support young children’s development of phonological awareness.**

Schiller (2001: 22–42) suggests the following enjoyable games and activities. These are English examples, but you can also use them examples to stimulate your thinking about examples in the indigenous languages:

- Show children how to enjoy books that play with spoken language
- Enjoy rhymes and poems that play with sounds
- Enjoy songs that focus on movement
- Play games that draw attention to sounds
- Rhyming Riddles
- The Name Game
- Rhyme or Connect Game

**Phonetics, phonics and phonemic awareness**

**Student reflection activity 29: Teaching a new sound**

See DVD 2 Grade 1, Chapter 3, 00:36 – 9:47.
See DVD 1 Grade R, Chapter 3, 00:28–2:54, 03:32–04:48, 04:48–06:24

View these clips for a practical illustration of the teaching of a new sound. Reflect on what works, what does not work and how one can possibly improve on the practices illustrated.

Of the remarkable number of sounds our speech organs can produce, a limited number are used in each language to form words. These distinct sounds are known as ‘phonemes’. In English, there are about forty-four phonemes, which are combined in thousands of ways to construct language and speech. When young children speak they combine the forty-four phonemes with little, if any, effort.

*They are able to combine phonemes quickly and automatically, in order to construct and make sense of the stream of sounds that constitute the everyday conversations.*
Interestingly, humans never have to learn how to do this; they are born with the ability to perceive phonemes. Even four week old infants have definite awareness of phonemes. . . However, when children begin learning to read and write they need to bring attention to this unconscious knowing. Richgels (2002:143).

This cognitive process of bringing conscious attention to phonemes is known as ‘phonemic awareness’.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to segment (break down) a word into individual phonemes (sounds) e.g. (/m/a/d/), as well as being able to combine individual phonemes to create words.

Young readers need to grasp that every spoken or written word is formed by sequencing sounds, in different ways. So, for example, by replacing /m/ with /d/ in the word *dad*, a word with different meaning results.

The *Reading Rockets* website offers explanations and a wide range of associated activities teachers can use in classrooms when teaching phonemic awareness.

‘Phonics’ is a way of teaching reading in schools, which emphasizes knowledge of sound-letter relationships. Children are taught to apply this knowledge when reading, spelling and writing.

**Onset and Rime**

Onset and rime are technical terms used to describe phonological units of a spoken syllable.

Onset refers to the initial phonological unit of any word (e.g. c in *cat*). Onset consists of the initial consonant or consonant blend.

Rime refers to the string of letters that follow (e.g. at in *cat*). Rime consists of the vowel and final consonant(s).

Onset and rime is an effective way of improving phonological awareness. Without phonological awareness we cannot break words down and decode them in order to read unfamiliar words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>onset</th>
<th>rime</th>
<th>word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>at</td>
<td>sat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sp</td>
<td>ot</td>
<td>spot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>str</td>
<td>ap</td>
<td>strap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words which share the same rime will also rhyme.

You may want to ask your students to do the following task in pairs and then share with one another.

Using different rime word families draw up lists from the easiest to the most difficult. For example:
easiest rime e.g. -it, -an, -op
more difficult e.g. –aw, -ick
most difficult e.g. –ate, -ame, -ight

Goswami and Bryant, cited in Hall (2003), were among the first researchers to show that children find it easier to recognise onsets and rimes, than to sound out single phonemes (e.g. c/a/t/ - cat).

Their research showed that:

- Children who learnt onset and rime at four years of age, could recognise and read words more quickly over the next few years than four years olds who had not learnt this.
- Children who struggled to recognise onset and rime in a list of written words were able to do this quite easily informally, in the context of meaningful play, e.g. by saying nursery rhymes and playing games like ‘I spy’, using alliteration and rhymes, and playing with language.
- Beginner readers are considerably helped when they learn to use the strategy of analogy. This means children learn to look carefully at the inner structure of words so they can recognise patterns across words. If they see a word they don’t recognise they can make use of similar words they do know, thus using ‘analogies’. For example, if a child sees the word /cat/ but does not recognise it she can find another word with the rime /at/. Recognising a word such as /hat/, she could think “I know ‘hat’, then that must be ‘cat’”. However, this strategy by itself offers no guarantee that the child will understand the meaning of ‘cat’.

**Student reflection activity 30: Phonemic awareness**

Work in small groups.

1. Read again in the paragraph above what Goswami and Bryant’s research showed.
2. Discuss why a child who may be able to read a word correctly, in this case the word /cat/, may not understand what the word means.
3. Share your thoughts with others.

**Thinking about how to teach phonics**

Phonemic awareness should precede the teaching of phonics, to allow children to develop familiarity and an ear for listening to spoken language, and in particular, to words and their constituent parts. Phonics is most successful when taught early on to beginner readers, before Grade 2.

Hall, (2003:90) who reviews the research on phonics instruction, writes, “Phonics taught earlier proved much more effective than teaching it after Grade 1.” Similarly, the United States National Reading Panel (2000) advises, “Phonics teaching failed to exert a significant impact on the reading skills of low-achieving readers above Grade 2.”
Should teachers purchase and follow a commercial phonic programme? Many are available and a school might purchase a particular programme or all the schools in a district may use the same phonics programme on recommendation from the local Education Department district office.

Alternatively, the question arises: could teachers use a less formal approach? In this case, they would not work daily from a ready-made programme, but use suitable, relevant teaching moments throughout the day to develop contextually-driven phonemic awareness and a phonics focus. In these classrooms, teachers would make use of a range of phonemic awareness activities, such as games, songs and rhymes. Teachers would also use the home language and literacy period to focus on phonemic awareness. Here examples include: talking and thinking about specific words that arise during reading lessons and general conversations; or focusing on interesting words the children bring from home; as well as words children ask their teacher to write on the chalkboard when they do a shared writing activity. (Hall, 2003)

A third option would be for teachers to combine both of the above approaches.

Because of the ease and success with which children acquire their home languages without being formally taught to do so, some researchers and curriculum planners argue against using approaches that are overly formal when teaching very young children. Instead, they recommend that teachers:

- Make use of shared reading of texts and books, especially books that play with sounds
- Encourage children to use invented spelling when they write
- Teach the onset and rime strategy
- Link, where possible, these activities to children’s life experiences, e.g. use children’s names and foods or beverages the children know, when teaching phonics.

**Student reflection activity 31: Review lesson and reflect on learning**

Work in groups of 5 or 6.

1. Look at the first clip at 00:24 – 2:54 in Chapter 3 on DVD 1, where the student teacher tells the story of *Olly the Octopus*.
2. Look at the third clip at 04:48 – 6:24, where the same student teacher retells the story.
3. Lastly, look at the final clip 12:40 – 14:06, where the same teacher focuses on letter formation. Here you see the children using their bodies.
4. As you watch the above three clips of the same student teacher:
   a. List the teaching sequence (the order of the lessons) that is used, across all three clips.
b. Comment on the effectiveness of each step.
   i. Where did the student teacher succeed well?
   ii. Where could the student teacher have provided additional support?
   iii. In these three clips the student teacher did not always focus on the children’s prior knowledge. For example, do you think all the children knew what the ‘sea’ was? The children do not offer the word ‘omelette’ when asked to. What might be the reasons?
   iv. The student teacher works with the whole class. Comment on the effectiveness of this choice.
   v. Would you have worked with the whole class, or not? Outline the reasons for your preference.

5. Look at DVD Grade R, Chapter 4; 00:27 - 03:37, 03:40 – 13:20 where the student teacher consolidates the phonics lesson.
   a. How could the same lesson be taught, making more use of children’s natural ability to play with and enjoy language in the context of teaching phonics? Be specific in your response. For example, if you would add a song to the lesson, say when you would add the song, and name the song.
   b. Would you plan and teach the lesson differently?

Student reflection activity 32: When children struggle to participate

Work in groups of 5 or 6.

1. Watch the DVD lesson
2. Can you identify two or three children whose developmental readiness is not as advanced as that of many of the other children?
3. Describe what is happening in the exchange between each child who is struggling and the teacher who helps her. What is the struggling child able / not able to do?
4. Critically consider the assistance that is given to the struggling child.
   a. What support is offered? Do you think the support is useful?
   b. Do you think the helpers understand the difficulty the child faces? Motivate your answer.
5. Discuss what strategies you would use to help a child in a similar position.
   a. You are required to provide a detailed answer, which includes a description of each strategy. For example, if you recommend a language game, specify what the game is, and write the words of the game.

Student reflection activity 33: Review the DVD consolidation activities

Work in groups of 5 or 6

1. Watch the DVD lesson
2. Can you identify two or three children whose developmental readiness is not as advanced as that of many of the other children?
3. Describe what is happening in the exchange between each child who is struggling and the teacher who helps her. What is the struggling child able / not able to do?
4. Critically consider the assistance that is given to the struggling child.
   a. What support is offered? Do you think the support is useful?
   b. Do you think the helpers understand the difficulty the child faces? Motivate your answer.
5. Discuss what strategies you would use to help a child in a similar position.
   a. You are required to provide a detailed answer, which includes a description of each strategy. For example, if you recommend a language game, specify what the game is, and write the words of the game.
Phonemic Awareness - from easy to more difficult tasks
Drawing on several research reports, the United States National (USN) Reading Panel (2000) listed phonemic activities, ranging from easier to more difficult as follows:

1. **Sound comparison:** identifying the names of objects in pictures that begin with the same sound. So, for example, children looking at a picture of three objects, will recognise and say that ‘bat, ball’ and ‘boy’ all begin with the same sound.
2. **Blending onset-rime units into real words** (e.g. tr – ick)
3. **Blending phonemes into real words** (e.g. f /r / o / m _from)
4. **Deleting a phoneme and saying the word that remains** (e.g. pant / ant; trip / rip)
5. **Saying and then segmenting words into phonemes** (e.g. bat into b/ a / t)
6. **Blending phonemes into non-words** (e.g. ar / dar / gar / )

Hall (2003: 88)

One intriguing research recommendation of the USN Reading Panel (2000) is that teachers should only teach children one to two phonemic awareness skills. They found that children who were taught one to two phonemic awareness skills, e.g. segmenting words onto phonemes, or using onset and rime, showed stronger phonemic awareness, and made better progress in reading than the children who were taught three or more phonemic awareness skills. Their advice to teachers is:

- Teach one skill at a time, to make sure the skill is understood, before moving on to the next skill.
- Teach children how to apply each skill as soon as it is taught.
- In any class it is highly unlikely that all children will be at similar developmental readiness. Individual children will differ in the extent of phonics teaching they need.

**Systematic and analytic phonics teaching**
There are two general approaches to teaching phonics: Systematic Phonics and Analytic Phonics.

**Systematic phonic** programmes emphasise letter-by-letter phonological decoding. In other words, phonemes are emphasized. The teaching strategy is to sound and blend sequential letter-sounds. Teachers follow a specific plan, and teach children sound-letter associations, in a particular order.

Children generally first sound out consonant letters and short and long vowel sounds, and later advance to vowel and consonant diagraphs, e.g. oi, ea, sh, th. Planned programmes usually contain blends of letter-sounds that occur as smaller units in words, such as initial blends, e.g. st (as in ‘stick’), sm (as in ‘small’), bl (as in ‘block’), pr (as in ‘pram’) and final stems, e.g. – end (as in ‘bend’), –ack (as in ‘back’), -ill (as in ‘pill’), -op (as in ‘stop’). Children may also write sentences, using the letter-sound correspondences they are learning.

An example of what a teacher might do is as follows. When the teacher writes the word ‘cat’ on the chalkboard, she will do so slowly. As she writes each letter, she will touch it and ask the children to say each sound aloud. Then she will make a blending motion under the
letters, with her hands, to indicate the children must blend the individual sounds. In this way, children learn to read the word. Thus, children are taught, when they meet unfamiliar words, to vocalise the sounds of the letters and then blend them.

The USN Reading Panel (2000) reported:
1. Phonics taught early was much more effective than when taught later.
2. Training had the most impact when taught in Grade R, but it failed to have significant impact when taught beyond Grade 2.
3. For greater impact, teachers also should teach children to use strategies such as: using analogy to read words, and reading words by paying attention to spelling patterns as well as multi-syllabic decoding strategies.

Letterland, is a well-known example of a systematic phonics programme. Based on the principle that learning is effective when it is a fun-filled game, teachers use stories, pictures and actions to introduce each letter of the English alphabet according to a planned schedule. Every letter is represented as a character, e.g. Sammy Snake, Talkative Tess, Quarrelsome Queen and Zig Zag Zebra.

THRASS, another well-known systematic phonics programme, uses a photographic principle which enables learners to follow a more visual approach to learning letters and sounds. The 26 letters of the alphabet are identified and referred to by name. This provides a clear understanding of their use in representing sounds in English words. The learner is able to graphically see that one letter does not just represent one sound. Letters can be used in groups of two, three and four to represent sounds and these sounds can be represented by different spelling choices.

The THRASS chart consists of 44 phonemes (speech sounds) and 120 key graphemes (spelling choices) of English.

To conclude:
Systematic phonics emphasises letter-by-letter decoding. What is emphasised is the phoneme. The teaching strategy here is to sound and blend the sequential letter-sounds. For the word fun, the teacher will write each letter, touch each letter and ask the children to say each sound. Then the children blend the sounds, as she makes a blending motion under each word.
Hall (2003:91)

Analytic phonics takes a slightly different route. Here children learn to analyse sound-letter relationships only once a word has been recognised and read.

Analytic phonics can also be used to identify unknown words, by using analogy to the onsets and rimes in unknown words. In this approach, children are taught key words that contain common spelling patterns. Children are then taught to break an unknown word into the component onset and rime, and to search a word wall for known words, to find a word with the same onset and rime. If ‘hat’ was an unknown word, children will note the /at/, look for a similar word on the word-wall, find ‘cat’ on the word-wall and realize, “If I know cat then I know hat.”
Hall (2003:92)
Reading Recovery is an example of an analytic phonics programme.

The USN Reading Panel (2000) found no significant differences between the effectiveness of the two approaches to teaching phonics. What is important is that the teacher is systematic in her teaching.

Many teachers use incidental teaching moments that occur throughout a school day, to draw the children’s attention to word study, vocabulary building, spelling and phonics.

**Student reflection activity 34: Teaching Phonics**

Work in groups of 5 or 6.

Discuss the following questions:

1. What is the difference between the systematic and analytic approaches to teaching phonics?
2. Which approach(es) would you use, and what are the reasons for your choice?
3. Discuss whether the student teachers you have watched on DVD footage have used a systematic or analytic approach to teaching phonics.
4. Were all the children the student teachers taught at the same developmental level? In other words, did the lesson take into account the children’s individual levels of knowledge?
5. Do you think phonics should be taught to the whole class, or not? Argue your point of view. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of whole class teaching. How would you scaffold teacher demonstration, whole class learning, group and /or pair work and independent learning?

A phonemic activity many children enjoy is to have fun with rhyming words, such as identifying those in well-known rhymes, and playing games with words that rhyme.

There is a note of caution: some studies indicate that efforts to accelerate learning to read, through early phonics training have shown no effects (Snow et al., 1998). Evidence suggests that such training, without a teacher’s clear understanding of phonemic awareness, may be detrimental to children remembering words and learning to spell.

### 5.3.2 Decoding

**Spelling-sound relationships**

Decoding language is often taught in literacy programmes that focus on phonemic awareness, phonics and blending of sounds. According to Scarborough (2002) the blending of sounds implies that children understand:

- the alphabetic principle, and know that each letter of the alphabet represents a sound
- that when the letters are put together, words can be formed.
‘Alphabetic knowledge’ refers to knowing the names of the letters of the alphabet. Children also need to recognise both lower case (e.g. /e/ f/ h/) and upper case letters (e.g. /E /F /H/). It makes good sense for teachers to link learning to write the letters of the alphabet with learning phonics.

Many researchers point out that knowing the alphabet is a strong predictor of short- and long-term reading success (Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Chall, 1990). Learning the names of the letters of the alphabet also helps children remember the sound-letter relationships associated with the letters of the alphabet.

5.3.3 Sight recognition

‘Sight words’ are those words that are easily recognised when reading, so that readers will not need to attempt to decode them. Sight words tend to be words that are frequently used in texts. English sight words include words such as: “the, who, what, that, was, is”. For many children, English sight words like these take time to learn. With increasing exposure to reading and writing, children become more confident and skilled at reading. The more accurate and automatic readers become at recognising words quickly, the more cognitive space there is for attending to comprehension.

5.4 Scarborough’s research recommendations

Scarborough (2002: 107-108) researched the feasibility of designing a regulatory framework for designing tests to be used to identify pre-school children at risk of developing reading problems in school. The concerns were:

- 22 out of 200 children were misdiagnosed as being at risk, in other words, these were ‘false alarms’
- Providing intervention programmes for ‘false alarms’ was financially costly
- This would be costly in other ways: the negative educational and psychological implications of mislabelling children, who would have achieved adequately, and therefore were not at risk, was of concern, i.e. misdiagnosis could do harm
- Diagnosing risk was problematic at a younger age; a single test was not reliable in predicting future reading deficits. It was shown that low test scores in any particular area could shift within a year or two
- The linear, prescribed developmental trajectories needed to become more nuanced and less linear in form
- Providing speech-language therapy did not reduce the risk of ‘at risk’ children
- Phonological awareness was found to play a contributing role in learning to read. Future training programmes were thus advised to include training in developing this skill
- Linking letter formation with phonological awareness was also found to be beneficial.

Additional components recommended for intervention programmes included a focus on:
- Developing print concepts
- Retaining verbal information
- General development of oral language skills, especially expressive vocabulary.
It was noted that “although there was no guarantee that training in these skills would facilitate children’s reading acquisition”, research to investigate the effectiveness of the above components could be carried out in the future.

**Conclusion**

Effective teaching and learning pose a range of challenges to all educators, even those who have many years of experience. It is now generally acknowledged that teachers have to invest in lifelong learning in order to manage the many challenges of the Twenty-first Century.

The Literacy Guide and DVDs provide theory as well as practical examples which can be used to enhance Foundation Phase teacher education. The Student Reflection Activities should encourage students to take an inquiry stance and approach theory and practice as an integrated whole aimed at optimal learning for themselves and ultimately for their learners. Included are examples of different contexts and different student teachers trying to deal with everyday teaching challenges in Foundation Phase classrooms. Teacher educators and their students are invited to add their own lenses to interrogate these critical teaching incidents, thereby contributing to their own professional development.