Tutorial letter 501/3/2014

TEACHING LITERCAY TO ADULTS
ABT1517

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:
This tutorial letter contains important information about your module.

BAR CODE

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Introduction

Welcome to this course on **Teaching literacy to adults**, one of the modules in both the Higher Certificate and the Diploma in Adult Basic Education and Training. This module aims to introduce you to the teaching of literacy to adults. We hope that you will enjoy each of the six units in this module and that you will be learning things that you want to know about why and how adults learn. We hope also that you will gain knowledge and experience which will help you in your work as educator, trainer and developer.

The module is an introductory one at level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and is meant to outline adult learning information that is of practical application to an entry level adult basic education and training practitioner.

In this Introduction we introduce you to the contents of the module on **Teaching literacy to adults**. In it you will find basic information about:

- the aims of the module
- the learning outcomes of the module
- the units in the module
- the study guide material and readings
- sources of additional information
- tutorial support
- assignments and assessment
- study expectations.

Aims of the module

This module aims to enable help you gain introductory knowledge, skills, and applied competence in facilitating the acquisition of reading and writing skills in the mother-tongue language of an adult learner. This module will enable you to teach initial mother-tongue literacy to adults.

Learning outcomes

The statements of learning outcomes provided below tell you what **results** are expected from your study of this module. It tells you what content you are expected to know as well as what you should be able to do or demonstrate. Of course these learning outcomes rest on the assumption that you will read and study this study guide, engage in the recommended study activities, and complete all the assignments.

By the end of the module you should be able to do the following (both in spoken and appropriate written form):

1. Identify two main approaches to teaching, reading and writing (synthetic and analytic)
2. Use placement assessment effectively and appropriately
3. Teach reading using appropriate methods and techniques
4. Teach learners to write for a range of purposes
5. Use formative assessment effectively and appropriately
6. Use summative assessment effectively and appropriately

7. Integrate reading and writing to enable transfer of skills from classroom to general life situations

The module units

The **Teaching literacy to adults** module consists of the following topic areas that are covered in six study Units of printed material:

Unit	Title	Topics covered
1	Approaches to teaching reading	Two approaches to teaching reading Using the approaches appropriately
2	Placing the learners	Placement tests Interviews Physical difficulties and how to overcome them
3	Teaching reading	Teaching the relationship of writing to oral language Teaching the mechanics of print Teaching word attack skills Punctuation and print conventions Teaching reading with a range of text reading methods Encouraging meaningful reading
4	Teaching writing	The mechanics of writing Writing as a meaningful experience Structuring, drafting and editing writing
5	Formative and summative assessment in reading	Strategies for formative assessment of reading Strategies for formative assessment of writing How to give constructive feedback Using appropriate forms of summative assessment Collecting and presenting evidence of achievement

6	Transferring reading and writing skills	Making reading and writing meaningful in practice Applying reading and writing in different contexts Sustaining mother tongue literacy

The study guide material and readings

The instruction given in this module is done in two ways:

- through this study guide with its units of printed course materials and readings which you are expected to read and study, and
- through interactions with a tutorial group (if you can attend one).

Units

The printed course material for the **Teaching literacy to adults** module is divided up into six **units**. Each unit covers topics related to one of the learning outcomes.

What is in each unit?

Each unit has:
8. Aims
9. Learning outcomes
10. Content material
11. Activities
12. Readings
13. Further reading

Aims
These provide a **general** statement on what you will learn in the unit and on what material has been provided to help you to do this.

Learning outcomes
These are **specific** statements about what you will be able to do when you have worked through the unit and engaged in other course activities related to the unit.

Content material
This is the material you will read and think about. Other supporting materials, mainly readings, may also be used.

Activities
Included in the study material will be a number of activities. These tasks should help you check your own understanding of the material. The activities will include questions, exercises, self-tests and ideas to think and write about.

Readings
At the end of some of the units you may find a readings or readings.

Further reading
A list of further readings will be provided near the end of some units. These readings can be found in textbooks, books, journal articles and other publications as well as on the Internet. You will have to find these readings yourself. In nearly all cases the books and journals are available in the University of South Africa Library and some are available at regional centres of the University.

How much time must I spend on each unit?

How long do I need to study this module and each unit of this module? This module is rated at 12 credits. This means that it is assumed that you will spend about 120 hours of study on this module. Usually this means that you must plan to spend time

- reading the materials,
- engaging in activities as you read, and attending tutorials
- writing assignments, and preparing for and writing the examination.

We recommend that you study for the following number of hours:

Reading through this introduction and the six units (40 hours) (about 6 hours per module)
Doing activities and attending tutorials (40 hours)
Writing assignments (this includes preparation, reading, writing and careful editing): (20 hours)
Preparing for and writing the examination (20 hours).

Sources of additional information

Most of the basic information you need for the **Teaching literacy to adults** course is either presented in the this study guide or in the tutorial letter you received with it.

But what about information you need that is not found in the above? What other information do you need?

Further reading
Some information can be got from recommended books or journal articles listed in the Further reading section near the end of each unit. These you can borrow from the University library.

The Internet
Another primary source of information is the Internet or World Wide Web. Computer facilities are available at the University for you to use this computer based resource.

The other students studying this module

Studying by yourself can be a lonely task. A rich resource of support, information and experience is your fellow students (whether given informally, by your setting up a study group, or by joining a UNISA tutorial group).

Support from the module coordinator
You can make use of the support given by the module co-ordinator. You are welcome to make appointments to see the co-ordinator and you can also communicate with him or her by letter, telephone, fax or e-mail (details are given in the Tutorial letter).

Assignments and assessment

What is going to be assessed?

The assessment in this module will be based on **assignments** and **examination**.

Assignments
You will be asked to complete **two assignments** during the course. Each written assignment has a due date and must be sent in by that date. The first assignment is worth 5% of the final marks. And the second is worth xx%. Completion of the **first assignment** is a requirement for entry in to the final examination. Note well that if this assignment has not been submitted you will not be allowed to write the examination.

Examination
This will be written at one of the recognised UNISA examination centres. The examination will last two hours.
Things to remember about assessment

In thinking about assessment, remember that what should be assessed is **your demonstration** that you have achieved the **learning outcomes** of this course. To do this you need to:

- show that you have **knowledge** about teaching literacy to adults (which you demonstrate by writing in appropriate ways in assignments and examination answers).

- demonstrate that you have the **skills** to think and plan how you would use your knowledge of teaching literacy to adults in practical ways in your education and training activities.

- display **attitudes** that indicate that the knowledge you have of how to teach literacy to adults is meaningful to you personally as an educator of adults and that the way you use your skills will be effective when working with adult literacy learners (which is displayed in the way you demonstrate your knowledge and skills).

Some things that will **not** help you demonstrate your achievement of the learning outcomes are the following:

- Writing what you have learned by **rote** (this means learning words, texts or facts off by heart without really understanding their meaning). You will not do very well in your assessments if you simply copy what is in the study material.

- Not making use of your own experience. We are very interested in your experiences, ideas, feelings and activities as an adult learner yourself. You will do well in your assessments if you combine what you have learned from the

study material with your own well thought out ideas. You will do well if can show us that you can use what you have learned in your work and activities.

Study expectations

To be truly successful in this module will require that you spend a considerable number of study hours reading and writing. The module was written assuming that you have a School grade 12 level competence in the language of instruction and in reading and writing skills. It is further assumed that you can learn from predominantly written material and that you can find, analyse and evaluate information relevant to the learning programme' Lastly it is expected that you will spend time in the careful reading and study of the course material and readings provided and that you will do the assignments and prepare for the examinations.

Unit 1: Approaches to teaching reading

Introduction

Before you can teach literacy to adults you have to have some idea of how you will do it. You have to have answers to such questions as, "How do I start?", "What approach should I use?", "What methods of teaching literacy are best and which one I should choose?", "Do I start with sounds, or letters of the alphabet, or words and sentences?" This module looks at this starting point – your approach to teaching literacy.

Aims of the unit

This module aims to introduce you to the two main approaches to teaching literacy to enable you to make an informed choice on which approach or approaches to use.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Identify two main approaches to teaching reading and writing (synthetic and analytic)
You will demonstrate this by being able to:

- Describe the two approaches and explain the differences in learning focus between the two
- Correctly identify the approach being used in different learning activities and materials
- Use an approach appropriately and effectively.

A note on terms: What do we mean by approach, method and technique?

For teaching purposes it is important to distinguish between approaches, methods and techniques. What are the distinctions between these three things?

An **approach** is the general, overall way in which we set about our educational activities. It is influenced by what we believe about learning, about human beings, and about the purposes of education and training.

A **method** is a practical way in which we implement our teaching. A method should be an effective way of achieving the educational purpose and should fit in with the general approach. Discussion in small groups is a method. Lecturing is a method.

A **technique** is a very specific method or part of a method. For example there are various techniques for running discussions in small groups.

Do remember that different books and authors may use different terms to these but the general pattern will be the same.

Two approaches to teaching reading

There are many different approaches and methods of teaching reading and writing but there are two main groups of approaches. These are the so-called synthetic and analytic approaches

The synthetic approach

To synthesize something is to combine a number of parts into a coherent whole. As the name suggests, the **synthetic** approach tries to put things together, to build up the whole from its parts. Other terms for the synthetic approach are the **bottom-up phonic** or **syllabic** approach.

Letters and syllables are taught first, these are then used to sound out words, and then words in sentences are read and finally meaning is obtained.

This approach stresses the importance of making the learner skilled in recognising and sounding out letters and syllables, before she or he puts them together to make words and sentences. Indeed, learning to read involves "tricking" the brain into seeing letter marks on page as the equivalent of speech sounds and words. This does not come naturally and so to help us to link the letters with sounds, much practice is needed. Most people learn to read more easily by starting with small units of one or two letters.

Emphasis is on accurate production of speech sounds represented by letters and combinations of letters.

Many of us were taught in this way when we were at school.

Synthetic approaches work best with languages where the correspondence between letter and sound is very regular (as with most African languages and Spanish) rather than those where the correspondence is irregular (such as English). The more complex the spelling of a language, the more practice is needed.

The main strength of this approach is that it gives learners skills to deal with unfamiliar text, in that they can sound out new words for themselves.

However, with the emphasis on letter/syllable-sound correlation, learners are at risk of concentrating so much on producing the sounds of words they are reading that they forget about the meaning of the words in the text. There is a danger that phonics may simple be the mechanical drilling of sound/letter correspondences and chanting out aloud rather than the use of phonics as the entry into real reading.

The analytic approach

The **analytic** approach is the reverse of the synthetic one. To analyse something is to examine in detail its parts or structure. Some writers have called this the **top-down** approach. In language teaching it is often called the **language experience** or **whole language** approach or the **look and say** approach.

As the name suggests this approach starts with a whole piece of written text, such as a short sentence. It emphasises meaning as most important in teaching somebody to read and write, and uses either a whole sentence or a whole word which has strong meaning in the learners' lives, as a starting point in teaching.

Learners repeat the sentence as they scan the written text from left to right, and are then led to break the sentence down into words and then syllables and then letters.

The strength of the analytic approach is that from the beginning, learners are aware of the meaning carried in the text they are reading.

A very important educational principle states that when teaching we should move from the known to the unknown. People learn best when they can connect new knowledge to existing knowledge, that is, when the new knowledge is meaningful.

It is important therefore to link new learning to the knowledge and experiences that learners bring with them. If learning takes place with strange and new things out of context, it will be less likely to succeed. The whole language approach emphasises the need to begin with something that has **meaning** in the lives of the learners.

The use of key words or sentences that have some special meaning in the lives of learners are often used as the starting point to generate discussion at the beginning of each teaching session, often in connection with an picture or photograph. The key words or sentences are then broken up into smaller units of words, syllables and letters for learners to recognise and write them.

Some of the benefits of the analytic or whole language approach are said to be:

- There is greater participation from learners in the form of discussion.
- There are more opportunities for learners to practice language in a meaningful way.
- There is greater communication between learners, and between learners and educator
- Learners learn language in a meaningful context and not in isolation.
- Learning takes place in an integrated way, as speaking, listening reading and writing skills are integrated.

- Learners' experiences and life contexts can be used as resources.
- Learning is enhanced because topics and themes are relevant to the lives of the learners.
- Learners are encouraged to use language in everyday life situations, thereby gaining confidence in communicating with a wide range of people in society.
- Learners are encouraged to think critically and engage with current issues.
- All the basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking can be accommodated in a meaningful way.

This approach tends to work best with learners who, although not literate, have long been exposed to print in their lives and have some knowledge about how it works.

However, the approach has been criticised for not equipping learners with strategies for dealing with unfamiliar text. Though the approach may help learners develop a positive attitude to reading, it requires a long time with expert tuition to become fluent readers. It also seriously disadvantages low-income learners without experience or access to a print rich environment.

Eclectic approaches

Eclectic approaches try to combine the best from different approaches, though usually their starting point is either the synthetic or analytic approach. Thus most modern literacy programmes try and combine some of the strengths of both the main approaches.

Programmes that start with a synthetic or phonic approach will also use meaningful text themes.

Programmes starting with an analytic approach will add initial exercises and drills to improve word recognition skills to get accustomed to the sound of syllables and words. Repetitive practice in reading each whole sentence is combined with exercises requiring learners to practise recognising and reproducing single letters within these sentences. Letters are introduced systematically, so that learners first work with letters representing single simple sounds and later with combinations of letters representing more complex speech sounds. Thus writing is introduced letter by letter and sound by sound while reading is learnt via whole sentences and words.

Which approach is best?

There is an old saying in literacy work that "all literacy methods work". One reason for this is that the particular approach or method used is not the only factor is learning to read. Think how important the other factors are – the motivation of the learner, the pressure in the general environment to become literate, the dedication, enthusiasm and skill of the educator, etc. So saying that one approach seems better needs to be taken with that qualification.

Recent research has shown that the synthetic or phonic approach is closest to how the brain actually "reads". Psychologists have found that a process of mentally sounding out words is an integral part of all reading. This is so even for highly skilled silent readers (Rayner et al, 2001, Rayner et al, 2002). Learners have been shown to learn to read much faster through phonic methods that break down words into syllables, especially in languages with regular spelling (as in all African languages in South Africa). Whole

language approaches have been shown to be inferior in practical achievement (Abadzi, 2006:44-47).

So we would agree that the synthetic, bottom-up, phonic approach is better than the analytic, whole language, look and say approach. However, unless reading is a meaningful activity, something which is prioritised in the analytical approach, it is unlikely to lead to real success. Reading has to be a making sense activity. Today, therefore, there has been a move towards a more flexible and balanced use of teaching methods where different approaches are combined – we use phonics with language experience, with discussion, with structured key sentences or free discussion and the use of key sentences generated by the learners.

Using the approaches appropriately

We have now considered the debate between the two main approaches to reading, between phonics and look and say. What then do we actually do when we teach reading? How do we make sure that learners end up as fluent readers, able to make sense of what they read? If we see strengths in both approaches how should we combine them and in what order should we do this?

It is important to teach our learners phonics because readers often need to sound out the syllables of words especially when we come across unfamiliar words.

It is important that learners so find reading a meaningful experience, indeed so meaningful that they will be able to read for pleasure as well as for other reasons.

In the rest of this unit we will look at how we can use the best of these two approaches in an appropriate way.

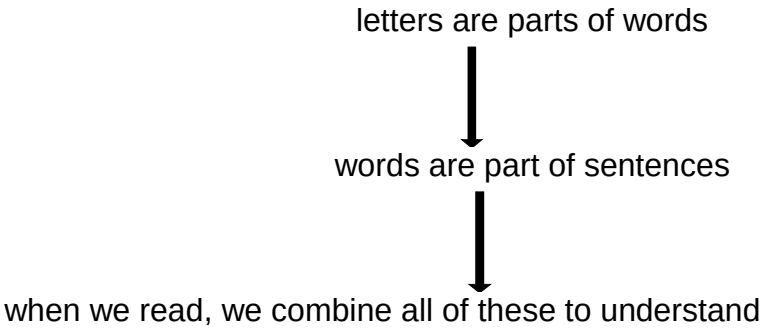
How can we teach phonics in a meaningful way?

In literacy work, by phonics we mean the sounding out of letters, syllables and using these to build words. In the phonic approach the parts of words (letters and syllables) are taught first.

But we do not read only by looking at individual letters or individual words. It is just as important for us to introduce our learners to the idea of reading for meaning – we have to teach them that they can give meanings to the "mark they see on the page".

There is a need for the initial breakthrough in understanding that the sounds we hear in speech can be represented by marks on a page of paper according to various writing and printing conventions (such as that we read from left to right and from top to bottom of a page). To read a person first has to be aware of the separate sound patterns in speech that we call sounds, syllables, and words.

This means that we need to introduce beginner readers to the idea that



It is important that learners are not drilled in sounds and then asked to read something that they do not understand. Many school children who were taught by the phonics methods in the past were not taught well. Teachers would spend too many lessons drilling sounds, with learners chanting them over and over again in a meaningless fashion. Sound and letter combinations were taught on their own and not as part of meaningful sentences. So learners spent a lot of time building sounds into one word, and not into sentences which together made meaning. They did little actual reading of texts. This resulted in lessons becoming childish and boring.

For these reasons in the 1980s and 1990s there was a move away from the phonics approach, in favour of teaching whole words and sentences. But more recently, literacy teachers have recognised that it is useful to teach phonics to help beginner readers. But they warn that we should not use phonics on their own as the only reading method or approach. These more recent methods are careful to use phonics in an imaginative and varied way and to always teach letters or sounds with words and sentences, and never on their own.

How can we use learners' own thoughts, words and sentences to teach them to read?

Because of the importance of meaning in successfully learning to read, the analytic approach encourages methods that use the learners own words.

An example of how this is done is the following:

An initial lesson in a language experience literacy class	
Step 1	
INSERT PICTURE EQUIVALENT TO Wedephol picture page 42 of “Teaching literacy to adults Source: Wedepohl (1988)	The teacher shows the class a picture or poster and starts a discussion about it by asking questions. She should ask questions like: What is happening in the picture? Who do you think these people are? What do you think they are doing? How do you think they feel? Where do you think they come from? What do you think they are saying? The teacher should get the learners to talk about what they see and to relate the discussion to the learners own lives.
Step 2	
INSERT SUITABLE PICTURE OF DISCUSSION GROUP AROUND PICTURE	As the learners discuss the picture the teacher "catches" a sentence that one of the learners says. For example one of the learners says that the man in the picture is saying *"My name is Mandla."* The teacher then chooses this sentence that the learner has spoken and writes this sentence on the board. The teacher reads the sentence to the class and points to each word as she reads. She lets the class read the sentence while she points to each word as they read the sentence.
Step 3	
INSERT PICTURE LIKE p. 43	The teacher writes the same sentence on a strip of cardboard and places it under the sentence on the board. She or he reads the sentence. Then the learners read the sentence again and point to the different words. They see that the words on the cardboard strip match the words written on the board.
Step 4	

INSERT PICTURE LIKE p. 434a	The teacher cuts up the sentence strip into separate words. She uses 'Prestik' and rebuilds the sentence under the sentence on the board. The learners now match the words under the sentence on the board. They each have a turn to rebuild the sentence.	
Step 5		
INSERT PICTURE LIKE p. 434b	The learners take the words and arrange them to form the sentence they have learnt. They can then copy the sentence into their books and illustrate the sentence.	

When you use this method you will find that at first your learners will probably only memorise certain words from the sentences that they read. That is fine – as a first step towards reading. But they will soon need other skills to help them read – such as *sounding out words* using phonics and *guessing* by looking at the picture or the whole sentence or by understanding the story.

Activity 1

What is happening in the pictures?

Now let us look again at each of the pictures in the example above and think about what is actually happening. Use the following list to guide your thoughts.

14. Do you think that the discussion in picture 1 makes learners think so that what they read will make sense?

15. Do the learners see that their thoughts and what they say can be written in words?

16. Does the teacher use the learners' own words or sentences?

17. Do the learners read words that are familiar to them? Are the words that they learn useful to them?
18. Do the learners discover that what is written is the same as what is spoken?

19. Does the sentence they read have meaning for them?

20. Does the picture help learners to understand what they are reading?

21. Do the learners see that the sentence is made up of separate words?

You probably gave ticks to each of the above questions. The steps that we have given in the pictures are the basic steps that are often used when teaching adults to read using an analytic approach.

Some literacy courses and packages that use this approach usually suggest which words should be used in the beginning and which should be used later in the

programme. The teacher has to “catch” a sentence (we can call it a "key sentence") from the learners that includes the words she wants to teach. In the pictures. The key sentence in the example above was "My name is Mandla."

In the next section we will look at a method that is similar to the one we have just discussed, except that the sentence is pre-planned and the sentence is taken from a story that the teacher reads to the class. Let us take a look at the a more structured language experience approach.

How can we use a story to teach reading?

Another way of using the above analytic approach but in a more *structured way* is to use a story to get the class discussion going.

Some literacy courses come with ready-made stories and sentences ready to be used with a class. The teacher reads a whole story to the class. This story acts as a stimulus to get the learners thinking and talking – but the story is also used to structure and focus the lesson. When you use a story to teach reading, it is important that you use a story that is relevant to the learners’ lives so that it teaches them to read and write useful and important information about themselves. While this way of teaching is similar to the method described in the pictures, the *whole story approach* tries to show beginner readers that words do not exist on their own, but are parts of texts which have meaning. A text is made up of letters, words and sentences. A fluent and experienced reader automatically combines these to give the words meaning.

Beginner readers must learn that

22. when we read, we read sentences
23. sentences are made up of words
24. words are made up of syllables and sounds

This also works in reverse. Learners must begin to understand that:

25. when we combine syllables and sounds we can make new words
26. when we combine words we can make new sentences
27. when we combine sentences, we get meanings

Through the story, learners move backwards and forwards between sounds and syllables, words and sentences, until they can read and write a whole text.

This approach helps learners read and write their own words but in a structured way. This means that they do not use just any words or sentences; rather they use sentences from the story which have meaning and are important for learners to know and to use immediately.

In both the above approaches, we call the sentences that the learners learn *key sentences.* Words are taught from these key sentences, and letters and syllables are taught from these words.

Activity 2

Building phonics into a lesson

Look back at the sentence being taught in the example given earlier illustrated with photographs. Can you think of ways of building a few minutes of phonic teaching into this lesson?

If you were to integrate the teaching of phonics into the above lesson, you could, for example, ask your learners to find all the letters **a** or **n** in the key sentence that you are teaching. For example in the following sentence:

My name is Mandla.

you could ask your learners to find all the letters **a** and **n**. They can then see that the sounds form part of a word and that the words can be put together to form a sentence.

You could also show them the difference between the capital letter **M** and the small letter **m**. If you did this you could explain that we use capital letters for names and at the start of the sentence.

You could use the following kinds of exercises:

Give your learners a few examples like the following where they have to cross out the letters that do not fit in with the rest:

m a m m n m

Or the following exercise where the learners ring every letter **I** in a list of words (Operation Upgrade, 1995:7).

Umsebenzi 2: Kula magama funa unkamisa u - I umkekeklezele

isibonelo

uyaphi
esikoleni
bazimisele
awesabi
ini

Teaching reading is about reading!

What is common about in all the modern approaches to the teaching of reading is that reading is about reading. Unless fluency in reading is attained, the learner is likely to relapse into illiteracy.

Fluency, that is the ability to read texts of an appropriate level rapidly and accurately, really does depend on practice in reading texts. People read more fluently if the text is in a language they know well. People identify letters faster when they are in words than if they stand by themselves. With texts, and particularly texts that are about things the literacy learners are familiar with, the readers can guess words from the sentence grammar and the context.

The speed at which learners come to read is very important for fluency. Because our human short term memory is very limited, if we read very, very slowly we forget what was at the beginning of the sentence (and therefore cannot make sense of it). This means that learners need to get to a speed of about 45 to 60 words per minute.

Once your learners have begun to read, it is up to you to make lots of reading materials available for your learners so that they can practise their new skills. We know that this is very necessary so that your learners do not forget how to read.

Activity 3

Can you think of what you could do to encourage learners to read regularly? Try ro make a list of things that you could do.

Our response

We thought of the following ways:

28. You could bring magazines that will interest your learners to class and have a special time for learners to read them during class. Your learners would probably like to read popular magazines which comes out in a number of languages. You could choose the magazine in their mother tongue. Sport magazines and newspapers in their first language are also very popular with new readers.

29. You could bring forms like bank forms or competition entry forms (if they are available in their first language and you could let them practise filling them in class. You could also ask learners to bring any forms that they may need to fill in to class. In this way, the whole class can benefit from reading and filling in the form.

30. Encourage your learners to read whenever they have a spare moment. You need to encourage your learners to read at every opportunity. Tell them that reading is not just something they do in class. Words are everywhere. They will find words that they recognise on signposts, posters, street names, newspapers, on mealie meal packets, coffee tins and even the numbers on car registration plates. We

learn to read by reading! Encourage your learners to practise reading and to read words and sentences wherever they see them.

There are many ways of encouraging new readers to read. You could also set up a small box library of easy readers for your learners.

Unit summary

Well, we are making progress. Let us think about what we have covered.

We looked at ways of teaching reading by using either the phonic or the whole language approach. We have also looked at ways of ensuring that, whichever approach is used, reading is a meaningful activity.

We have given some examples of teaching phonics and sounds so that they are not just meaningless noises but are actually part of meaningful reading.

Every learner is different – some may need to sound out letters to help them along the literacy path, others may find that it is easier to read whole words and all learners learn at their own paces. Also, every ABET teacher is different. You, as the teacher, need to understand each method so that you can use what is most appropriate for your learners. You also need to ensure that the course and materials you use draw on the best of each method. So you have a very big responsibility ahead of you. Good luck - we know you will find it rewarding!

Further reading

Abadzi, H.. 2006. *Literacy acquisition and the biology of reading*. In: Abadzi, H. 2006. ***Efficient learning for the poor: insights from the frontier of cognitive neuroscience***. Washington, DC: The World Bank, pp. 36-49

A state of the art summary of current ideas and research on literacy teaching. Though the book is addressed mainly to school education it has valuable insights for all adult educators.

Lyster, E. 1992. *Current approaches to first language methodology*. In: Hutton, B. (Ed.). 1992. ***Adult Basic Education in South Africa: Literacy, English as a second language, and numeracy****.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press, pp. 103-151

Though obviously no longer about current methodology, having been written over 15 years ago, this chapter has a wealth of practical advice on literacy teaching approaches and methods.

McKay, V.I. 2008. ***Literacy facilitator's notes***. Pretoria: Kha ri gude Literacy Campaign South Africa

A richly detailed guide to teaching literacy using the Kha ri gude Literacy Campaign South Africa mother tongue literacy manuals. The manuals themselves follow a structured phonetic approach but with strong whole language elements.

American Literacy Council. 2009. *Teaching reading in the classroom, Survey of historic methods and curricula*. http://www.americanliteracy.com/teacher-methods.htm <Accessed 27 January 2009>

Outlines a number of literacy approaches/methods

References

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Unit 2: Placing the learners

Introduction

This unit could also be called "Who are our learners? Though you may have a good idea of what approach you are going to use in teaching literacy, now you have to engage with real people. Many of the adults you will meet in a basic literacy class have never had the chance to learn to read and write in their own home language. The printed word has no meaning for them. We must think carefully about who these learners are. We often speak of the many millions of people who cannot read and write in this country. When we think of big numbers like these, it is important for us to remember that we are not just speaking about numbers, we are speaking about real people. So, in this module, we ask you to think about who your learners are.

Aims of the unit

The unit aims to assist you in discovering what your learners existing level of literacy is so that you can adapt your teaching to their varying prior experience and abilities. It also looks at some common physical problems many literacy learners experience in literacy classes.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Use placement assessment effectively and appropriately
You will demonstrate this by being able to:

31. Samples of learners' work are assigned to appropriate literacy/adult basic education levels.
32. New learners are interviewed effectively.
33. An appropriate screening test is administered and interpreted effectively.
34. Learners are assigned to appropriate levels/classes.

35. Physical difficulties commonly experienced by adult learners are recognised and accommodated. (These difficulties specifically include difficulty with fine muscle control, far sightedness, hearing difficulties.)
36. Remedial strategies appropriate to the problems are suggested [e.g. exercises to develop fine muscle control (like using scissors), fat pencils, reading glasses, positioning in class, eye / hearing tests, hearing aids]
37. Interviews and group discussions are used to discover particular needs of groups or individual learners.

Who are our learners?

Let's think for a while about who our learners are. While working through this unit, you will need to think about adults who do not read and write in their mother-tongue or in their first language (which we will refer to as L1 [Language One].) Teaching adults to read and write in their L1 [When we speak of our learners' second language we use the abbreviation L2] is not just a matter of teaching them the letters and sounds of the alphabet. We know that what we teach must be shaped by the context of the learners' lives, and also by their motives and aspirations. And so what we teach when we teach adults to read in their first language will have to be shaped by their own circumstances and background.

The following questions are probably very familiar to you, because they are often asked of educators or trainers:

- Who are your learners?
- Who is your target group?
- Who is your audience?

We might also be asked to think about:

38. What are your learners' needs?
39. What are their motives for learning?
40. What kinds of problems do you learners have?
41. What do they need literacy for?
42. Why do you think they come to classes?

By asking these kinds of questions, and thinking about the answers, we as literacy educators should develop a good understanding of who our learners are and of what motivates them to start coming to classes – and what motivates them to continue coming to classes. It also helps us to understand more deeply what their knowledge (or ignorance) of literacy and its practices is.

Let's begin with an activity that will help us to think about our learners:

Activity 1

Think of someone you know who is illiterate - someone from your community, maybe someone you work with or a member of your own family. Try to hold a picture of that person in your mind. Now, answer these questions about this person:

43. How old is he or she?

44. Is the person employed? If so, what kind of work does she or he do?
45. Is he or she a parent? If so, what ages are his or her children?
46. What kinds of responsibilities does the person have? For example, committee member, member of political organisation, member of a church women's group, etc.
47. What does she or he do for leisure or entertainment?
48. If you saw this person in a crowd, would he or she seem to be different from the other people in the crowd?

Our response

Who did you think about? I thought about my own grandmother [This is Veronica's answer.] She was illiterate and this is what I remember about her:

My illiterate grandmother

My grandmother was an immigrant to South Africa, so she could not read or write in her LI which was Arabic. But she eventually picked up enough English to survive. She lived in Johannesburg where English was the dominant language. Although she could not read and write and she spoke only a little English, she managed to earn a living as a hawker, selling shoe-laces and other things.

She had nine children whom she managed to feed, clothe and educate. She was able to register their births, look after them when they were sick, run a home, make decisions about their lives, educate them, find her way around the streets of Johannesburg, and eventually as a single parent take on many of the responsibilities of parenting - all this without knowing how to read and write.

I remember well the stories she told [Oral tradition is very important in societies where people do not read. In such societies the passing on of information through storytelling, or teaching children about traditional recipes and remedies, keeps the culture of the community alive] and how she remembered recipes. "Take a handful of rice and a pinch of salt ... "When she needed to write, one of her children or one of her grandchildren would write for her. I can remember how, as a ten year old, I would read the newspapers to her. Although she could not read and write, she lived a very full life and often wonder whether her life would have been any better if she could read and write. Yes, I am certain that it would have been.

If you completed Activity 1 above, it is likely that you would have thought of a person who is as capable as my grandmother. It is likely that the person you thought of fitted most, if not all, of the characteristics listed under Activity 2 below.

Activity 2

Now tick off all the characteristics that fit the person you thought of.

The person I thought of
49. is not stupid or ignorant
50. lives a full and active life
51. has many responsibilities
52. pays for the family home
53. brings up children

54. Buys food and clothes for the family
55. pays for the children's education
56. makes important decisions about the children's lives
57. knows about the world around them
58. listens to the radio or watches television
59. talks about important events with friends and family

Our response

We are certain that you ticked off many items in the list – showing that the person you thought of leads a very full and responsible life. Do you think that the person you are thinking of would benefit from learning to read and write? I often thought that my grandmother did not really need to learn to read and write. But if I really think about it, she must have had quite a few difficulties in a world of writing and print, especially when needing to write but not being able to do so. The following activity may give you some idea of what she felt like.

Activity 3

Copy the text below onto some rough paper.

But, do not use the hand you normally use for writing. Are you right or left-handed? If you are right-handed, use your left-hand, and vice versa:

Gemeinnutzigers Bildungswerk
Fiord - Siid - Plet 2
TersteegentaBe 77
4000 Dusseldorf 30
Frankfurter Algemeine Zeifung

Did you find this difficult? Was it frustrating? Did it take a long time to complete the exercise?

Was it difficult for you to use your “other” hand ? (the non-dominant one)? When I wrote with my left hand, it just did not want to do what I wanted it to do.

Was it a bit difficult to read the typeface?

This kind of exercise will give you only a partial idea of how people who cannot read and write must feel every time they look at a written document, or even a can of tinned food on a supermarket shelf, or whenever they are in a situation where they are expected to write something.

Do you think that they might feel:

60. frustrated because they cannot understand what the words are telling them?
61. inadequate because they live in a world of written words, but they do not know what the words mean?
62. disadvantaged because they cannot even write their names, let alone their thoughts?

63. frustrated because even if they try to write something, their hands don't really do what they should?

This is the way that many millions of South Africans may feel in the world of printed words. But we know that often, in spite of being illiterate, these adults – like Veronica's grandmother – have found ways of coping in a highly literate world.

How do we place the new learners correctly?

Once learners have been recruited for a literacy or ABET programme, it is necessary to place them into a class or group. This is usually done on the basis of their ability, which needs to be checked or tested. We call this process of selection *screening* or *placement.*

One of the most important steps in preparing to teach any group of people is to find out about who they are. If you do not know who your learners are and what they are like, you will not be able to design your teaching approach, methods and learming content to suit them best. This means that they may struggle to learn. And you will feel frustrated.

From what we have looked at so far in this unit it is clear that adults coming to literacy classes are complex people. They are adults and often very capable people who work and parent children and are often important figures in the community. They are fluent speakers of their home language and often other languages. They have a large and rich vocabulary in their own language. They often handle and can count money.

Yet at the same time they may be totally illiterate or partially illiterate (many people dropped out of school after a year or two). They may not be able to do numerical calculations. They probably cannot write (though some may be able to write their name). Many, particularly men, will have great difficulty with using a pencil. They are often nervous about coming to class and thereby admitted that they are illiterate. They may feel very embarrassed. Many of them have bad memories of any schooling they experienced.

For the educator this raises the important issue of how you do this screening or placement of the learners. Will they all be in the same class or group? How will you know who is completely illiterate and who is already partly literate? How will you discover what they already known and build on that foundation rather than starting from the very beginning? Above, all, how can this placement be done sensitively so that it does not further embarrass the learners.

The correct placement of learners needs to look at:

64. what literacy skills they already have
65. what physical or other problems will give them difficulty
66. what their needs and aspirations are.

Finding out what they already know

Finding out what people already know can be done through interviews and placement tests.

Interviews

The most obvious way to find this out is to ask them – in some kind of interview. (Understandably you cannot get people who cannot read or write to fill in some kind of form of questionnaire that asks them whether they can read or write!).

Ideally, there should be a short interview with every potential member of a class. Because it is individual it is private and the learner does not have to admit their illiteracy in front of others. Such an interviews can be used also to discover an particular needs or worries that the learner has.

The interview is the best place to look at any previous work that the learner has done. You can look at any samples of work they present and assess its validity.

Screening and placement tests

The other method is to give all the learners some kind of screening or placement test. The administration of screening or placement tests is also called grading or pre-testing. This process should be done before you place a learner into a particular level.

Why is it necessary to do this pre-testing? Would it not be best and very simple just ask learners whether they have gone to school, and if so up to what level, and then to allocate them to a level according to that information. However, it is often not always useful to use formal schooling as a basis for selecting and placing adult learners at various levels. Some adult learners went to school for several years but achieved very little. Other people have never been to school at all but learned to read by themselves or with the help of friends or their children. Some adults actually know a lot but don't believe that they do.

This is why it is important to screen learners.

At present there is no one type of screening test which everybody uses to place learners. Many different literacy programmes and courses have ready prepared placement tests. The questions are arranged in progressive order or difficulty and so, when marked one can readily see how far the learner has already progressed and they can be placed at one of the ABET levels 1 to 4. Literacy practitioners can also devise their own test that are suitable for the type of classes they are offering.

Generally we do placement assessment by trying to find out whether or not the learner can demonstrate the outcomes of a particular course. So, in placing a learner, you will need to look at what it is that you hope the learner will be able to do by the time he or she completes the course.

Activity 4

Let's imagine that a group of learners will be doing a simple beginner literacy course. The educator knows that at the end of the a course her learners should be able to demonstrate various course *outcomes.* This means that, before the educator can place her learners into a course, she will have to think of ways of testing whether or not they can already perform the outcomes she has for the course.

The following is what the educator hopes her learners will be able to do at the end of their course. Look carefully at these outcomes.

A mother tongue literacy course

At the end of the course, the learner will be able to:

67. read with understanding in his or her mother tongue
68. write his or her own name and address
69. write a description of a person, place or event
70. use punctuation appropriately
71. spell well enough to be understood
72. write on ordinary ruled paper.

A basic numeracy course

At the end of the course, the learner will be able to:

73. count, read and write numbers up to 1000
74. tell the time
75. calculate change
76. use a calendar
77. add and subtract two digit numbers

Do you clearly understand what kinds of things the learners will have to do by the time they are finished the course?

Now think of different ways that you can use to find out whether a learner can do these things or not. This means that you will need to try to think of ways of 'measuring' whether or not a learner should be placed in the following course.

Our response

As usual we will give you our answers to compare with yours. There are many things that you could ask your learner to do. You could for example ask the learner to:

78. write his or her name and address (without guiding lines to keep his or her writing straight)

79. read a short passage aloud (you could have a set of simple texts of varying difficulty)

80. do a short comprehension

81. write a short description of, say a 'happy event' (and then see whether the spelling and punctuation is good enough for a reader to understand the written piece)

82. tell you the time from a watch or clock

83. give you information from a calendar

84. give you his pr her date of birth

85. do a few simple two digit number calculations (adding and subtracting)

The test will show which learners have no idea of how to read and those who already have some literacy skills. You can place the learner in a group according to how well he or she managed to do the above tasks.

If you find that the learner is *not* able to do the above tasks, then the learner would probably *be* suitable for the above two courses. If the learner *is able* to do them with ease, then you may have to 'measure' the learner against the outcomes of a more advanced level course. Those who are more advanced can then be selected to go into the various higher levels.

Should we group learners according to their ability?

There are good reasons for literacy and ABET practitioners divide their learners into different classes or groups according to these different levels of proficiency. Teaching classes of learners of mixed levels of proficiency is a very common difficulty for ABET practitioners. Is it also a problem for learners?

Activity 5

Why should we try to place learners at a level that is appropriate to their abilities? Let us answer this by looking at it from a learner's point of view.

Imagine a new class at an adult education centre:

As the learners arrive, Mrs Vilakazi and Mrs Hlophe, the two educators, chat to them. They ask a lot of questions, and they record some of the answers on enrolment cards. Their most important task for the evening is to divide the learners into one of the two groups, depending on their levels of ***proficiency.*** There are doing this now, as the learners arrive. Some of the learners have been asked to do a pre-test, and some teachers from the other centre have the job of explaining the test to these learners. Mrs Vilakazi and Mrs Hlophe allocate each learner to a particular class once he or she has been screened.

While Mrs Vilakazi and Mrs Hlophe make their lists of who should go into which group, the new learners chat to each other. One of the learners is Petrus Khota. He seems slightly older than most of the others, and he looks quite anxious. Someone says to him, 'Petrus, why are you so nervous?' Petrus says he feels like a school child again, and the others listen as he tells them how scared he was of going to school. 'When I was in sub-B, my teacher used to beat met with a ***sjambok*** if I could not do my sums or answer to questions. One day, the beating was so bad that I ran away from the school yard. I did not learn anything at school even though I stayed there for five years. Maybe today I can have a second chance, but no I am worried that I am too old to learn.'

Another learner, Nomonde Sibiya, is talking about her hopes. 'Do you think they can teach us quickly? I hope I can learn to read soon. You know, sometimes a train is standing in front of you but you do not know where it is going because you cannot read the number. You have to ask people and they say to you, look, read there. It is written up there! Then you feel so ashamed, because you cannot read. I see how some of the people in this class can read a newspaper. I am ashamed that I cannot.'

Mrs Vilakazi and Mrs Hlophe try to ***reassure*** the learners who seem ***apprehensive.*** They know from past experience that one of their challenges will be to keep the learners motivated, so that they attend classes regularly and do not ***drop out***. This year, however, they hope this will be less of a problem than before.

From this case study we see two learners in the class who are misplaced. Nomonde Sibiya is an absolute beginner. She is unable to do what the other learners can do. Petrus Khota is more advanced than the rest of the class but he does not participate much.

Try to put yourself in the situation of these two learners.

86. How do you think they feel?
87. What do you think they think about during the classes?
88. Do you think that they will continue to come to classes?
89. Why?

Make two columns. Give each column a heading. Call the one Sibiya's situation and the other Khota's situation. Write short notes on how you would feel if you were Sibiya, and if you were Khota.

Our response

We will give you our answer to compare with yours. We think that unless some special arrangements are made for Nomonde Sibiya, she will feel quite helpless. She will probably not have the courage to try to answer questions or to participate in the lessons. It is likely that Nomonde may feel demoralised because she is unable to keep up with the rest of the learners. So we think she will sit quietly and not participate in any of the activities. We are fairly certain that if something is not done to assist her she will not continue coming to class. In other words, we expect that she will drop out. She should have been placed in an beginner class.

It is likely that Petrus Khota will also drop out. We think that he may find the classes boring and feel he is not achieving very much by attending them. He may also feel that he could spend his time better if he did something else so he may decide to stop attending. He should have been in an advanced class but also given special support because he was so nervous.

So, while the beginner learner (like Nomonde) may feel demoralised if she is placed at a level where she cannot cope, the more advanced learner (like Petrus) may become bored in a class in which only basic skills and competencies are being taught. Both these learners may be demotivated and this might make them drop out of the classes.

Is it possible to teach a class where the learners are at different levels?

If the pre-entry assessment of learners is good enough, an ABET practitioner could overcome many of the problems associated with placing learners; but it is not always easy to place learners at precisely the correct level (French 1992:81).

You may find yourself in a situation where it is not possible for you to offer more than one class: you may not have enough resources or teachers to offer more. Even if you can offer more than one class, it is unlikely that *all* the learners in *all* the classes will be at the same level. So you will probably find that you have a range of abilities in one class. The case study tells us that the teachers had to cope with learners ranging from those who could not write their own names to those who could read the newspapers and came to class with the hope of improving their reading – all in once class! This is a problem which ABET practitioners always worry about. The question they often ask is: 'Some of my learners have had a few years of schooling and can read and write a bit, some can only read, and some have never been to school and are complete beginners. How do I teach them all at the same time?' (Wedepohl 1988: 201).

What can you do? Is it possible to teach a class where learners are at different levels? Is it possible to deal with the different levels of proficiency and learning needs among learners in a class?

Activity 6

Look at the case study in Activity 5 again. If you were Mrs Vilakazi, how would you handle the situation with Petrus Khota? Make a note of everything the case study tells us about Petrus. Before you write down your ideas, think about the following:

90. Are there some ways of working with mixed ability groups?

91. Is it possible to place a learner accurately?

What do we know about Petrus Khota? We know that he went to school for five years and that he says he did not learn anything there.

Would you put him in a beginner class or an advanced class?

Or would you put him in an advanced class?

Or would you put him in a beginner class and then move him to an advanced class later?

Our response

We can think of two possible answers.

Firstly, you might place him in a beginner class because he was so nervous and claimed to have learned nothing in school.

Secondly, will he really have forgotten everything from school? So you might place him in an advanced class.

But maybe it would be inappropriate to place him in the advanced class. He may be too nervous and his past bad school experience will keep him too frightened to benefit from the advanced class. Maybe he should start out in the beginners class and after spending a few weeks there he will have started to remember much of what he *did* learn

in school learn a long time ago. He will slowly realise that the adult class is not like the school he attended. His confidence will increase and he can move.

These are common problem because of the difficulties involved in placing learners.
It is difficult to work with classes in which some of the learners are like Petrus. Many teachers deal with this type of problem by letting their more advanced learners assist the others. If Mrs Vilakazi asked Petrus Khota to assist her with the beginners in the class, it would help him to *consolidate* and practise his own skills (French 1992:81).

Some of the other things Mrs Vilakazi could do to work with a mixed ability class are:

92. She could divide the learners in one class into smaller groups of about six learners. She should make it clear to the learners that this does not mean that some of them are cleverer than others but rather that some learners have had more opportunities to learn than the others.

93. She could work with individual learners while the rest of the class carries on with group work.

94. Mrs Vilakazi could encourage learners to work on their own or with others in a small group.

95. Another thing that educators often do is to arrange the learners into social groups (that is groups of friends) and then let the more advanced learners help the beginners. Small groups are very useful for establishing this kind of co-operation (Wedepohl 1988:201, French 1992: 81).

The issue of language and placement – which language should we teach adults to read and write in?

Literacy learners often say they want to learn English. They say it will be more useful than their home language. They may asked to be placed in a class that is learning to read and write in English.

This can make literacy educators unsure about whether they should start off by getting their learners literate in English, or in their mother tongue. Teachers often ask "should we go straight for English or should we start off in the mother tongue?"

Activity 7

Think back ro your own school days.

96. What language did you start reading in?
97. Was this language your mother tongue (your L1)?
98. Is your L1 a language other than English?
99. If so, did you switch to English?
100. If so, did you find it as easy to learn through the medium of a language that was not your L1?

We have not all had the same experiences in life, but it is likely (depending on how old you are) that many of you switched to English in about standard 3 (Grade 5). For a time this was the law in South Africa. Mother-tongue literacy was seen only as a stepping-stone, as something that was done as quickly as possible so that people could get started on " real education" through English. The African languages were not promoted as being important in their own right.

You probably found that you learned most effectively when you were taught in the language you knew best, your LI, and that you took some time getting used to studying through the medium of English.

This raises two important issues that we must think about when we consider the role of language in a literacy or ABET course.

Today most linguists insist that people should start to read in their mother tongue or first language. If adults learn through their mother tongue, they can more easily gain the important skills, knowledge and understanding that will help them on their life-long learning path. Indeed, proficiency in a first language predicts success in studying a second language.

So it important for us to remember that our learners should start off learning to read and write in their LI. Why, you may ask, should we not start them off in English? The answer is simple, the learners will have too limited a knowledge of both the language and its vocabulary to make sense of reading and other class activities. You would need to have a knowledge of about 2000 to 3000 English words to fully understand the content of lessons in English (Abadzi, 2006: 51). By contrast, a mother tongue speaker already knows 40 000 words or more in his or her own language.

The answer to the question then on whether we should teach reading in mother-tongue first or should we go "straight for English" is clear – we should teach mother-tongue or L1 first.

Interestingly enough, the better the grounding in mother-tongue literacy, the faster the learners will progress when they start to learn and read another language such as English.

Activity 8

Although we believe that it is best to start off learners in their LI, after reading the following case study you will see that it is nevertheless a difficult question to answer. Read the case study and try to formulate our own opinions on this matter.

Sylvia Jama's dilemma

Sylvia Jama is a 38 year old mother of three children. She lives in an informal settlement in Lwandle near Somerset West. She was lucky to find work as a domestic worker soon after she arrived from Mqanduli near Umtata, three years ago. She has discovered, however, that because she cannot speak English, she finds it very difficult to communicate with her employer. Reading and writing messages are a big problem also – not only because she does not know English, but also because she cannot read and write in Xhosa, her mother tongue. Sylvia is determined to solve this problem, and

she is looking for an organization or adult education centre that can offer her English classes.

Read the case study carefully, and then jot down short answers to these questions:

101. Sylvia has two main educational needs that will help her to communicate with her employer. What are they?

102. What would you advise Sylvia Jama to do to meet these needs? Give reasons for your answers.

103. Does your advice help Sylvia become literate in her LI or in English?

We can see that Sylvia's learning needs may be a problem for her literacy teacher. How does one advise her on what to do?

Our response

The case study refers to two of Sylvia' s immediate needs:

104. the need to read and write, that is, to acquire literacy skills
105. the need to communicate in English.

What advice did you give Sylvia? Did your answer suggest that she should become literate in

106. English, her L2
107. Xhosa, her L1, or
108. Come up with a solution which would enable Sylvia to read and write in her L1 (Xhosa) and learn to then to learn to speak, read and write in English, her L2?

You may have wondered whether it was not impossible for Sylvia to learn to read, write and speak English, all at the same time. We think that it may not be impossible, but that it would be very difficult. Let's look at what Sylvia would have to learn and understand if she were to start off learning to read and write in English – a language she does not yet understand.

109. She would have to learn that the signs and symbols on a page are letters and words, that together make meaning. (The concept of reading and writing.)

110. She would have to learn what those signs and symbols mean, and how to put them together so that they make sense. For example, she has to learn the letters, t-a-b-1-e, and she has to learn that together they make the word, table. (The mechanics of reading and writing.) She would also have to overcome the difficulty of English spelling, which is not regular.

111. She would have to do all this in a language that she does not speak or understand.

112. She would also have to learn the vocabulary of the new language, for example that a "table" is what she knows as "itafile".

We think that Sylvia could learn reading and writing skills much faster if she learnt them through the medium of her L1. By starting off in her own language, she will develop a foundation on which she can build her reading and writing skills and her ability to acquire and use other languages. Language specialists believe that, once reading and writing skills have been developed in one's first language, it is easier to apply them in another language.

But you may say "Sylvia needs English to cope with her job". Why should she have to wait a year or two before she can begin learning to speak English? We can't ignore Sylvia's request to learn English.

One solution would be to help Sylvia speak English at the same time that she becomes literate in her mother tongue, Xhosa. If we begin by teaching Sylvia to read in Xhosa (her L1), she will find it much easier to learn to read and write in English later.

Just because adults are illiterate, or semi-literate, does not mean that they are struggling to communicate in their own language, their mother tongue.

113. Adults speak their mother tongue fluently and have a wide vocabulary in it.
114. They can put forward arguments, give their own opinion, agree or disagree with someone.
115. Many are good at making speeches in their own language, or hold positions in organisations or clubs because they are able to express their thoughts well in their L1.

Once we realise that adult learners have a good understanding of their mother tongue, it makes sense to build on this knowledge to develop more advanced concepts and knowledge which they need to continue with further learning. If you start to teach adults to read in their mother tongue, they will learn at a much faster rate than would be possible through a second language. Why? Because they will not be struggling to understand what they are reading. If they start to learn to read in a language they already *know* and *understand,* what they read will already have *meaning* for them. If they start in a second or foreign language they will read without really understanding what they are reading. It will be very difficult for them to be interested in what they are doing if they do not understand what they are reading, and it is possible that in the end they will not learn to read at all.

What about learners with other problems?

People who never went to school, or who had very little education, not only missed out on learning to read or write, they also missed out on the other benefits that one gets from attending a school. For example:

116. They missed out on the discipline of concentrating for long periods.
117. They missed out on the values, attitudes and rules taught at school.
118. They missed out on learning how to tackle problems and tasks in new ways, and on how to make good decisions based on the information they have.

We must think about ways of building all these other benefits of education into our ABET classes. We must teach reading and writing, as well as the skills, knowledge, confidence and understanding that adults need to function effectively in their work and in their lives.

Once learners have this foundation, they can then choose to carry on with their education, or take up training opportunities in the workplace, or simply use their new knowledge and skills in their daily lives. Are you beginning to see why we say that ABET is much broader than just learning to read and write?

Other learners have physical problems, some of them related to age.

Physical difficulties and how to overcome them

There are three main kinds of physical difficulties:

Sight

Many people who are illiterate may have eyesight problems but have never had their problem looked at. Older people usually find it difficult to see things that are close up and small (such as text on a page). They need reading glasses.

This is why it is always useful to use a placement test at the start. It should be immediately obvious if the person doing the test cannot actually see the page clearly. Literacy campaigns often have sight tested as part of the campaign.

Older people also need more light to read than younger ones. It is helpful to ensure that there is enough light in the room where the literacy class is being held.

Hearing

Hearing should also be tested. Learners need to be able to hear the educator speak, especially if the group is large and not everybody can sit near the educator.

Difficulties in writing

Writing is a quite a difficult act. It requires what is called “fine finger co-ordination”. Many people, particularly men who have been involved in hard manual labour, find it difficult to make these fine writing movements with their fingers. Unit 4 on writing has more information on how you can address this problem.

Unit summary

Before you start with the next unit, you should make a short summary of the main points we have covered in this unit. In your notes, you should include the following ideas:

119. We must know who our learners (our target group) are.
120. We must find out at what level they should be placed.
121. We must find out what their learning needs are.
122. We should also advise them on the benefits of mother-tongue literacy (it is easier to start learning to read and write in our first language before starting to learn to read and write in a second language).

References

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Unit 3: Teaching reading

Introduction

So far we have looked at our overall approach to teaching literacy and how we would find out what our learners already know (so that they can be placed in the appropriate level and group). We may have taken the decision to teach adult learners to learn to read in their own language. But, when we speak about reading, what do we mean? What do we do that enables us to look at a lot of marks on a page and understand what they are saying? What methods and techniques will we use to teach people to read.

Aims of the unit

The aim of this unit is to explain and discuss both the technical aspects of teaching (and the methods and techniques to be used in doing it) and need for making learning to read a meaningful experience.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Teach reading using appropriate methods and techniques
You will demonstrate this by being able to:

123. Explain the technical aspects of print are explained. (Print is arranged from left to right, top to bottom, words are separate clusters of letters, letters usually represent sounds, the function and appearance of headings, function of punctuation.)
124. Use a range of word attack skills to derive meaning, including sounding out, recognising common letter clusters and using context, including illustrations.
125. Teach the functions of traditional punctuation forms in the context of making sense of print, at the appropriate time and pace (commas, sentence notation (full stops and capital letters, question marks, exclamation marks, paragraphs, titles, inverted commas and paragraphing).
126. Teach the functions of standard print conventions appropriate to the level and context of the learners. (Examples are headings, bold print, speech bubbles, captions, diagram labels, arrows.)
127. Teach a range of reading strategies (such as prediction, logical guessing, skimming, scanning) at the appropriate time, through appropriate situations and tasks and within a reading context.
128. Facilitate activities which promote the practical application of reading skills necessary for extracting information. (Examples are the use of indexes, dictionaries, telephone directories, newspapers, calendars, timetables,

diagrammatic instructions, simple maps and plans, sequential drawings (as in picture stories) and other conventional sources of information.)

129. Use strategies which encourage meaningful responses to text. (Examples are to identify the main ideas and messages in a text, identify contradictory or misleading information, state own opinions in response to text, compare their experience and knowledge to what is read.)
130. Facilitate activities which promote skills of analysis, deduction, inference, and prediction.
131. Facilitate activities which develop the skills of distinguishing text types (such as fact and opinion, ascertaining the purpose of a text, and distinguishing between a range of text types including narrative, factual, persuasive, informational).

Teaching the relationship of writing to oral language

Writing is a visual way of representing the sounds we make in speech. We usually think of our speech as being made up of separate words which themselves are made up of separate sounds (soft sounds called vowels and harder sounds called consonants and sounds made up of a joining up of a consonant sound and a vowel sound called syllables). We can distinguish words in speech because we have had a lot of training in doing so. When you listen to a foreign language you have not heard before it is not so easy. The sounds all seem to run together in a stream of sound. It was just as difficult when the languages in South Africa were first put into writing. In the Nguni group of languages words were written with the parts joined together, in the Sotho group of languages they were separated out. For example:

Zulu: *Ngiyamukela.*
Tswana: *Ke a le amogela*.

One of the first steps in learning to read writing which is a representation of speech sounds is to be conscious of the sounds in spoken language. Unless we have that awareness it is virtually impossible to make the link between those sounds and the marks on a page that represent them.

One of the first things one can do in beginning literacy is to have the learners start to sound out, syllable by syllable, some of the initial words that you are going to use.

Phonics are the speech sounds that make up words. When we learn the sounds of the individual letters that we put together to form words we are working with phonics.

Teaching the mechanics of print

To be able to read writing in our society you have to understand the conventions by which writing is presented on the page. Illiterates may not know these conventions (though some will, having observed how other, literate people, hold books and newspapers).

You will need to explain these technical aspects of print:

132. Print is arranged from left to right and from top to bottom.

133. Pages go from front to back (learners also need to be shown how to turn pages without damaging the book).

134. Words are separate clusters of letters.

135. Letters usually represent sounds.

136. Letters are in two forms, capital letters and lower case letters.

137. Words are joined into sentences which express an independent statement, question, request or command. Sentences usually have an action word or verb.

138. The word at the beginning of a sentence has a capital letter. At the end of a sentence is a full stop.

139. The basic punctuation symbols indicate where, in the spoken language, there would be various kinds of pauses and, in the case of the full stop, the end or in the case of the question mark, where a question has been asked.

140. Headings serve to indicate a new topic or set of thoughts.

At the beginning of literacy you would not teach all of these at once. You would introduce them when they are needed. Later more advanced instruction is needed on conventions such as paragraphs and various forms of text emphasis such as bold and italic print.

Activity 1

What is wrong with the following sentences?

1. thgir ot tfel morf etirw syawla ew hsilgnE nl. .od segaugnal lla toN

2.whenwespeakwehearsoundsthatrunintoeachotherlikethisbutwedonotwritelikethiswhen wewritewespaceourwords

You needed special skills to read the above sentences. In the first sentence, we had to remember that in English we read from left to right. This is one of the things that we need to teach our learners – that we read and write from left to right.

When we speak, we hear sounds that run into each other like they seem to do in example 2. One of the skills that we have to learn when we learn to read and write is to know where one word ends and the next word starts. Try and listen to people when they speak, and see if you can work out where the words end and start. In doing example 2, you had to:

141. read the string of words from left to right
142. divide the string of words into separate words
143. divide the words into sentences each starting with a capital letter and ending with a full stop.

These are the things that we need to remember when we teach our learners to learn.

Teaching word attack skills

To begin to be able to read words you have never seen before, there are three things that can assist one:

Being able to sound out letters
Being able to sound out syllables and common letter clusters
Being able to recognise some words

Sounding out letters

People do have to learn the sounds of the alphabet (this is one of those times when rote memorisation is necessary).

In the past people used to teach learners the whole alphabet at the start, the names of the letters and their sounds. This alphabetic method is very seldom done nowadays because it delays any actual experience of simple meaningful reading.

Others teach a few letters of a time and use those few letters (usually a combination of one or two combinations of consonants and vowels to make simple reading of whole words possible so as to make things more meaningful. This is the phonic method.

Normally it is best to teach lower case forms of the alphabet first:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

(Remember that capital letters are harder to read that lower case ones.)

(Later you will need to teach the order of letters in the alphabet for use in finding things that have been filed alphabetically – as in dictionaries and telephone directories and other indexes).

Sounding out syllables and common letter clusters

The basic sounds associated with the consonants are combined with vowels sounds to make syllables. The advantage of this method is that in languages that are spelt phonetically and regularly it is easy to form new words from a set of syllables. Learners can sound out words with confidence.

This can be done systematically, taking each consonant and then adding one vowel at a time. Usually the syllables are taught in a logical sequence (often based on their frequency in the language).

The problem with English

Teaching English literacy, even to mother tongue speakers of the language, is more difficult than in languages with writing that is consistently phonetic. In English, for example, the same letters don't always stand for the same sound. Burroughs (1995:254) gives the examples below:

Is the **ea** in these words the same sound?

peach pear bread steak heart appear	Not *one* of the actual sounds represented by the **ea** is the same. English is filled with such examples.

Do these words – all spelt differently – sound the same?

you queue cue view use through noodle beautiful	Not *one* of the actual sounds represented by the **ea** is the same. English is filled with such examples of words with identical sounds spelled quite differently, as you will see from the list below.

It has been found that with English speaking children it takes much more time to learn to read than children whose language in written in a more phonetic script. English speaking students generally need an extra 2½ or more years of literacy learning to attain the same degree of literacy gained in one year by people learning basic literacy in a language with simpler spelling (Abadzi, 2008: 41).

In English there are 47 sounds that are spelled in about 150 main ways. Obviously this is harder to learn that a language that has fewer sounds and representations of those sounds. However, even with this difficulty there is a basic regularity that means that the sound and spelling system can be learned – it just takes more time!

The sounds of English and their variant spellings

a
u o oe ou oo
i y ey u o ie ia a ay e ai ei ui
e ie ea ai u a
o oh ho ow au ou a

a e u o i ea ou y ei ai ough ie iou io
i y i igh ie eye ye eigh is ais
a aa ea e ah au
o a au aw augh ough ou oo hau oa
a ay ey eigh aigh ei ea ai
u you eau ue ew eu eue ieu
e ee ea ei ie i eo oe ay ey
o oe ow owe oa oh ew ou eau ough
ou hou ow ough
a ai hei ea e et ayo
o oo oe ough ou u ue ui ew wo
oo ou u ew ui o
oi oy
oi
p pp pe ph
t tt te ed cht ct bt pt tte th
s ss se z zz si thes x ’s
s ss se ’s c ce sw st sc sch ps
s z ge
m mm me mb gm mn lm
n nn ne kn dne pn gn
f ff fe ph lf gh u
f v ve lve
d dd de ed ld
l ll le
th the
th the
w wh o u
k kk ke ck ch c lk qu que cch che

cc
r rr re rre wr rh lo rrh rt
b bb be bu
h wh
g gg gu gh gue
sh ch t s ce che ss sch sc ci
ch tch t c
ng n
j g d dge ge gg dg dj
qu
x xe xc cc
x
x

Punctuation and print conventions

Punctuation has to be taught and its is really best taught in conjunction with reading aloud both reading material and what the learner has written.

One must remember that the purpose of punctuation is to make sense of print, to make reading more meaningful. Punctuation represents what in speech are pauses of different length (commas, semi-colons, colons, dashes), an ending (full stop), the tone of voice that indicates that a question is being asked (question mark), an exclamation (exclamation mark), an emphasis on a word or phrase (bold, italic, capitals), and direct speech (quotation marks, the so called inverted-commas), and so on.

Capitals letters are used to signal the beginning of sentences and names of people or places such as towns, cities and countries.

Spacing out text into paragraphs shows where each passage about one main idea or thought or topic begins and ends.

More advanced print conventions such as the standards greetings and ending of letters can be taught later.

Associated with print conventions are things such as page numbers in books, captions and labels to diagrams and illustrations and arrows that point in a direction.

Teaching reading with a range of text reading methods

With readers who already have the basics, we can teach a range of more advanced methods. Some of these relate to specials kinds of text, some relate to the looking at texts as a whole to get a sense of what they mean before reading in detail.

Recognising different kinds of texts

Learners have to be taught through the showing of examples and practice in reading different kinds of texts.

The texts can be different in format: stories, reports, messages, letters, news articles in newspapers, poems, calendars, timetables, forms, instructions. They are also different in purpose or intention: factual, narrative, persuasive, informational, etc. You need to show learners in the higher ABET levels a range of examples of such different kinds of texts so that they get to understand their characteristics.

They also have to be accustomed to getting information from the various kinds of layouts and illustrations that go with various kinds of texts: forms, maps, photographs, drawing, tables, graphs, comic strip illustrations, sequential drawings, captions, etc.

They also have to understand some of the pictorial conventions that are used in illustrations: arrows pointing, flow charts moving, speech bubbles talking, thought bubbles thinking silently, and so on.

Looking at texts as a whole

Because meaning is so central to reading, being able to get a sense of what a text is about before you start reading it is a really useful reading skill. There are two main techniques that are used in this kind of pre-reading, skimming and scanning.

Skimming

Skimming is used to quickly identify the main ideas of a text. You do it at about four times the speed of normal reading. You look at the title, the contents list, the headings and subheadings, summaries and illustrations to get an idea of what the text is about. Consider reading the first sentence of each paragraph.

Scanning

Scanning is the technique you often use when looking up a word in the telephone book or dictionary. You know what you are looking for and you search for it.

Knowing how alphabetical order is used as a means of sorting in dictionaries, indexes, telephone directories and other sources is also important. Alphabetical order is one kind of rote learning that has to be done by learners.

For both skimming and scanning it is easy to devise simple exercises using real books and other texts.

Critical reading

At the higher ABET levels learners need to be exposed to the idea that they have to respond critically to texts. People often misunderstand this concept of critical thinking. They think that to criticise means to see only the negative or bad things in something. We use the word criticize in a more correct sense of seeing what is good and bad in something. So to be a critical thinkers means to be able to look at texts and, having made sense of them, making an assessment or judgement of their value. Are they good or bad. Is the information accurate? Is it true? Is it logical? Is the evidence given backing up statements made, and so on. Even at simpler reading levels learners need to be encouraged to look critically at everything they read.

Encouraging meaningful reading

In thinking about how we make reading meaning ful for learners it may be useful to think about what we do when we read. You are busy reading this page. What are you doing? It is likely that reading has become so automatic for you that you never stop to think about what you are doing? Let us read a short story and, while we read, think about what it is that we do to make sense of the marks on the page:

Case study 1: Muti for love

144. One Saturday afternoon Thabo was sitting in his garden staring at the ground. His bother Sipho walked up to him.
145. "Hello Thabo. How are you today?" he asked. Thabo looked sad and did not answer.
146. "What's the matter with you?" asked Sipho.
147. "It's Thandi." Thabo said. "I love Thandi but she does not love me. She doesn't even look at me when she walks past me."
148. Sipho looked at his brother. He saw how sad his brother was.
149. "I’ve got an idea," Sipho said.
150. Sipho decided that he would do something to help his brother. He went to a little shop in town. The shop was dark and he could smell all kinds of things.
151. Sipho told the old man in the that Thandi did not love his brother. The old man listened and then he gave Sipho some muti in a small bottle.
152. "Put this muti in some water, and let your brother wash himself with it," he said.
153. Sipho thanked the old mad and hurried off.
154. When Sipho got home. Thabo was still sitting looking very sad. Sipho showed him the bottle, and told him what the old man had said. Then Sipho went inside and filled a bowl with water and poured the muti in. He was carrying the bowl outside when Thabo called out. "Hurry Sipho, I can see Thandi coming down the road."
155. Sipho started to run. He was in such a hurry that he tripped over a stick. Some of the water and muti splashed onto his face. Thandi came into the garden. Thabo looked at her with a smile on his face and love in his eyes – but Thandi did not notice Thabo.

156. Thandi went to Sipho who was standing there with his face all wet with water and the muti. Thandi looked at Sipho and put her arms around him and said "Sipho, I think I might be in love with you."
157. Poor Thabo looked at the girl he loved and walked away slowly.

This story was adapted from *Mandla wants Thobeka's love*, an ABET Level 3 English book produced by the Molteno Project.

Making sense of what we read

In the next activity, we will *ask* you to think about what you did, and what you thought about when you read the story.

Activity 2

Read through the story carefully. (We have numbered the paragraphs in the story *so* that we can refer to them when you do this activity.) After reading the story, think about each of the following questions:

1. Did you understand the story?
2. When you saw the title of the story, "Muti for love", did you wonder what the story was going to be about? If you did, what did you think the story was going to be about?
3. Have you ever heard of people buying muti to make someone love them?
4. While you were reading, did you think about whether or not a love muti could work?
5. When you got to paragraph 6, did you wonder what was going to happen? What did you think was going to happen?
6. When you got to paragraph 9, did you wonder what was going to happen next? What did you think was going to happen?
7. While you were reading, did you ever think that Thandi was going to fall in love with Thabo?
8. While you were reading, did you ever think that Thandi was going to fall in love with Sipho?
9. Did you notice that we left the word "shop" out in paragraph 8?
10. Did you notice the spelling mistake in line 10? We used the word "old mad" instead of old "man".

Our response

Let's discuss each of the above questions – if you think about each of them, you will gain a lot of insight into what we do when we read.

1. We are sure that you understood the story. Because we all experience emotions like love (or not being loved) at some stage of our lives, this story must have

reminded you of some of your own experiences – even if you have never actually thought of buying *muti* to get someone to love you! This should make you realise how much easier it is to teach learners to read if the material we use is relevant to their life experiences. New readers will often not know some of the words, and they will often need to guess what they mean. If they know what the sentences are about it will give the readers an idea of what words they should to expect to see. This is helpful for new readers because it helps them to use their knowledge and experiences to *guess* what the words will be.

2. When you saw the title of the story, *Muti for love,* did you wonder what the story would be about? The title of the story is like a newspaper headline. Titles and headlines draw our attention to a story or article. They make us think about what the story might be about. We call this prediction. When we look at newspaper headlines and wonder what the article will be about, we are predicting. Whenever I teach learners a new book, I tell them to first page through the book and to see what the drawings and pictures (if there are any) tell them. We look at the title and at the picture on the cover and at other illustrations in the book. I then ask them to guess what the text might be about. So, you can see that pictures, illustrations and photographs are useful to help us to understand what we are. And learners often like to guess what the story is about by looking at the pictures. This helps them anticipate what words they will see, and makes it easier for them to guess the meaning of the words more accurately.

3. If you thought about the title before you read the story, and if you knew that such love *muti* was available in some shops, you would have understood better what the story was about. Some English LI speakers will not know what the word *muti* means. Do you think that they would understand what the story is about? Perhaps when they have read the story they would be able to have understood what was going on and also be able to guess what we mean by *muti.* But they might have understood the story better if we used the word *love potion.*

4. We asked you whether you thought that a love *muti* could work. We are sure that, as you read through the story, you must have had your own opinion about a belief that muti can work. When we read, and if we understand what we read, we usually form our own opinions. Maybe you believe that muti can work. Or maybe you don't believe it and therefore you think that it is not possible for *muti* to help in love. Whatever you thought, you would have formed an opinion about the powers of *muti.*

5. When you got to paragraph 6, did you think that Sipho was going to buy some love *muti?* I thought that he was going to tell Thandi that his brother loved her. When we read, we usually stop and think about what is going to happen next. We form our own ideas (in our heads) of what we think might happen. But maybe the title should have given me an idea that Sipho was going to buy some love muti. What did you think of when you got to paragraph 6? If I were teaching this story to a class, I would have stopped the reading at paragraph 6 and I would have asked the class to think of what Sipho was going to do.

6. By the time I got to paragraph 9,1 thought that Thabo was going to wash his face with the *muti* and that Thandi was going to fall in love with him. Once again, at that point I tried to predict what was going to happen. If I were teaching this to a class, I would stop reading the story to them at paragraph 9, and I would ask

them all to tell me how they thought the story would end. I don't think that anyone would have predicted the actual ending – that the *muti* would splash onto Sipho's face.

7. I thought that in the story the *muti* would work and that Thandi would fall in love with Thabo. Did you also think that?

8. I wonder if anyone really predicted that there would be such an unexpected twist in the story, and that Thandi would fall in love with Sipho. Or did you expect this to happen? Can you see how, as we read, we constantly think about what is going to happen next. We all read with our own ideas in our heads and we actively have to work with these ideas.

9. You probably did not notice that we left the word "shop" out in paragraph 8. It is very common for us not to notice missing words, because if we understand what is happening in a story, we are able to "fill in the gaps". Later in this study guide, we will show you how you can test your learners' understanding by giving them exercises where they must fill in missing words.

10. You probably also did not notice that in line 10 we used the word "old *mad",* instead of old *"man".* Again, this is because you understood what was going on in the story, and you were able to "fix" the mistake in your head. You did not notice it, and you probably read it as old *man.* And, even if you did notice it, you would have known what we meant.

We can see from our answers to Activity 2 that, by thinking about what we do when we read, we can gain an understanding of how the reading process works. This will help us to know what to do to help our adult learners to start reading.
With the activities that follow, we would like to get you to think about how you learned to read. And so the next activity that will take you back a long time – I know that it took me back a long time!

Do we read whole words or individual letters?

What do we do when we try to make sense of the marks on a page? Do we look at whole words and their shapes, or do we look at individual letters?

$ Some language specialists say that, when we learn to read, we learn by looking at individual letters. They call this approach the *phonic* approach.

$ Others say that we look at whole words. They call this approach the *look-and-say* approach.

Which approach do you think you are using? You can decide after you have worked through the next section.

Looking at letters

Let’s see what happens when we read and look at individual letters.

Activity 3

Think about how you learned to read.

- $ Did you learn by first sounding out the individual letters, for example **b** is for baby ... **c** is for car?
- $ Did you learn by seeing whole words and then saying the words that you were shown?
- $ Did you learn through a mixture of the above to approaches?

Well, did this activity take you back a long time? Were you able to remember how you were taught? I remembered being taught the sounds of the individual letters. Then I learned how to write them, and I remember eventually putting them together to make words, for example c-a-t, d-o-g. We call this learning phonics.

But once we have learned to read is this the way that we actually read a book? Do we read one letter at a time?

Think about what you are doing now. Right now you are looking at the letters, words and sentences on this page. You are reading and understanding each sentence as a whole. Are you looking at each letter on its own? I don't think so, probably only when you come across an unfamiliar word. You are not sounding each letter separately to make a word, and you are not saying to yourself:

d....o....w....e.....r....e...a....d....b....y....l....o....o....k....i....n....g....a....t....o....n....e....
l....e....t....t....e....r....a....t....a....t....i....m....e.

Do we actually look closely at each of the letters when we read? Let's think carefully about what we do when we read, and about what we did when we started to learn to read.

Look back at paragraph 1 of the case study in Activity 2. How did you read it? Did you read one letter at a time? Many language specialists say that mature readers do not read one letter at a time (and it would be a very slow and boring way of reading if they did).

You can see how slowly reading one letter at a time and concentrating on its would make it difficult for the reader to concentrate on the meaning. Such a slow reader might actually be able to "read" correctly, without understanding what they are reading. If we teach people to move on to recognising words rather than sounds, they will start discovering for themselves that certain letters match up with certain sounds.

Let us try a little test.

Activity 4

Let us compare what if is like (a) to read by looking at one letter at a time, and (b) by looking at whole words.

- $ Take a piece of stiff paper and, using a punch, make a row of holes in the paper.
- $ Hold the row of holes over a sentence in the "Muti for love" story. Look through each of the holes and read the text, letter by letter.

- While you do this, time yourself and see how many words you can read in a minute.
- Now read without the card and see how many words you can read in a minute.

We are sure that you could not read more than about thirty or forty words per minute when you read letter-by-letter through the holes. When you read without the "holes" (in other words, when you read whole words at a time not each indivdual letter), you would probably read from 150 to 300 words per minute. Also, with the "holes", you were probably trying so hard to link the letters to the other ones that you probably struggled to follow the meaning of what you were reading.

By the way, did you notice the spelling mistake in the previous paragraph? Did you notice that we spelt “indvidual” incorrectly (we left out an I)? Probably not, because when you understand what you are reading, you tend not to notice small mistakes, and to "fix" mistakes like these quite unconsciously as part of the reading process.

Looking at whole words

So far we have looked at individual letters. We have suggested that while we are reading we do not take in each letter one at a time unless you are trying to read a word that you do not recognise. We seem to look at whole words, but how do we look at them?

Some teachers say that we learn to recognise whole words by recognising their shape. But do we simply recognise the shapes of words? Look at the following example (taken from Chapman 1995:11) and think about it. Do you agree that perhaps it is too simple to say that we recognise words by their whole shape?

IF fLUen tREading WEresimply amAtter of rec Ognizing fAMiLlar wHolE wORd shapes IT seeMs RatHer unlikely tHat yOu WoUld be ABIe tO rEadTh is SENtence WitH tolErabLe EaSe.

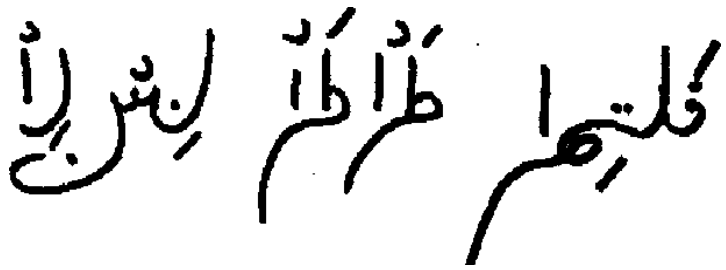
In the next activity we shall see what happens if we are not familiar with the words.

Activity 5

1. Can you recognise the letters in the piece of writing below? Can you read it aloud, even if you do not understand what it means:

   DIPEREKATIKAN SELAMA SEABAD

2. What about this one?



3. Look at the following letters for a few seconds, and then see how many you can remember:

   ASDLKFJOWEIRUQWEZXNCBV

4. How look at the following words for a few seconds, and then see how many you can remember:

   hail name absolute when wish incorporate

5. Now look at the following sentence and see how many words you can remember:

   Thabo looked at the girl he loved, and then he walked away sadly.

[These activities are taken from Macdonald and Burroughs (1991:81) and various sections of Chapman (1995)]

Our response

Let's talk about what happened in each of the above exercises

1. When you read the first exercise, we are sure that you could recognise, pronounce and read (although with some difficulty) the words, even if you did not understand what they meant. You would not, however, be able to tell us what the words were. It is unlikely that, if you were a learner and you were asked to read a "sentence" like this – which did not mean anything to you – that you would carry on attending your literacy classes. This supports our argument that your learners should first learn to read in their mother tongue. It makes simple common sense that people are more likely to learn quickly and efficiently through their own language, and that the development of their first language provides a sound base for the development of their skills in a second or third language (Burroughs 1995:271).

2. This exercise highlights a different language tradition. This was a piece of Arabic text. To read a text like this, the reader will have to read from left to right. In English and in the African languages we use the Roman script and we follow the custom of reading from left to right and from the top of the page to the bottom. This all helps to make the change from reading in one of the African languages to English easier than it would be to change to Arabic or from Arabic to English. The convention of reading from left to right is something that we need to show our learners.

3. I could only remember five letters from the list of letters in this exercise. How many could you remember? Probably not too many, because you were unable to make any sense out of the list of letters. This exercise highlights the importance of not teaching letters in isolation because they will not make sense to the learner.

4. In this example I could remember the letters in the words *hail* and *wish. I* was not able to remember words in isolation because I could not make any sense of the individual words.

5. In the last sentence you could probably read the whole sentence because the sentence has meaning. The sentence is made up of 56 letters. You probably found that your were able to remember all of them, and that it took you exactly the same time to remember the five letters in exercise 3 as it took to remember four or five letters in Activity 4.

When you did the above exercises, you must at some stages have looked at whole words and at some stages looked closely at the individual letters.

What we would suggest you should remember when teaching learners is that it is not necessary to wait until after teaching each sound of the alphabet before giving learners *interesting* things to read. From the start it is important to have interesting material and letter and word decoding should be taught in the context of relevant and interesting sentences and stories. This means that we should not teach the letters on their own or in isolation. So, for example, if you were teaching learners to read *Muti for love,* you could build in a phonic or (sound) lesson and ask them, for example, to find the *a* s and the *b s* and so on. Do you agree with us? In this way, you would be using both phonic and whole language approaches, but the learning of phonics is built into a context and into what your learners already understand.

What does all this mean for teaching reading?

If we think about what we have learned so far in this unit, we can formulate the following " rules" for meaningful reading:

"Rules" for teaching people to read:

- Learners must start learning to read in the language that they know best.

- Learners must understand that the written-down words are the same words that people use when they talk. That is why it is so important to start with the mother tongue.

- It is helpful to know what we are reading about, because reading is about giving meaning and making sense. We "make" meaning as we read.

- New readers must start by reading material that they understand and which is relevant to their lives.

- It is important that people who are learning to read should start with sentences that are made up of words that they use often in their own everyday speech.

- Learners must learn what the letters stand for, learn to recognise whole words, and learn to read whole sentences. They should not be taught the sounds of the letters and combinations of letters in isolation.

- Writing and print have conventions, such as that we read from the left to the right, and from the top of the page to the bottom. These conventions have to be taught and explained.

- We should start each sentence with a capital letter.

- Learners should know that there are spaces between words.

- Learners should be able to recognise where one sentence ends and the next one starts.

- We should end sentences with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.

Unit summary

Well, we have reached the end of this unit. We hope that you have learned a little more about teaching adults to read. We have spoken about how reading involves knowing the alphabet, the different sounds of the letters and recognising words. But we said that it is most important that we can make sense of and give meaning to what we read. We also showed you that when you read, you do not just let words pass your eyes. You are active in that you think "I wonder what will happen next?" or "Oh, I wasn't expecting this to happen" and so on. We used the *Muti for love* story to show that what we do when we read.

We also used the story to show that we use certain strategies when we read, for example the following:

- Based on our knowledge of the subject, we guess what some words are. It helps adults to learn to read if they know what the reading material is about before they start reading. Our guesses are helped by the illustrations we see.

- Adults learn to read if the material is meaningful and relevant to their lives.

- The content of what we read must have an immediate use outside the classroom. Don't you think learning "My name is Mary", is more meaningful and useful than, "The cat sat on the mat"?

- We should tell learners what the story is about. You can do this by talking briefly about the story, showing them the pictures and asking them what they think the story is about or by speaking about a related picture, story, or any topical event.

- Learners do not need to know all the letters of the alphabet before they start to read whole words and sentences. But they will need to know the sounds to help them to work out words that they are not sure of, and help them build new words.

- Sounds and syllables can be taught together with meaningful words and sentences.

- We should use words that the learners know.

- Words that are seen often are recognised quickly, and this helps learners guess other words and grasp the meaning more quickly. Repetition helps adults learn, as long as it is not overdone.

- Frequent use of words and sentences helps the learner recognise words without having to rely on sounding (phonics).

These are all part of what we need to do when we teach reading.

Further reading

Kohl, H. 1974. ***Reading, how to***. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Though an old book, it is a really useful guide to the teaching of literacy in English.

Lyster, E. 1992. *Current approaches to first language methodology*. In: Hutton, B. (Ed.). 1992. ***Adult Basic Education in South Africa: Literacy, English as a second language, and numeracy****.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press, pp. 103-151

Has a wealth of practical advice on literacy teaching methods and techniques.

McKay, V.I. 2008. ***Literacy facilitator's notes***. Pretoria: Kha ri gude Literacy Campaign South Africa

A detailed guide to teaching literacy using the Kha ri gude Literacy Campaign South Africa mother tongue literacy manuals. Should be used in conjunction with one of the learner manuals.

References

Burroughs, L. 1995. *Language considerations when planning an adult basic education*. In: McKay, V.I. (Ed.). ***The sociology of educating***. Johannesburg: Heinemann Lexicon.

Chapman, J. 1995. ***An introduction to the teaching of reading****.* Harare:, Zimbabwe: Jongwe.

Unit 4: Teaching writing

Introduction

In the previous units we focussed on what we do when we read and on ways of teaching our learners to read. In this unit we will look at ways of teaching writing.

It is important to remember that reading is the reading of writing. Writing is an important part of basic literacy and, like reading skills, writing skills have to be taught. Writing skills are is not something that the learners will just pick up somehow.

It must also be remembered that writing skills are complex and varied, from knowing how to hold a pencil and how to sit when you write through to how to structure the writing of complex texts.

This unit therefore gives some basic instruction on the teaching of writing in the context of beginner literacy classes and the first levels of ABET.

Aims of the unit

The aim of this unit is to enable you to teach basic writing skills and to assist learners to write for a range of different purposes.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Teach learners to write for a range of purposes
You will demonstrate this by being able to:

- Describe suitable ways of holding a pen or pencil.
- Describe conventional letter formation, including pen/pencil direction and lifts.
- Identify the stage at which the learner is encouraged to use reduced writing (i.e. filling half the height of a line).
- Encourage learners to practise newly attained writing skills by writing short meaningful units of language. (e.g. words, lists or short sentences).
- Explain punctuation forms which are appropriate for learners to use at ABET levels 1 and 2. (Examples are commas, sentence notation, question marks, exclamation marks, paragraphs, headings, titles.)
- Facilitate activities which extend the writing skills of learners such as writing to express their own original thoughts, communicate with others, express and support their own opinions.)
- Facilitate activities in which learners develop understanding of the purpose of written tasks and create writing that is appropriate to the task.
- Facilitate activities in which learners develop the skills of structuring, organising and formatting logical writing which is coherent according to theme and content.
- Facilitate activities in which learners develop the skills of drafting and editing preparatory to writing final versions.

Why do we teach writing?

You will find that, whatever literacy approach and method that you use, your learners will need some help with writing. Often their reading and their recognition of words will be more advanced than their writing. For this reason, all basic literacy programmes should always include some writing exercises. In this unit our focus will be on teaching writing as part of your teaching basic literacy. So, we will look at ways of teaching writing and we will be attempting to answer questions like:

- How will I know which hand my learners should use when they start to write?
- What kinds of things can I do to help my learners to start to write?
- What kinds of writing exercises should learners do when they start to write?
- How should learners sit when they write?

If you ask learners who join a literacy class why they have joined and what they want to learn, it is likely that they will say things like:

- I want to sign my name.
- I want to write a letter.
- I want to help my child with his or her homework.
- I want to be able to fill in a form.

These are the kinds of things your writing classes should include. Like reading, writing should be a meaning making activity. Writing is not just a copying down letters – it is a skill that involves putting letters of the alphabet on paper in a way that it can communicates meaning to a reader.

As you read this text, you are receiving a message. You are receiving the message that we thought about when we wrote this module. Writing means that we put our thoughts into print. But we cannot read or write unless we know the letters of the alphabet and how the letters form words.

Activity 1

Writing is communicating

Try this. Copy these letters: m g s t.

You have written something down quite correctly, but it has no meaning.
What you have written does not come from your own thinking.

Now count how many letters you copied and write down the number.

Again, you have written something down. This time you did not copy it. You had to think about what you were going to write and what you wrote made sense to you. It is the answer to a question in your mind, “How many letters are there?”

Now finish this sentence:

I am happy when I am _____.

Now you have written down something that you thought, a thought that came from your own mind. You have made it possible for a reader to know what you thought. You have communicated it This really is writing!

What do you think writing meant for the young man in this case study?

Case study 1: Mandla tries writing

Mandla told his literacy teacher that he did not want to learn to write, he only wanted to learn to read. He said he could write already. His teacher was very surprised because she could not understand how a person could write but not read, When Mandla insisted that he could write, she asked him to write something for her at home.

He returned the next day and proudly handed her a whole page of writing. It was very neat writing, all the words were slanted neatly and there were gaps between the words. The teacher was very very surprised. But when she put on her reading glasses and looked carefully at the page she saw that Mandla had " written" a whole page of very neat scribbling. There were no proper letters, just a flow of what Johannes believed was writing. There was no meaning. Mandla was "writing", but he was actually not giving any message. She handed him the page and asked him to read it to her. After a long silence he looked up at her and said, "It says nothing."

She quietly explained that although he had given her a page of very neat marks those marks were not "talking" to her, they were not giving her a message.

So, writing is not just a mechanical skill. Writing is the ability to write your own thoughts down on paper. Learning to write involves copying, doing guided activities, dictation, writing thoughts with help, and finally, writing down thoughts without assistance. All of these strategies are used through the various levels of a literacy course to teach people to write.

The mechanics of writing

You may have to do a little preparation before you start teaching writing.

New writers may also need to be shown how to:

- Hold the pencil properly, and to relax their hand when writing.
- Hold the pencil lightly and not to press heavily on the paper.
- Hold the book with his or her free hand to keep it from moving.
- Sit when writing.

Holding a pencil

You need to demonstrate suitable ways of holding a pencil or pen.

In some cases learners will already know how to do such things as hold a pencil or pen and copy letters. Truly illiterate people will not. As even people who can write often hold the pencil and sit in the wrong way for writing, it is always useful to check this when you start to teach writing.

Usually your learners will know which hand to write with. They will know whether they are right or left-handed. But if one of them does not, this is one of the first things that you will have to decide on. As a general rule, always let the learner write with the hand they feel most comfortable – which ever hand they use for sewing or using a screw driver, etc. Usually there should be no problem in deciding this.

Sometimes a very nervous learner or a learner who tends to work with heavy tools, for example pickaxes or heavy drilling machinery, may find it difficult to hold the pencil correctly. They may also need to have their pencil "thickened" in the beginning if they have difficulty holding it. This can be done by placing some *plasticine* or putty around the grip part of the pencil.

Holding the pencil correctly is important because otherwise it is hard to move the pencil so as to write legibly and at an appropriate speed.
The pencil should rest between thumb and fore-finger and be lightly held between thumb, fore-finger and middle-finger. The fore-finger should be slightly arched, but not sharply angled. The pencil should be held with the fore-finger and side of the middle-finger about 25 millimetres (one inch) from the tip and with the thumb about 12 mm (half an inch) further up the pencil.

The pencil should point on the paper at an angle of 45° and should be held at an angle of 45° to the writing line.

How to sit when writing

One should be sitting comfortably when writing with your feet firmly on the floor.

The best height for the desk, table or other writing surface is slightly below the level of your elbow. The best surface is one that slopes slightly downwards towards you (as in old-fashioned school desks).

You should be able to see clearly and the light should come in over your left shoulder.

The paper should slope slightly to the left for right-handed people.

You need to show the learner how to sit when writing and how to use his or her free hand to hold the paper or book steady.

How to move the pencil

The learner needs to be shown how to move the whole hand when writing and not the finger and thumb. The thumb and fore-finger should just hold the pencil, while the hand moves it up and down, backwards and forwards. The actual movement takes place from the wrist.

How to form the letters

If you have beginner learners, it is a good idea to give them patterns to do that will help to prepare them to "write" the shapes of the letters. You can let your learners practice writing shapes like these:

Then move on to the shaping of the letters according to any good form of the alphabet suitable for beginning handwriting, such as this one (the Simple Modern Hand (Gourdie, 1971)

I have often let my learners practice writing new letters in a tray of mealie meal. In this way, they can write the letter with their fingers and then shake the mealie meal and try again. The tray can be kept clean by covering it with plastic and it can be used to try out new letters in the following lessons.

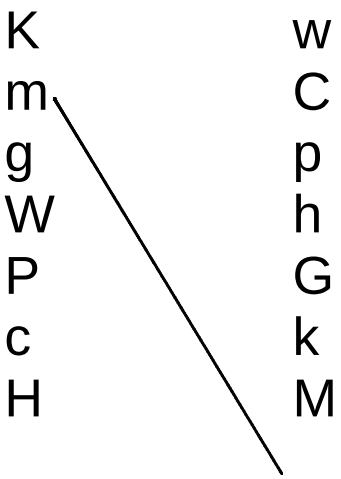
Remember you learners will copy your writing so you will need to practise using neat lower case printing (not cursive) on the board.

When we write we usually write on one line. But beginner writers may find four lines helpful.

Identify the stage at which the learner is encouraged to use reduced writing (i.e. filling half the height of a line).

Make sure that you do not teach writing in isolation. Just as phonics are not taught alone or in isolation from words and sentences, writing should also not be taught in isolation. This means that we do not just work our way through the alphabet, teaching learners to sound, say and write the letters from A to Z. We need to think of ways that will make writing a meaningful activity for our learners. The following example shows

how letters can be taught as part of words. In this way, the letters are taught in context. You can also let your learners do exercises like the following to match capital letters with small letters.



Printing and cursive writing

Cursive writing is “joined up” handwriting, as distinguished from “print” writing. One normally only teaches the use of cursive writing once the learner is able to write sentences and paragraphs well in print script.

The learner has to be shown how the basic print script letters have to be modified so that each one can be linked both at the beginning and end to the letters before and after it. Usually you will make use of guidelines on how this is best done for the particular form of alphabet you are using.

Some basic writing rules when you teach writing

Remember that it is important to teach learners that:

- We start writing on the left side of the page.
- We leave a space between each word.
- New sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop.
- We start the names of the people and the places with capital letters.

Writing as a meaningful experience

Teaching writing is part of a meaning making enterprise. What the learners write must make sense to them. The letters that you teach them to write must be the letters that are taken from the words in key sentences. In this way, the learner says the sounds and the letters that he or she learns to read, are the sounds and letters they learn to write.

Writing involves expressing thoughts on paper. So – we must teach learners how to form the letters, how to put them in the correct order on paper, and how to express their own thoughts in print.

Show learners how to write their names. You have written their names on their books and you should let them copy their names. Teach learners how to sign their names. They need only write the first letter of their name. So, Nomsa Dlamini need only sign:

N. Dlamini

Structuring, drafting and editing writing

Writing should be a meaningful activity through which the individual expresses his or her thoughts in way that can be communicated to others. Now, in the same way that we vary our speech according to what we want to say, and to whom, and in what circumstances, so does writing have to be varied.

Think of the different ways in which we would speak for these purposes:

Giving somebody an important message from somebody else
Giving some complicated instructions
Making a public speech
Having an heated argument with somebody
Chatting informally with friends
Introducing yourself during a job interview
Telling a story to some young children.

In all these examples you would speak in a different way (slowly or fast, varying tone of voice, etc.), use different facial expressions and body movements, and use a different vocabulary, and so forth.

In the same way learners have to slowly and with much practice learn to write in different ways – for different purposes and audiences – and anticipate different responses from readers to what is communicated.

In beginning literacy the different ways in which writing will be structured will include these common forms:
a letter
a message
filling in a form
a short paragraph about oneself
a very short story

You need to teach some of the more obvious conventions about these forms. Thus for example a message would normally include:

- the name of the person to whom the message is addressed
- the name of the person sending the message (and maybe their contact details)
- the content of the message (including any important information about times or dates)
- the time the message was written

In the same way we are all familiar with the conventions of the letter:

- sender's name and address
- date written
- recipient's name and address
- greeting
- main content
- conclusion
- ending.

Now all these conventions are best taught is practical ways so that the exercise is meaningful to the writer – so that he or she sees the practical usefulness of these ways of structuring their writing.

Drafting and editing

One of the most important things that new writers need to learn is that they need to look at the draft of what they have written and then edit it to make it better and correct any mistakes.

There are simple ways to do this. Writers should be encouraged to read their writing out aloud. This often a very good way of seeing whether it makes sense and whether it has any obvious spelling, grammatical or punctuation mistakes. Learners should also share their writing with each other and edit each other's work.

Unit summary

This unit has looked mainly at the very basic mechanics of teaching writing. Often this part of literacy instruction is neglected and it is assumed that the learners will somehow pick it up themselves. Good reading skills should be matched by good writing skills.

Readings

If you are currently involved in teaching literacy or ABET examine the material or educator's guide to see what material there is one teaching writing and particularly on the particular way in which the letters of the alphabet are taught in writing both print and cursive scripts.

References

Gourdie, T. 1971. ***Handwriting for today***. London: Pitman

Hutton, B., Murray, N. and Walton, W. 1995. ***Fundani - Teaching literacy: theory and practical suggestions***. Cape Town: Juta.

Molteno Project. ***Training manual for Breakthrough to Literacy - Facilitators***. Johannesburg: Molteno Project

Unit 5: Formative and summative assessment in reading

Introduction

The place of assessment in learning to read and write is often debated by literacy educators. Some say that literacy learners don't want to be assessed, tested or examined – they just want to learn to read. They may argue that learners, particularly those with previous bad experiences of school, may be scared of being assessed. Such learners associate assessment with stress, failure and humiliation.

In this unit we argue the very opposite. Constructive assessment is absolutely essential for learning to read and write. Above all, assessment is the means by which the learners get to find how well they are doing and can improve their reading skills. It is a most valuable part of literacy education. This is why assessment of literacy learners has to be done well so that is can be seen as learners as a natural and essential part of the learning process.

Aims of the unit

This unit aims to provide introductory knowledge, skills, and applied competence in using formative and summative assessment effectively and appropriately in the teaching of reading and writing with adult mother-tongue literacy learners.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Use formative and summative assessment effectively and appropriately
You will demonstrate this by being able to:

- Use a range of formal and informal strategies, which reflect a valid judgment of learners' abilities in reading and writing.

- $ Give constructive and regular feedback is given to learners. (Suggestions for effective and useful feedback on samples of learners' work typifying poor to competent reading and writing, which identifies areas of weakness and suggests ways to improve skills.)
- $ Identify and use strategies for learner-centred assessment (e.g. where learners edit and evaluate their own and peers' reading and writing).
- $ Correctly identify exemplars of learners work that typify learners who need to be allowed to progress at a slow, (step by step) pace and learners who could progress rapidly through several stages.
- $ Pace the learning and teaching appropriately for the majority of learners.
- $ Use a range of strategies for assessing reading in the classroom. (Examples are both silent and aloud reading, through listening, checking of comprehension and observation of reading behaviours - such as fluent progress through the text, reading with appropriate vocal expression, learner's degree of awareness of mistakes made, the kind of mistakes made - e.g. sense of text retained as opposed to obliviously lost.
- $ Give feedback on reading, which promotes increased awareness of deriving meaning from the text.
- $ Give feedback on writing, which promotes learners' ability to use writing effectively for a range of purposes.
- $ Identify appropriate forms of summative assessment.
- $ Recognise exemplars/samples of learners' work which typify readiness for examination or relevant form of assessment such as by portfolio presentation at ABET levels 1 and 2.

Strategies for formative assessment of reading

Formative assessment is ongoing assessment that helps the learner to continue developing their knowledge and skills. Formative assessment needs to be seen as ongoing or **continuous** as against purely **summative** or **terminal** (end of course) assessment. The emphasis is on the assessment of the learner's work over a period of time, rather than on a single performance. Key in formative assessment is the feedback from the educator to the learner. Formative assessment includes this feedback so that the learners can identify their strengths, weaknesses and progress so that they can improve their performance.

Formative assessment then is that assessment which checks how well the learner is doing during this journey to literacy and, through constructive feedback from the educator, is helps the learner to correct mistakes, improve learning and meet new challenges. Good formative assessment enables the educator to more accurately pace the learning and teaching appropriately for the majority of learners.

A way of checking progress

Obviously in something as fundamental as moving from not being able to read and write at all to being a fluent reader there are many steps and stages. Initially the learner may only be able to decode a few words and copy some letters of the alphabet and some key words (possibly only his or her name). Over a period of six months or so there will be great progress. This can be observed by the educator in a number of ways: observation of the learner's everyday performance in the class, reading exercises, written exercises and tests.

Collecting a portfolio of evidence

Often it is advisable to collect a set of examples of the learner's work at each stage of development. This is what is often called constructing a portfolio of work. Such a portfolio is useful evidence of progress. Both the educator and the learner can look through the examples of reading comprehension and of writing – of sentences, paragraphs, stories, letters and the filling in of forms – to see learning has progressed and also identify difficult areas needing further attention.

Some portfolios of evidence can be highly structured. A good example of this is the 2008 *Kha ri gude* Literacy Campaign ***Yes I Can Assessment portfolio for communication and numeracy*** which has twenty carefully graded tasks that are completed in printed portfolio booklet.

Such a portfolio of evidence is also useful for the educator in deciding what level of reading and writing ability the learner has reached.

Levels of achievement

With reading and writing there are different levels of competence. Different writers have suggested various levels: Barrs *et al* (1988) proposed six levels of reading: inexperienced, less experienced, moderately experienced, experienced and very experienced. Kohl (1974) has four levels: Beginning, Not bad, With ease, Complex.

Kohl's four reading levels (1974)	
Levels	Skills
Beginning	1. Knowing print 2. Known words 3. Words that connect and words that place 4. Alphabet 5. Sounds and combinations of sounds 6. Simple sentences
Not bad	1. Combination of sounds 2. Complicated words 3. Complex sentences 4. Everyday reading 5. Paragraphs and stories
With ease	1. Unfamiliar words 2. Different forms of writing 3. Voice 4. Test taking
Complex	1. Knowing about languages 2. Special uses of words 3. Special language 4. Critical analysis

After you have collected examples of learner work in the you will become more familiar with the characteristics of the work at different levels of reading and writing. There will be some variation between learners as their progress partly depends on their prior experience and personal abilities. Give yourself practice in comparing all the work of the learners in your class.

Initially, the writing of the beginners will have awkwardly shaped letters and uneven spacing between letters, words and lines on the page. With practice the writing will improve. The content of the writing will also become more complex as the learner becomes more accustomed to writing down their ideas, moving from a few words and phrases to more complex sentences and paragraphs and start using punctuation correctly.
Through examining the learners' work you can identify what further teaching they need and when they should be encouraged to move to a higher level of reading or writing.

Assessing reading

Reading is more difficult to assess because you do not have a product to examine.

One of the best ways of assessing reading is to listen to each learner reading aloud and then giving useful feedback on how they are reading. Learners should be encouraged to practise reading by reading both silently and aloud whenever they have the opportunity and also by providing our learners with materials to read that are suitable for their level and which are interesting and relevant for them to read. You need to observe the reading behaviours – such as fluent progress through the text, reading with appropriate vocal expression, learner's degree of awareness of mistakes made, and the kind of mistakes made.

Silent reading can only be assessed indirectly, by your asking questions that check the learner's comprehension of what they have read (this can be done either orally or by way of a written comprehension test).

One of the important aspects of developing fluency in reading is the speed at which the learner is able to read. Unless a person can read the average sentence of about seven words in under 12 seconds the person cannot keep the whole sentence in their short term memory – in other words by the time they reach the end of the sentence they have forgotten its beginning. So to be functionally literate you must read faster than this, at least at 45 to 60 words per minute while retaining almost 100% accuracy. So checking the speed at which the learners read is also important.

Questions to ask yourself when assessing reading include:

- How fluently do they read?
- What kind of mistakes do they make?
- Do they correct their own mistakes?
- How well can they tell you or others in their own words what they have read?
- Can they answer questions about the content?
- Do they understand what kind of text it is?
- Do they like to read or not?
- What do they like to read?

Finding out at what level the learners are reading

Try to decide which learners belong on which level on the following scale. (This activity may take quite some time.)

Reading scale checklist		
Inexperienced reader		Does reader have only a little reading experience?
		Does reader generally choose to read familiar texts?
		Does reader choose texts where illustrations play an part?
		Does reader have difficulty with unfamiliar material?
		Is reader able to read familiar texts confidently?
		Does reader need a great deal of help with reading?
		Does reader often read word by word?
		Does reader seldom read for pleasure?
Less experienced reader		Is reader becoming more fluent with certain texts?
		Does reader choose short books with simple text?
		Does reader read silently most of the time?
		Does reader re-read favourite books?
		Does reader read for pleasure?
		Does reader-need help with classroom reading – especially information texts?
Moderately experienced reader		Does reader feel at home with books?
		Does reader read silently?
		Does he or she read often?
		Is reader able to read for longer periods of time?
		Is reader able to cope with more difficult texts?
		Does reader select books on his or her own?
		Can reader use information books?
		Does reader still need some help with unfamiliar material?

Experienced reader		Is reader self-motivated to read?
		Is reader confident about reading?
		Does reader read about areas of interest to him or her? (e.g. sport)
		Is reader able to read books that deal with the other areas of the ABET curriculum?
		Does reader think about what he or she reads and is he or she able to form an opinion?
		Can reader draw out information from a variety of sources

		in order to do a project?
Very experienced reader		Is reader enthusiastic about reading?
		Does reader have strongly established tastes in books?
		Does reader enjoy reading outside of class?
		Can reader read a wide range of texts?
		Is reader able to evaluate evidence from sources?
		Is reader able to form an opinion about what he or she reads?

(Adapted from Barrs *et al* 1988)

Obviously, it is not so easy to "categorise" anyone perfectly but the more ticks a learner has in one particular category the more likely he or she will fit into that level of reading experience. And our goal is to ensure that our learners become experienced readers.

Testing reading using cloze exercises

Another way of testing reading ability is to test for comprehension or understanding.

One simple way of doing this is to do what we call a *cloze* exercise. The word “cloze” is taken from the word “closure” . Readers have to use their knowledge and understanding of the text to be able to fill in missing words in the text, to close up the gaps.

Try doing the following activity which will give you a good idea of what a cloze exercises is:

Activity 5

You and your friend are deep in conversation. You know that whenever you pause, your friend fills in the gaps in your sentences because he or she can predict what you are about to say. You find that you and your friend are constantly finishing each others’ sentences:

The conversation goes like this:

(1) *Phenyane*: Hi Nomsa: How are ...
(2) *Nomsa*: I am fine. I am just back from ...
(3) *Phenyane*: What was it like in Durban?
(4) *Nomsa:*: Great but I am hungry. All I have eaten today is some bread and ...
(5) *Phenyane*: Shame, here's some tea. Do you want milk? And how many spoons of ....

.
We are sure that you were able to make sense of their conversation. Let us look at your answers and think about what you had to do to complete the conversation.

In line 1, you probably found it easy to fill in the word *you* because we all use this kind of sentence structure every day.

You probably found it easier to fill in the gap inline 2 *after* you had read line 3. But when you read line 2, you knew it was likely to be the name of a *place.*

In line 4, you probably filled in margarine, butter or jam – or anything else that you like to eat with bread. As long as it made sense, it was correct. It is not likely that you would have answered *paper* or *television* because as you fill in gaps, you need to make sure that what is being said makes sense.

I am certain that you would have filled in *sugar* in line 5. Did you? Again this is because you could use your knowledge of "drinking tea" to complete the gap.

You probably found it very easy to fill in the gaps in this dialogue. The more difficult the text, the more difficulty you would have had in filling in the gaps. Cloze tests give you information about how your learners are building meanings and their reading ability. Cloze tests are a very good way of checking whether your learners understand what they are reading because they require your learners to work both with *understanding* and with the *grammar* that the text contains.

You can easily make your own cloze exercises. Copy a few paragraphs from one of your learners' readers and leave out every fifth or sixth word. Or leave out all the names of things (nouns). When you design a cloze exercise, it is a good idea to leave the first paragraph intact so that the readers are able to establish the context of the story. Remember that there is often not just one correct answer for the gaps. We saw in the above activity that Nomsa could have had jam or butter or margarine or cheese on her bread. Any of these answers would, however, have told us that the reader understood what he or she was reading.

The following cloze exercise was taken from the an Independent Examination Board examination at ABET Level 1 examination. We have included an example taken from the English Level 1 exam but the same question appeared in the various other Level 1 language examinations. You will notice that in the following question, the learners are given a number of words from which to choose.

1. Read this letter and fill in the gaps with words from this box.

money	letter	news	love	job

P.O. Box 293
New Brighton
Port Elizabeth 6000
5 March 2009

My dear wife Gladys

How are you? I am keeping very well here in Port Elizabeth. I have very important _____ to tell you in this _____. Fortunately I have managed to find a new _____ with a firm that makes motor

cars. As a result, I will be able to send you more _____ at the end of the month.

I hope that this news makes you happy.

I will write to you again. _____ to you and everyone at home.

Your husband

John

[5 marks]

Interviewing learners and giving them feedback

Every two to three months (or even more frequently, you should review each learner's reading and writing then arrange a time to meet with her or him for an interview. individually. In this interview you will talk about the learner's progress in the class, their reading development and their writing accomplishments.

The interview should be as non-threatening as possible and should be informal and friendly. Explain that the interview has the purpose of assisting the learner to identify their own progress. The interview is not a test or examination.

You need to look at the learner's general progress in class, their progress in reading and writing and also check whether the learner is meeting their own aims in coming to the literacy class.

Things you can look at include the following (Dixon and Tuladhar, 1996: 59-61):

General progress
Begin by asking the learner to tell you what she or he likes about the class and has learned in the class. If you are using a structured portfolio, go through the sections that have been completed. Read any notes you have made and discuss them with the learner. Be sure to discuss how the learner is using her reading, writing or language skills outside the classroom.

Reading progress
Ask the learner to tell you about any text he or she has read and enjoyed recently. Ask her he or she has been finding helpful, and what difficulties have been experienced. Help the learner to develop a plan of action for improving reading skills over the next two months.

Writing progress
Arrange the learner's writing in the order it was written. Discuss the improvements the learner has made in writing skills and in explaining her or his ideas clearly. Invite the learner to choose one or more favourite pieces and tell you what she or he likes about it. Make a list of the skills the learner has gained and compare the list of skills in writing development with those the course aims to achieve. Talk about the next step the learner may want to work on.

Learning needs and goals
Relook at the learning outcomes you and the learner, or the class, have set or agreed to for this course. Discuss whether they have been achieved, and how the learner feels about them. Find out if there is anything particular that the learner would like to work on over the next few months. Ask if there is anything the learner wants to talk about, any worries or issues that she may not feel comfortable raising in class. Give the learner time – it often takes courage to raise issues.

Strategies for formative assessment of writing

The strategies and methods for the formative assessment of writing are similar to those for reading. To be useful formative has to be regular, continuous and there has to be rapid and effective feedback to the learner.

Also as with reading, there has to be lots and lots of practice. One learns to read by reading and to write by writing.

Give feedback on writing, which promotes learners' ability to use writing effectively for a range of purposes.

It is often useful to have learners edit and assess their own and peers' reading and writing. Remember that writing is a form of communication that stands on its own. The reader of the writing is the best person to make a judgement on whether it is communicating clearly.

The use of exemplars

Particularly with writing, examples of good writing are very helpful to beginner writers. Collect together good examples from your class and use these as exemplars. Correctly identify exemplars of learners work that typify learners who need to be allowed to progress at a slow, (step by step) pace and learners who could progress rapidly through several stages.

It can also be useful to have examples of bad writing for learners to correct and edit.

Have a look at the United Kingdoms' Department for children, schools and families website on literacy assessment to get an idea of how exemplars can be chosen and used (http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/assessment/literacy).

How to give constructive feedback

Give constructive and regular feedback to learners. We have already given some advice on this in the section on formative assessment.

Remember that all feedback should be aimed at building up fluent and meaningful reading and writing.

Feedback should always be constructive – thee purpose of formative assessment is to develop and build, not to judge, grade, rank or select.

The best feedback should always adhere to these basic rules:

- It is rapid – given as soon as possible after the work being assessed is completed.
- It is timely – it is given at an appropriate place in the course when it will have most effect.
- It is relevant to the objectives or outcomes being worked on.
- Its is constructive and usable (it is pointless giving feedback if the learner can do nothing in response or it is beyond their capabilities at this stage.)
- Avoid pointing out mistakes or errors without explaining how they could be corrected or avoided.
- Give examples of good or exemplary work.
- Give feedback not only on details but also on the whole piece of work.
- Do not only point out mistakes or errors, also commend what is good, correct or improved.

It is important that feedback it given in a way that it becomes a normal and expected part of the learning programme and not seen as stressful or threatening.

Using appropriate forms of summative assessment

Summative assessment is assessment that “sums up” what has been learned. It is used to assess whether the desired learning outcomes of a course or programme have been achieved. Thus summative assessment is usually carried out at the end of a course or programme. It involves gathering information through a final assessment process as a basis for deciding whether or not learners have reached the outcomes to the required standards.

In a literacy programme the desired outcomes are usually fairly clear. So selecting what is to be assessed should also be clear. Can the learner read and write in a meaningful and fluent way at a particular level? What is more difficult is to find methods and techniques for doing this final, end of course, summative assessment in ways that are fair, valid, reliable and practical.

What do we mean by “fair”, “valid”, “reliable” and “practical”?

Summative assessment requires the collection of sufficient, appropriate evidence on which to base a judgement about the learning achievement.

It has to be **sufficient** (that is, there is enough of the evidence) to make such a judgement. When one is assessing a whole course of study, possibly lasting six months or more, it then become a problem on what is to be assessed. Assessing everything the learner has learned may take too long and be impractical.

The assessment has to be **fair**. It must be assessment that is seen to be a fair test of the learners without any tricks, surprises or disadvantaging some of the learners for any reason. The assessment therefore has to be such that it is culturally fair, not for instance, testing beginning literacy learners' reading ability with a culturally alien or foreign text. It must not use assessment methods which the learners have had no experience of. (One of the important benefits of continuous formative assessment is that learners get used to assessment as a natural part of education. They will not therefore be frightened or intimidated by having to do a terminal assessment.

The assessment must be **valid**. By valid we mean that the assessment must be of what was meant to be assessed. If achievement of a particular outcome is being assessed the assessment must genuinely assess that and not something else. As an example. An assessment of fluency in reading should use a text the learner has not previously read, but one which is at the appropriate level for that learner. Thus what is tested is fluent reading ability. If, however, a text was used that all had read many times, what might be being tested might be their memory of the text, not their reading of it. It would be an invalid test.

Not only must the assessment be valid, it must be **reliable**. This simply means that if your another educator assesses the same learner again using a similar test you will get the same result. So reliability means you get consistent results from assessment activities.

Assessment has to be **practical** in terms of cost, time and convenience.

Methods of summative assessment

There is no reason why summative assessment methods have to be different from formative methods and techniques. There are three major differences that have to be considered:

Firstly, the summative assessment is meant to assess the final or exit achievement of the course outcomes. This means that it may have to be more **comprehensive** that individual acts of formative assessment of various components of a course. It has to cover the whole course and all its elements in a fair way.
Secondly, it may also need to be more **integrated.** Reading fluently, for example, puts together a whole range of skills,. A summative assessment would want to test how all these skills are put to work together in fluent reading.

Thirdly, summative assessment is often done by external bodies or for external bodies and this often means that the evidence of the learning has to be in a form that is easy to administer (such as an examination script or a small portfolio).

Summative assessment has traditionally tended to be in the form of a written examination and often learners are scared of examinations because of their own past school experience or because of what they hear about examinations. Often the conditions under which examinations are written is very different to that of the friendly, informal class environment.

You need to take these fears seriously and either ensure that any summative tests and examinations are written in a more friendly environment or give the learners practice in being assessed under these more stringent and unfriendly conditions. Learners should

only be assessed summatively when they are ready for it. The educator should be able to recognise from samples of learners' work that they ready for examination or relevant form of assessment such as by portfolio presentation.

As with formative assessment the reporting back to the learners on the results of the assessment should be done as speedily and carefully as possible.

Although summative assessment often been badly implemented in the past, with most of the emphasis on passing or failing and little on learning and understanding, summative assessment nevertheless has very important purposes, including the gaining of certification.

Collecting and presenting evidence of achievement

The educator has a great responsibility to see to the collecting and presentation of genuine comprehensive evidence of the learners achievement of the desired reading and writing outcomes.

The evidence can take a variety of forms: written exercises and tests, examples of letters, filled in forms and stories and poems, various kinds of lists, etc. In addition there may be reports written by the educator on, for example, the learner reading texts aloud.

All this evidence needs to be collected into some sort of file or portfolio.

In many cases today portfolios are used as a way of presenting this evidence. They can take two forms:

- a learner generated portfolio in some kind of ring file
- a preprinted portfolio in which the learner writes.

The learner generated portfolio is usually constructed on the basis of the learner being given a list of things that have to be added to the portfolio. Sometimes the portfolio has to be presented in a special way. Such portfolios have the benefit of flexibility but are often large and hard to store and look after.

A preprinted portfolio (such as that use in the *Kha ri gude* literacy campaign) has the enormous advantage of standardisation and ease of handling, but is obviously less flexible in use.

Unit summary

This unit has looked briefly at assessment of literacy learning and shown how it can be done both formatively and summatively. Because reading and writing are so dependent on regular, consistent practice, assessment as a means of support to learning is a vital part of teaching reading and writing.

Readings

Look at the following literacy related ABET level 1 unit standards on the South African Qualifications Authority website at http://www.saqa.org.za

119633: Use basic reading/receptive skills to respond to defined simple texts
110638: Use basic writing/signing skills

Further reading

Look at the following literacy and language related ABET level 2 to 4 unit standards on the South African Qualifications Authority website at http://www.saqa.org.za

119629: Use basic reading/viewing skills to respond to defined texts (Level 2)
119634: Write/sign simple defined texts (Level 2)
119632: Use reading/viewing skills to respond to defined texts (Level 3)
119639: Write/sign defined texts (Level 3)
119640: Read/view and respond to a range of text types (Level 4)
119636: Write/sign for a variety of different purposes (Level 4)
119641: Identify and respond to selected literary texts (Level 4)

Department for children, schools and families. ***The National Strategies. Primary. Literacy. Assessment***.
http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/assessment/literacy
<Accessed 27 January 2009>

Designed for United Kingdom primary school teachers this site has a wealth of literacy assessment information of interest also to educators teaching English literacy to adults.

References

Barrs, M., Ellis, S., Hester, H., and Thomas, A. 1988. ***The primary language handbook for teachers***. London: ILEA/CLPE.

Dixon J. and Tuladhar, S. 1996. ***Whole language: An integrated approach to reading and writing***. Amherst, Massachusetts: Center for international education.

Kohl, H. 1974. ***Reading, how to***. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Unit 6: Transferring reading and writing skills

Introduction

Reading and writing, although they have great value in themselves, are often desired by adults learners for very practical reasons. Adult learners want these skills to make their lives – at home, at work, and in recreation – better. They also want them improve their capacity to study various learning areas.

This unit therefore briefly looks at how reading and writing skills learned in a literacy, language or communication class can be transferred to other parts of learning and life. This transfer is also vital in ensuring that literacy are sustained through being continually practised and strengthened through everyday use.

Aims of the unit

This unit aims to show how an educator can assist learners in integrating their reading and writing skills into other learning activities so as to transfer these literacy skills from the classroom to general life situations.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Integrate reading and writing to enable transfer of skills from classroom to general life situations
You will demonstrate this by being able to:

- Facilitate activities which combine and sequence stimulating and contrasting learning activities, which will prevent learning from being monotonous and dreary.
- Facilitate activities which simulate practical application and combination of reading and writing skills in real-life contexts.
- Facilitate activities which provide practice in a range of conventional written ways of responding to text.
- Provide opportunities for the learners to apply reading and writing skills in different contexts and for different purposes, in everyday situations applicable to their contexts. (Examples are notes, formal letters, lists, forms, novels, newspapers, legal documents, notices, advertising, poetry.)
- Present strategies to learners for practising and maintaining mother tongue literacy skills after learners have left mother tongue literacy classes.

Making reading and writing meaningful in practice

We have stressed in earlier units that fluent reading is meaningful reading. Reading as a practical skill has to be developed through activities that make sense to the learner. This requires planning and creativity on the part of the literacy educator.

Making activities interesting

You should have learning activities that are genuinely interesting to the learner. This can be done in various ways. Obviously the more relevant the activities are to the learner the more likely he or she is to engage fully in them. You can also make reading and writing activities more engaging by variety and contrast. Do not do the same things every lesson. By combining activities in new ways and by planning an intelligent sequence of exercises you will prevent learning from being monotonous and dreary.

Simulating practical activities

Sometimes it is not a good idea to practice things in real life. For example one could ask a beginner learner to go to bank and fill in forms to open a bank account. It might work out but the possibilities of error and embarrassment are also high. It would be much better to simulate the experience in the classroom until the learner can do it well – and then do it in real life confidently and well.

Most real life literacy practices can indeed be simulated in the less threatening environment of the literacy class.

Combining reading and writing in one activity

In real life many literacy activities combine reading and writing (for example, filling in forms requires close accurate reading of the text and clear neat writing). As an educator you need to avoid learners being taught reading as a separate activity from writing. Ideally they should be combimned as much a s possible.

Applying reading and writing in different contexts

Another aspect of making reading and writing more meaningful is to ensure the at the activities cover a full range of practices as they would occur in a range of typical but different contexts. You need to provide many opportunities for the learners to apply reading and writing skills in different contexts and for different purposes, in everyday situations applicable to their contexts. For example think of all the different kinds of letters and forms that people have to write or fill in and all the different kinds of material that they may have to read.

You need to think also why adults joined the literacy class in the first place. What did they want to learn and why? Have those needs been covered? Do those needs have to be extended? You may also have to think carefully about whether the learners will perceive what you are offering as necessary.

You will probably agree that being able to read and write is a very useful skill. If you can read, you can find your way around by reading street signs and maps, you can write a letter to a friend who lives far away, read a newspaper to know about what is going on in the country (and you can even read this module).

But do you have to be able to read and write to do all these things? Is it really necessary that we need to know how to read and write? Could you not find your way around without reading? And isn't it still possible to know what is going on in the country even if you can't read and write?

As an adult educator you may think that these questions are irrelevant because you are used to the idea that people simply have to learn to read and write, and you may never have questioned it. The point that we are making is that people who do not have these skills, are still able to survive, to find their way around, to bring up children (often on very small budgets), and often to generate incomes in ways that are most innovative. So it may not be obvious to everyone why people should be taught to read and write.

You may well find that as part of your teaching of reading and writing that you have to engage in dialogue with them on what the purposes and possibilities of literacy are.

Activity 1

Match the different kinds of reasons for reading with the different kinds of reading material.

While you do the matching exercise, do the following:

- Think about each "type of reading material" in the column on the right.
- Think about whether you have had any of the following reasons for reading in the past week.

Reason for reading		Type of reading material	
1	to increase our knowledge	a	newspapers
2	to find out information	b	books, comics
3	for pleasure	c	a map, a telephone directory
4	to help us form an opinion	d	a letter
5	to communicate with each other	e	a study course

Answers

Our answers are 1 = e, 2 = c, 3 = b, 4 = a, 5 = d.

While you were busy with the above activity, you probably thought of a number of times in the last week when you needed to read something for some or other reason. Thinking out what you were reading, and why you were reading it, you probably realise how important reading is for many of your daily activities.

You will find that your learners come to class to learn to read for reasons which are not very different from your own. Reading helps people survive and function effectively in today's world. It leads us to new knowledge about the world and about life.

Sustaining mother tongue literacy

It is a well known fact that many literacy learners who have not become fully fleunet readers lapse back again into illiteracy if they do not continue to practice their reading and writing skills.

As an educator you cannot control or influence the learners after they leave you class – except through the grounding you have given them in your class. This grounding includes a range of activities to enable the learners to practising and maintain mother tongue literacy skills that will survive after they have left the mother tongue literacy classes.

In particular, once your learners have begun to read, it is up to you to make lots of reading materials available for your learners so that they can practise their new skills. We know that this is very necessary so that your learners do not forget how to read.

Activity 2

Can you think of what you could do to encourage learners to read regularly?

Try to make a list of things that you could do.

Our response

We thought of the following ways:

- You could bring magazines that will interest your learners to class and have a special time for learners to read them during class. Your learners would probably like to read popular magazines which come out in a number of languages. You could choose the magazine in their first language. Sport magazines and newspapers in their LI are also very popular with new readers.

- Encourage your learners to read whenever they have a spare moment. You need to encourage your learners to read at every opportunity. Tell them that reading is not just something they do in class. Words are everywhere. They will find words that they recognise on signposts, posters, street names, newspapers, on mealie meal packets, coffee tins and even the numbers on car registration plates. We learn to read by reading! Encourage your learners to practise reading and to read words and sentences wherever they see them.

- A few publishers produce easy readers for adults. Try and set up a small shoe-box library for the learners in your class and get a set of such readers. More ambitiously you can try and set up a reading resource centre by working with and combining the resources of other educators in your area.

Look at the following list of suggestions for encouraging reading (New Readers Publishers, 2009):

Tips for facilitators

- actively build positive attitudes towards reading
- surround learners with a variety of books
- allow learners to take books home to read in their leisure time
- create attractive book displays in the classroom
- read enthusiastically to your learners … you are their role model, discuss what has been
- read with learners to help them make connections between what they have just read and their prior experiences
- ask learners to express their reading preferences
- let learners take turns to read a daily story of their choice to the class
- demonstrate the value you place on reading by having regular free reading time in class
- always emphasise that reading is fun
- read books that stimulate the learners' curiosity and imagination
- share your enjoyment of your current book with your learners
- ask learners for their input when choosing books for them
- personalise reading by recommending certain books to certain learners
- introduce new books to stimulate learners' interest

- use issues raised by stories as a starting point for class discussions or use class discussions to encourage learners to read particular books
- talk to learners about aspects of the books – for eg. the illustrations, the authors' attitudes, the use of description, the type of characters in the book
- when reading aloud stop before the end and ask learners to complete the story/predict what is going to happen, then finish reading the story allowing learners to test their predictions
- use a tape recorder to tape learners reading aloud – facilitators can also assign different characters to different learners (learners can even use sound effects like music if they so wish)
- have storytelling sessions in which both teacher and students participate where learners can be made aware of the development of plot, character, etc.
- let small groups do choral reading activities – for example, learners select a – favourite short story or poem – rehearse and present it to the rest of the class
- use drama – for example, have learners pretend to be characters in a story they have just read
- develop vocabulary through reading activities – for example, identify new words or find certain types of words (like all the descriptive words or all the action words)
- go to the local library
- visit a local bookshop.

Becoming an experienced and fluent reader

Ultimately, the purpose of teaching literacy to adults is that they become experienced and fluent readers. If they are fluent readers they will retain their reading and writing skills for the rest of their lives.

What do we mean by experienced readers? We will explain what we mean by "experienced readers" after we have paid a "quick visit" to a typical literacy class where the learners have already had about 100 hours of instruction.

Case study 1: Mrs Vilakazi's learners make progress with their reading

As we enter the class, we hear the usual warm buzz of Mrs Vilakazi's classes. The class is divided into small groups and the groups are very busy. Mrs Vilakazi is working alone with a learner, Themba. We watch Themba running his finger along a letter **d** which Mrs Vilakazi has made out of sand-paper.

She says "Themba has a problem - he confuses the b's and the d's. This is really a problem," she says, "because he has a b in his name. So I have had to think of ways to help him with that problem. I spoke to a teacher who deals with remedial problems and she suggested I try a few things.

"One of the things I do is to let him write b's and d's in this tray of mealie meal. All the learners enjoy practising writing letters in the mealie meal tray. I usually start the writing lessons for everyone with exercises like these. But I try to spend a lot of time working with Themba when the others are busy in their groups.

"Another thing we do is to read through a paragraph in his reader and he finds all the b's and the d's. I also make him listen to himself when he reads and in that way he is able to correct himself."

As we walk across the room we see a group of learners talking excitedly about a newspaper article. Mrs Vilakazi speaks to one of them. She tells us that Ronnie is reading well. He is very enthusiastic about reading and now that his favourite soccer team is doing so well he is very happy to be able to read about the matches in the newspapers.

Another learner, Florence Mkhize, is also reading well. She likes to read the magazines and often comes to Mrs Vilakazi for help with words that she has difficulty with. Earlier she also had problems reading. She could not focus her eyes on the words and she needed reading glasses. But now she is a very keen reader.

Mrs Vilakazi tells learners have achieved the first stage of literacy learning. She says that they now know the sounds of the alphabet, can write and sign their own names, can write their address and other personal information, construct short sentences, and can do some basic number work. She also says that sometimes they practise speaking English so that they are prepared for the next level.

And so we leave Mrs Vilakazi's class. We have looked at the progress of only a few of her learners and already we have learnt a few things about starting to read. We see that:

- not all learners learn to read at the same pace
- learners may have certain difficulties with reading
- learners enjoy reading different kinds of reading material
- physiological problems like needing glasses can cause reading difficulties

We can *see* that after about 100 hours of learning to read, Mrs Vilakazi's learners have "broken through to literacy" and are entering what some people call the post-literacy stage. But they are not experienced readers yet – they are in the process of becoming so. Two of the learners in Mrs Vilakazi's class have moved from *learning to read* and are now starting to do *reading to learn.* Ronnie and Florence are well on their way to becoming experienced and independent readers.

In the next stage of their literacy process, Mrs Vilakazi should ensure that her learners carry on reading relevant material, write stories and letters, formulate opinions, listen and talk and even debate opinions. During this next stage of learning, her learners will not need key sentences anymore and will probably not need to sound out letters and syllables. They should be reading and writing fluently. In other words, they should be well on their way on the journey of lifelong learning.

Further reading

New Readers Publishers. 2009. ***Online catalogue***. Durban: New Readers Publishers, University of KwaZulu-Natal

http://www.newreaders.org.za/content/view/21/43/ <Accessed 1 February 2009)

This catalogue from one of the few dedicated non-profit providers of easy reading material for adults is a valuable resource for all South African languages.

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New Readers Publishers. 2009. ***Tips for facilitators***. Durban: New Readers Publishers, University of KwaZulu-Natal

http://www.newreaders.org.za/content/view/54/ <Accessed 1 February 2009>