

Born to Read: A Programme of the Gauteng Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts, Culture, Library and Information Services

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A reading nation is a winning nation. Are South Africans a reading nation? South Africa currently finds itself in a serious struggle against illiteracy, which affects our economy and our chance to compete globally. Why, we may ask, is the situation like this?

Our children do not see us reading as parents, as educators, as health providers, or as librarians. Most people regard reading as something connected to school or formal education; that is the reason why we have a generation of non-readers. Students use many of our community libraries predominantly as study facilities. This sometimes poses a problem for other library users who want to read for leisure or who seek to access information from resources in the library.

Statistics show that 45 per cent of South Africans are illiterate. A study by the Joint International UNESCO–UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement Project found that South Africa’s Grade Four pupils ranked lowest in numeracy, literacy and life skills when compared with their counterparts elsewhere in Africa.

Faced with this situation, and based on our vision of having a literate, informed, creative and active society proud of its cultural heritage, the Department decided to implement the Born to Read programme. A literate and informed society is a society that can read and write.

What is the Born to Read programme?

The Born to Read (BTR) programme is a reading awareness programme aimed at promoting the culture of reading among children while they are still young. It is a programme that helps parents raise children with healthy bodies and minds to become creative and active members of the community. The programme builds partnerships between parents, educators, health providers, librarians, the business sector and the community at large since it deals with the development of children in all spheres. Studies have proved that the majority of reading problems faced by adolescents and

adults today could have been avoided or resolved in the early years of childhood.

Why should we all be part of the programme?

Efforts to promote reading habits will be effective if they involve all segments of society at every level – from the family, community and school, through local, intermediate and national levels of government. We are all involved in the common interest of promoting a culture of reading. We owe this to our children and to ourselves as South Africans.

What are the objectives of the programme?

It is expected that the programme will lead to:

- an increase in mothers becoming new library members;
- regular visits by mothers and their children to the library, enquiring about their children's reading needs;
- a greater public awareness of health and parenting and other reading resources available in libraries.

Who is the target group and why?

The target groups for this programme are: mothers; mothers to be; their new-born babies; toddlers; and pre-schoolers (two to six years).

Parents are children's earliest teachers, and strengthening mothers' ability to stimulate their children and encourage them to learn can set the stage for adult success. Fathers are not excluded because in some cases fathers have shown immense interest and have been involved in the programmes. According to research the first five years of a child's life are important and crucial for the child's development. Learning seems to peak between the ages of 3 and 10, and continues throughout life.

What has research shown?

The programme is based on research done on the development of the brain. A burst of research activity in the past few years is giving us a whole new understanding of how the brain develops and the crucial role of early language experiences, including reading. An infant's brain structure is not genetically determined. Early experiences have a decisive impact on the architecture of a baby's brain.

Life shapes the brain's development. Warm touches and care-givers who talk positively to the infant allow the brain to take in all things around. Severe stress that goes on for many months or years in early childhood can actually affect the development of a child's brain. In one

of the articles that I have read it was found that gently massaging premature infants three times a day for 15 minutes helped them to gain weight, be more alert and cry less.

Unconditional love and acceptance are still the most important building stones for developing a baby's brain at any age. A health-care worker from the Johnson and Johnson company that is in partnership with us teaches the parents about the importance of touch and how to massage children. This emphasizes what I alluded to earlier, that the programme builds partnerships between librarians and other stakeholders. How many of you thought that a company like Johnson and Johnson could play a part in promoting reading in this way?

Each person is born with over 100 billion brain cells called neurons. There are enough brain cells to learn about anything. Brain cells that are not used wither away.

A child-care provider reads to toddlers and, in a matter of seconds, thousands of cells in these children's growing brains respond. Some brain cells are turned on, triggered by this particular experience. Many existing connections amongst brain cells are strengthened. At the same time new brain cells are formed, adding a bit more definition and complexity to the intricate circuitry that will remain largely in place for the rest of these children's lives.

Children's minds can absorb any amount of information. It is often said that children's minds are like sponges, soaking up as much information as is possible. Parents should therefore use this time as an opportunity to read to their children, because:

- children who are introduced to books at an early stage go on to be confident readers when they start school. These children, however, outperform their peers not only in language-based subjects, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening, but also in mathematics;
- development of literacy is a continuous process that begins early in life and depends heavily on environmental influences.

How were the objectives achieved?

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives the programme comprised three stages: the launch, the roll-out to community libraries, and monitoring.

Launch

The programme was launched on 3 August 2000 at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, Gauteng. The Department reached out to about 2,000

mothers and their babies throughout the month of August in the hospital. An integrated programme with the Health Department took place at the hospital during that month. The first baby born on 9 August, which coincided with Women's Day, became our BTR Baby and received a special gift. BTR resource packs were issued to mothers throughout the month of August.

Mothers were given resource packs containing the following:

- A T-shirt and bib for the babies to show that these are special BTR babies. Parents could treasure these so that they could serve as a reminder to their children to continue to read as they grow up.
- Two books, one for the mother and one for the baby. These books were published by READ and are excellent reference material of a very informative nature. The book for mothers highlights ways on how and when to prepare your child to read. The book for babies is a colourful picture book with little text. It is a user-friendly book and even parents who cannot read or write can use it. A mother can tell a story just by looking at the pictures, which promotes traditional story-telling. One aim was to instil the culture of ownership and to teach children to take good care of the books.
- A rattle in the shape of a book with text:
 - These rattles come in four different titles, which teach babies different animal sounds. The mother can use this rattle when bathing the baby or changing diapers (nappies). It naturally has a value for a child, but, to build up and establish vocabulary, the baby must look at one picture for some time and talk about it. The book will encourage mothers to read or tell their babies a story at bedtime.
 - The brightly coloured rattle can also be used as a mobile above the baby's bed. Parents were advised to make their own mobiles by using items of different colours and cutting them into different shapes, and these can be changed regularly. The mobiles stimulate the baby's eye movement and muscles. The skills developed in this way are visual perception, eye co-ordination, and the development of eye muscles. We also found that already by the fifteenth day after birth, the baby prefers colour to form. It is therefore appropriate to start almost immediately after birth to establish the baby's perception of colour.
 - As the rattle is used, the baby can develop the skills of observing and listening effectively.

All these ideas were explained to the mothers individually. A work-

shop was held by the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture and mothers were given a talk on pregnancy, exercise and fitness. A second workshop was held at the Antenatal Clinic in the hospital during the month of August on the importance of reading and the merits of joining a library. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the mothers were taken down in order to follow up both the mothers and the progress of the babies.

Story-telling and puppet shows were presented to the children in wards. This was a joint venture by the staff of the Department and the community librarians in Soweto. Story-telling was one of the activities of the roll-out programmes because, from research, we found that as a learning tool it can encourage children to explore their unique expressiveness and heighten their ability to communicate thoughts and feelings. Colouring-in was also one of the activities that was done with the children, and it linked with a story told. Children were given coloured pencils and colouring books and encouraged to draw anything that they could remember about the story, and they enjoyed this immensely. Two books in two languages for toddlers and pre-schoolers were also included later in our resource packs after we discovered that most of the children could not read or understand English. We chose Zulu and Sotho books because we have found that most of the children in our province speak these languages.



Display of Born to Read resources at SCECSAL 2002.

Roll-out of the programme at community libraries

Community librarians were sent a circular letter inviting them to send business plans to the Department on how similar programmes could be held in their communities. The programmes could be in hospitals, clinics, libraries, etc.

Twenty-two community librarians launched their programme in the financial year 2001/2002. Most of the launches were held at clinics in order to target mothers that never visit libraries since this would provide an opportunity for librarians to market their libraries to the community. The launches differed from community to community. In some libraries the launch was very informal while in others it was formal, with even senior officials from local structures and politicians attending. Librarians also obtained the contact details of mothers or expectant mothers so that the necessary follow-up work could be done.

Monitoring/follow-up work

Various modes of communication were used to reach out to the mothers:

- Spot checks by the health providers when the mother returned with her baby for immunizations, etc., especially in communities where the health workers were involved in the programme from its inception. Health providers formed groups during antenatal and postnatal classes for the mothers. The health providers used this time for feedback from the mother about the progress of the programme.
- The community librarian contacted the mothers by phone where possible and enquired about the progress of their babies and the problems that they encountered. In some cases the mothers telephoned and enquired further about the programme.
- Home visiting by community librarians and provincial staff, and in some cases by both health providers and community librarians working together, was another possibility. The librarians kept in contact with mothers by conducting programmes in the libraries and inviting them to attend.
- Forming BTR clubs or support groups which met regularly. In one of the libraries parents meet once a week.
- Through suggestion boxes so that mothers' opinions could become part of the programme.

Feedback/results

Responses from the mothers

- ‘I could not come to the library because I could not afford the membership fee.’
- ‘I want to wait for my baby to be old enough before I can visit the library.’
- ‘I thought libraries were for the school children and the educated; I did not realize that I can also use the library even if I cannot read.’
- ‘I did not know that this big green building was a library; I thought maybe it was one of those government offices.’
- ‘My child can recognize the book you gave him and he will always cry when somebody takes the book away from him.’
- ‘I knew that I had to read to my child but I never got to force myself to do that; thanks to this programme, I always feel guilty if I don’t read to him.’
- ‘I thought that it is the work of the school to teach a child to read; now I can help my child myself as well.’

Internal factors affecting monitoring

Several issues were identified:

- Limited human resources resulted in monitoring not being done as regularly as it should be.
- Owing to the restructuring of local government and movement of librarians who were involved in the programme, no follow-up was undertaken in some libraries.
- Relocation of some members from informal settlements to RDP houses made it impossible for the librarian to make follow-ups.

External factors influencing the behaviour of mothers

In our interviews with the mothers we found that several external factors influenced their behaviour towards BTR.

Educational level of the mother

Some of the mothers, especially those that came from previously disadvantaged areas, are not well educated, and they see preparing a child as the work of the school. They do not see themselves as their children’s first teacher. They had misconceptions like, ‘It is the work of teachers to stimulate and teach the children because they get paid to do so.’ These mothers did not see reading as a priority; their only concern was to provide food for their children.

The BTR programme was therefore a waste of time for them. We received comments like, 'I hated school and did badly; how can I be of help to my child?' 'I did not come back to the library because I thought that since I cannot read and write, the librarian will force me to attend classes and reading sessions.' These mothers felt intimidated by the librarians and did not want to come back to the libraries. In some cases, out of desperation to be left alone, mothers would end up giving librarians false contact details.

Some mothers from the same group knew what was expected of them; they could read and write but still expected the school to prepare and teach their children. Reasons such as a lack of time were given. 'We don't have time as we have to prepare food, wash the kids, clean the house' was a common excuse.

Another group of mothers were also influenced by this educational factor, but in a positive way. From our studies we found that mothers who were educated were mostly from townships, and although the BTR was a new concept for them, they could immediately understand what was expected from them. They carried out the instructions as they were told and came back to the librarian with positive feedback. They wanted to know more tips on how to help their children.

Socio-economic status

Most of the mothers who came back to join the library with their children were those from the middle and working classes, and they were mainly from the townships and suburbs because they could afford the membership fees. Then there were mothers who wanted their children to be part of the Born to Read programme but who were from informal settlements and previously disadvantaged areas and could not join because they were unemployed and could not afford the membership fees.

Geography

In most cases the programme was launched in a hospital or clinic, and most of the target groups came from areas where there were no libraries at all. In order to get to the nearest community library, which in most cases was in town, the mother had to use public transport, i.e. a taxi or bus. This created a problem because the mothers could not afford transport costs as well as the membership fees. Some mothers who attended a launch resided a long distance from the libraries or did not have a library in their area at all.

Culture

Africans used to sit down as families around the fire and tell stories. When we told the parents to tell stories to their children they were very happy because for them it was going back to their cultural upbringing. They saw this as an African Renaissance, a rebirth of our culture, the culture of traditional story-telling. They did not feel intimidated, as was the case with reading.

We emphasized that they could tell a story that they knew, or they could tell a story just by looking at a picture. They could start by using the picture book that we gave their little ones. It was found from the studies that, when a story is read to a child, the child actively creates a picture in its own mind and will also learn to listen. The basis of being ready to read is the following: the toddler/child must learn to look not merely see, and to listen not merely hear.

Stories often build a positive attitude towards reading and learning to read. Research has shown that babies start to benefit from story-telling immediately after birth. Reading aloud to children and allowing the children to play with books stimulates their motor, emotional, and intellectual development. All these help strengthen a child's readiness to begin school.

Partnership

From the discussion above it is clear that partnership is very important for the success of the BTR programme. It is through working together and the participation of other stakeholders (like the *Star* newspaper, Johnson and Johnson, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, the *Sunday Times* newspaper's 'Read Write' supplement, and parents) that the programme is still sustainable. We could have not managed on our own as the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture to promote literacy in our province. As the saying goes, 'in unity there is strength'.

We have one common interest and goal with the *Star* newspaper, that of promoting the culture of reading. The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture is trying to promote reading for leisure. Since we have newspapers in all our community libraries, we came up with a joint programme with the *Star* for the BTR mothers. Mothers are taught how to read newspapers by officials from the *Star*. The workshops might be held during the launch of the programme or could be a form of a follow-up programme for the mothers.

The Johnson and Johnson baby products company is also playing a

role in the success of the programme. Like the *Star*, an official from the company will also give a talk during the launch of the programme or will conduct workshops on pregnancy and breastfeeding and general health-related issues.

Most of the programmes are held in clinics, and from the start the planning session is done by both the community librarians and health providers. There are places where health providers and community librarians come up with joint follow-up programmes for the mothers. In some cases, the health workers continue to work with the mothers when they return to the clinics for vaccinations and monthly check-ups.

Success stories

- Bonearo Park Community Library in Kempton Park has designed a programme for the year 2002. A group of mothers who attended the Born to Read launch meet with the librarian on the morning of every second Thursday of the month. They usually start with a formal meeting where they discuss the programme and share ideas. Programmes such as story-telling and, with the older children, creating bookmarks are some of the activities planned. The group decided that each mother would contribute R5.00 at every meeting towards tea and some light refreshments, which they could enjoy after the meeting.
- Vanderbijlpark Community Library is another library that has a success story to tell. Its Born to Read programme was launched in December 2000. The librarian targeted mainly expectant mothers. Before the librarian could do the follow-ups, the mothers brought their babies to the library four months after they were born. The mothers and their babies were also involved in the last Library Week celebration, and the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture was invited to be part of the Vanderbijlpark Born to Read follow-up programme. This was a wonderful experience because we could sit and discuss the programme with the mothers, and it was so wonderful to see mothers involved, joining hands with us to safeguard the future of their children.
- At the Tsepiso Community Library, mothers who attended the Born to Read launch last year have formed a support group to motivate each other and they meet once a month in the library to share their experiences.
- The Born to Read baby from the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital launch is now one and a half years old. The mother is very happy

with the development of her daughter. She has agreed to be involved in the Orange Farm Library that is about to open soon. When we went to visit them, we brought some books for the child, who was very happy to receive them. She was particularly interested in one picture book. She looked at it for a long time without tearing the pages. When the child got to a picture where there was a woman carrying a child, the child looked at the page for a long time, then smiled. As we were wondering why the child was smiling, she said 'mama' and pointed to the woman, and then pointed to the little baby and called out her own name. At that age the child could identify herself with pictures in the books.

- Bodibeng Community Library is another area where the BTR programme is really progressing. Mothers not only visit the library for their children's reading needs, they also visit to seek advice regarding their children's social problems. The librarian has referred some of the mothers to psychologists and social workers, and they were very happy with the referrals made by the librarian. Some of the mothers there have nicknamed their babies Born to Read. They say that the children enjoy the books we gave them during the launch; they do not allow other children to touch the books and, if there are visitors, they will always take the book out just to 'show off'.
- We have also received numerous telephone calls from mothers who are happy with the programme. One of the mothers phoned to thank us because she believes that her little boy is now developing a critical and analytical mind. She was reading a book to her four-year-old son that she got from the launch of the programme. In the book was written 'the little brother', but the child stopped the mother reading. He was not happy with his mother, accusing her of lying to him. What he saw on the picture was not a little brother but a little sister, because the child in the picture had long hair. To him, girls are usually the people who have long hair.
- The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture also received an invitation from Rustenburg, North West Province, LIASA¹ branch to present the programme, and to motivate libraries in its province to implement a similar programme.

¹ Library and Information Association of South Africa.

Other programmes

In order to sustain the programme the Department has bought educational toys for all the regions. Staff members from these regions were given a workshop on how to use these educational toys, and on the skills developed from playing with them. The regional staff, together with community librarians, are presently running educational toy library programmes. Two similar workshops on toy libraries will be organized this year to complement the BTR programme.

Two workshops on story-telling were also organized last year. A story-telling manual has been compiled and is available on request. Two booklets, *Books I Have Read* and *My Family Storybook*, were designed and are also available on request. These booklets give children a chance to use their imagination and motivate them to read more books in order to be able to write about what they have read.

Conclusion

From the discussion above it is clear that librarians from all spheres should join forces to promote the culture of reading. We now understand that we play a crucial role in applying what we know about brain research and it is our duty as professionals to educate parents in our community libraries about the role they play as their children's first teachers.

In addressing the problems of mothers not being able to read, community librarians must join hands and form partnerships with other organizations that present ABET² and literacy classes. Mothers must also be made aware that there are Easy Reading for Adults (ERA) books available in some libraries. The Department has also developed family literacy workshops, which are presented to community libraries on request. We would therefore urge libraries to take advantage of these opportunities.

Addressing the problems of a lack of library facilities, joint mobile library services by the provincial and local governments and other stakeholders should be investigated. Factors such as membership fees that act as a deterrent to people joining the libraries should be further debated so as to ensure access by the majority of the people to information resources available at libraries.

² Adult Basic Education and Training (see page 25 of this volume).

Post-adult Literacy Needs and the Development of Adult Learners' Skills: The Experience of Project Literacy¹

Vanashree Chetty

The provision of adult literacy has been beset by numerous obstacles within the South African context over the past years. These have ranged from a lack of interest within the public sector in the face of much larger socio-economic problems such as HIV-AIDS, inadequate budgeting by the government, and a lack of sufficient resources and research in the field.

Project Literacy has, however, been fairly successful over the years in providing literacy education to adults across the country in the face of these obstacles. The methodology used to teach adults to read is not so different from that used for teaching children, yet managing to sustain adult interest in developing this skill has always been a challenge to educators. The methodology we have adopted of outcomes-based, interactive, group-oriented classes has worked well with adults. It has inspired confidence in their ability to continue learning. It is also an empowering experience as learners contribute to the learning process by drawing on their own experiences.

Adults enter literacy classes with varying degrees of skill in reading and writing through their experiences as members of society. Adult learners do not, however, spend enough time in the classroom to perfect the skills learnt, and therefore supplementary work done at home is important for their continued development. The additional work reinforces outcomes that are practised in the classroom. Unlike children, adults, especially women, have a large number of responsibilities that do not often allow them time to themselves.

Leisure time is a prized commodity, and adults have obligations that infringe on their leisure time, such as their children and spouses. Leisure time is often taken up by regular activities such as watching television

¹ Adult education and training in South Africa is undertaken within an agreed framework, known as ABET. Appendix 1 (p. 25) gives some information about ABET.

and listening to the radio. In order to further their education adults need to use their leisure time as study time. Any process to promote reading has to compete with the electronic media and its ability to attract potential readers' attention.

In order to ensure that adults use their time to improve their skills by reading, there has to be a concerted effort to create processes to encourage adult learners to read.

Historical background

Over the years there have been many conferences that have dealt specifically with getting adults reading, one of which was the Conference on Literacy and Basic Adult Education in Southern Africa in 1990. Subsequent Department of Education workshops and various internationally sponsored conferences and seminars have dealt with adult reading skills. At all these gatherings the general consensus has been that there is a need to get adults reading in order to improve their skills, which will, in turn, improve their conditions of living.

What motivates an adult to want to learn to read and write?

When adults enter a literacy programme they are asked what motivates them to want to learn to read and write. The answers range from a religious need to read the Bible to helping their children with homework. Some cite work-related incentives where they need to study for certain qualifications in order to get a promotion. For others it is a desire for self-improvement by learning skills previously neglected.

KEY PLAYERS IN GETTING AND KEEPING ADULTS READING

Adult literacy providers

Adult literacy providers are perhaps in the best position to determine the needs of adult learners. Many providers, including Project Literacy, have course material to address the skills that adults need to function adequately in a literate society. Further, Project Literacy developed a set of readers as supplementary material for ABET's Language and Communications course. The books, which were developed with funding from USAID and published by Kagiso, have been very successful in the classroom. However, sales of these books have been poor, as companies and organizations are willing to spend money on course materials but see spending on readers as an unnecessary expense.

An additional set of readers was developed in mother-tongue lan-

guages: siSwati, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi (Northern Sotho), Setswana. These were also produced with external funding, but sales are dismal and publishers no longer see publishing books in mother tongues to be feasible.

Although the Constitution gives all eleven languages equal status, this has not been the case in most sectors of society. The recent 14th International English Academy Conference held at the University of Pretoria in 2002 concluded that it was not feasible to educate people in the other nine African languages as there was not enough interest and funding to carry it out.² English was considered the primary and dominant means of instruction in education.

Recommendation

In the face of such reports it is difficult to sustain reading at the primary levels of ABET education where the learner is taught to read and write in his or her mother tongue. It is the resourcefulness and skills of the educator that provide additional material for adult learners starting to read. The trend identified at the Conference has to be addressed so that the ABET market is supplied with reading materials in both mother tongues and English.

Published materials

There are a fairly small number of publishers producing material for ABET. Appendix 2 contains a list indicating the current publishers of readers for adult literacy, together with the percentage each takes of overall production. Whilst this list is dated, it is in general terms still applicable today. As mentioned above, Project Literacy, with funding from USAID, published a set of readers from Level 1 to Level 4, as well as a set of mother-tongue readers in four languages. Appendix 3 contains a list of these readers. They were published by Kagiso Publishers, which was later taken over by Maskew Miller Longman. MML has cited many reasons for the unfeasibility of producing more readers for the adult literacy market:

- Lack of sales: There is insufficient money in the field to facilitate the purchase of these books. Large amounts of funding are required to make sure that the books get to the readers.

² English Academy of Southern Africa. 'Mother Tongue, Other Tongue? Law, Learning and Literature', Fourteenth International English Academy Conference, University of Pretoria, 4–6 April, 2002.

- Research conducted to ascertain the needs of the audience has found that providing books to a relatively small audience was not feasible owing to the diversity of needs.
- Adults are taught basic literacy skills in their mother tongue and therefore any reading materials to augment their skills would need to be written in or translated into all the eleven official languages. This obviously involves large costs. The pie charts opposite show (a) the different languages in which readers are produced and the percentage they take of the overall market, and (b) the different kinds of material produced.
- The purchase of core materials to cover the literacy classes is a large portion of a company's or provider's budget, and there are therefore not enough funds left over to buy readers that are considered to be 'supplementary' materials.

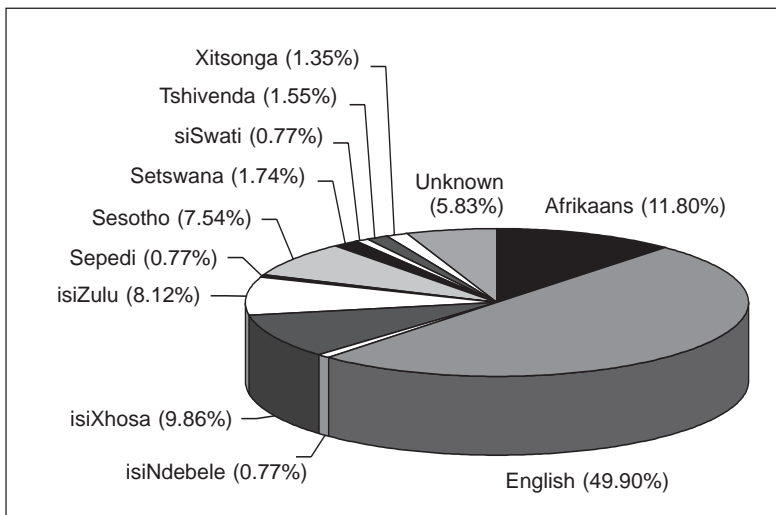
Recommendation

Most importantly MML has identified that there is a dire need to provide these supplementary reading materials to adult learners to improve the skills that they are learning in the classroom. Funding is the obvious solution to ABET's need at the moment.

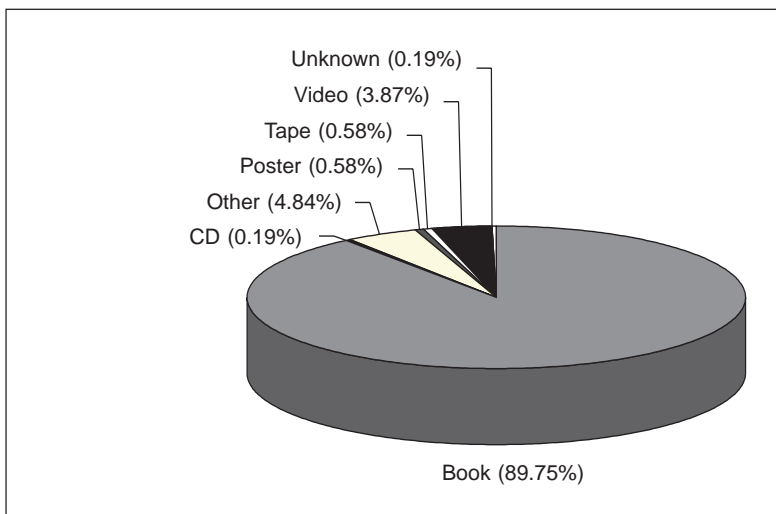
Other, smaller, publishers and providers involved in producing readers were consulted to ascertain their opinions, but unfortunately they did not respond before the submission of this chapter. It is possible that in the context of the small size of this market these providers are protective of their own interests and are unwilling to participate in endeavours that seek to share information.

Libraries

Libraries play an integral role in providing materials for adult learners. All of our learners come from the lower end of the economic scale and often do not have extra money to purchase books. Books are very expensive owing to the diminishing value of the rand against other major currencies and the price of paper, which, although made in South Africa, is bought back in US dollars. (It is interesting to note that half of the unit price of a book is the cost of the paper it is made from.) Most of these communities rely on the service of libraries to provide free access to books. Therefore libraries need to stock books for this new audience to allow them to further their skills. Libraries also need to advertise the fact that they have books for the newly developed reading audience.



Languages in which support materials are produced.



Different types of support materials produced.

Johnson, Robbins and Zweizig identify five ways in which libraries can assist in encouraging this group of readers to get reading:³

- identify and provide print materials for the audience;
- provide print materials for tutors and educators of adults;
- compile bibliographies of relevant reading materials;
- generate publicity about literacy providers;
- provide community library tours on a regular basis. This would involve the library arranging with interested members of the community to be bussed to a nearby library and given a tour of its facilities. This visit could be followed up with a programme to allow these people to use the books in the library.

Community centres

While community centres provide reading materials and opportunities for adults to interact with books, their attempts are often impeded by a lack of money and skills. In partnership with nearby libraries and organizations they can set up regular reading groups in the evenings for adults either to listen to books being read or to read the books themselves – organized in a similar but more economically feasible way to book clubs for a middle-class audience. These sessions could be followed by interactive group activities where readers demonstrate their newly learnt skills, whether it is from do-it-yourself manuals or newspapers. The community centre could co-ordinate mentors in reading to assist new readers to improve their reading skills.

At present greater interaction is therefore needed between literacy providers, corporate companies, libraries, publishers and community centres in order to ensure that adults:

- have access to adequate, suitable materials;
- are given sufficient opportunities and places where they will find these materials;
- have a range of reading materials to cover their interests and needs.

FACTORS THAT NEED TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN PRODUCING READING MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

Helen Lyman in a 1973 report said, ‘a major obstacle to teaching and providing guidance to the adult who is developing his reading skills and

³ D. W. Johnson, D. W. Robbins and D. Zweizig (eds.), *Libraries: Partners in Adult Literacy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1990.

habits is finding appropriate and interesting materials related to the new reader's interests and needs'.⁴

Factors to consider include:

- Multi-lingualism: South Africa currently has eleven official languages, nine of which are indigenous African languages.
- Needs: a multiplicity of needs.
- Readability: fonts must be large enough, clear and legible.
- The content must be interesting.
- It is a highly specialized market.
- Books must have vocabulary and grammar suitable for the audience. Also the themes and illustrations must suit the age group as some illustrations may be too childish.

Problems providing materials

- The availability of suitable materials.
- The needs of readers are not met.
- There are too many languages into which these books must be translated. Sometimes the context is inappropriate after the books are translated – for example, a book written in coastal KwaZulu Natal about the activities that take place on the coast may have no relevance to an inland Venda population.
- Government policy, such as the concept of the African Renaissance, has had no impact on the creation or production of books in mother-tongue languages. It has merely highlighted the existing gaps found in ABET.
- The cost of developing original material is much too high.
- It is a small market that publishers do not want to produce for.
- Some books are written in a simplistic, childlike manner, suggesting that the audience is being 'written down to'.⁵
- The diversity of themes required to satisfy the demands of this small market makes the materials difficult to produce.

Reading skills and reading interests

In everyday life a number of reading skills are required. An average adult has to perform many functions in both his or her personal and work

⁴ E. R. Arnold, 'The production of suitable reading matter for adult new literates: A publisher's viewpoint', in *The Provision of Literature*. Pretoria: Unisa, 1982, 15.

⁵ Z. Ntuli, 'Writing for adults with limited reading ability', in *The Provision of Literature*. Pretoria: Unisa, 1982, 5.

environments. These require specific skills in which basic literacy is required. Some of these activities are:⁶

- completing job applications;
- reading bank statements;
- reading signs on buses and train tickets;
- reading and completing income-tax forms;
- reading manuals for operating appliances;
- reading instructions on medicine bottles;
- reading advertisements;
- reading statements;
- reading maps;
- following recipes;
- registering to vote;
- reading warranties and guarantees;
- reading airline tickets;
- filling out forms at work;
- reading labels on grocery items;
- writing cheques;
- reading and writing letters;
- reading road signs;
- reading do-it-yourself manuals;
- reading contracts;
- reading notices;
- reading newspapers;
- reading memos from a supervisor;
- reading danger warnings;
- helping children with homework.

The reading interests of adults encompass a number of genres, and the kinds of books that adults read can be broken down into three major categories:⁷

- stories: real incidents, character-based, philosophical, social and historical;
- self-help books or manuals, learning, religion, financial and sport;
- newspapers and periodicals.

Learners are interested in books that cover experiences similar to their own, and within African rather than European contexts.

⁶ S. McCormick, *Instructing Students Who Have Literacy Problems*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 3rd edn, 1995, 519.

⁷ C. Richards (ed.), *Manuals on Adult and Youth Education: Simple Reading Materials for Adults: Preparation and Use*. Paris: Unesco, 1963, 23.

PROJECT LITERACY'S FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

The project started in 1999 as a brainchild of Project Literacy. The actual running of the project is a partnership of Project Literacy and the University of South Africa (Unisa). The underlying premise for the project is that parents would like the opportunity to assist their young children with their schoolwork and to spend quality time reading with their children. The project seeks to assist these parents without putting them through rigorous adult literacy programmes.

How does the programme work?

The project targets both the rural and urban areas of Gauteng. The townships of Mamelodi, Winterveld and Katlehong were proposed as pilot sites. Parents of children between one and six years old are recruited from these communities for the project. Existing crèches in these areas are used as sites for the training. The turnout of parents was quite high, with about 80 participants in the beginning, which has now increased to 168. Qualified trainers from Project Literacy conduct the classes in their own time on Saturdays. The training consists of six one-hour workshops. The training manual was developed by Project Literacy and will be reviewed and edited once the results from the year-long pilot are established.

There was no form of assessment or entrance requirement except that the parents have children between the ages of one and six. The parent is not required to have literacy skills; rather, they are taught how to 'read' books to their children. If the parents cannot read, then they are taught to read the illustrations in the book. Two books were selected for this purpose: *The Principal's New Car* and *Bana bo Segoe*. The parents will finally learn to read these books to their children, but the first interaction has been made where they teach their children to work with books. Parents are taught skills that they can later transfer to other books. Included in the handouts is a summary of the anticipated outcomes of the project. The last four pages of the handout are part of a report and a questionnaire that was used to determine whether parents were interested in the project or not.

Interim evaluation

The project will run in its pilot phase until the end of 2002. To date there have been a number of problems:

- There has been a shortage of books for parents to use. The project depends on sponsorship to continue.

- In the Mamelodi site, numbers of parents dropped dramatically until it had to be closed down. A possible reasons for this was that Saturday, when participants meet, is also often the only day that working parents can do things such as shopping and paying bills. Another reason cited in a report was a lack of interest in their children's development.

There have also been many successes in the project. One of these successes is the keen interest shown by parents. This interest is so great that a new site has been established in Heidelberg. Parents and children have shown a marked improvement in their use of vocabulary. It is hoped that the children will show an improvement over other children when they enter school as a result of their exposure to regular interaction with books via their parents. Another success has been the involvement of local high-school children in the project. The school children assist the trainers and parents by also reading to the children in the crèches.

Ideas on how to keep newly literate adults reading

Activities

- Organizing group tours to local libraries and community libraries on a fortnightly or monthly basis.
- Creating a section on library shelves that is clearly marked as ABET or is similarly categorized.
- Through a church or other community organization, arrange reading groups that get together and swap books and review books that are read. These activities allow for some research into the kinds of books that adults really want.

Integrating reading into other activities

- In the classroom, ask learners to brainstorm ideas about the meaning of the title and illustrations in a book.
- Suggest that learners do 'sustained silent reading' and then make oral presentations by recommending a book, story or article to the other classmates.⁸

Using the existing range of books

Project Literacy materials

Project Literacy has a range of readers for each ABET level of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) 1 in English. Educators use

⁸ C. van Duzer, *Reading and the Adult English Language Learner*. Washington: Eric Digests, 1999, 3.

these books as supplementary material to the comprehensive course materials that cover the language and communications unit standards. These books cover themes that are relevant to the learner's lives, i.e. crime, superstition, transition from rural to urban areas, feminine empowerment, life in a squatter camp, love, lobola and politics.

The mother-tongue books are written at a much simpler level as they target an audience that is not yet fluent in English.

Educators attend language and communications training courses in which they are instructed in the methodology and ways that the books can be used to their full for educational empowerment. Similar themes are covered in the course material, so the readers are often used as a discussion platform.

The Viva book collection

These books were developed by a group of writers as a series of easy-to-read books in English. These books target an ABET Level 1 and 2 audience. The books deal with stories about people and their experiences in the townships, and always end with moral or educational advice for the reader.

What is interesting about this set of readers is that they work in conjunction with a facilitator's manual. The manual gives the educator advice on facilitating reading in the classroom. It also looks at ways to use the stories to encourage learners to improve their other skills such as word recognition or numeracy abilities. For example, *The Gift* (as well as the other books) has such word activities. Another book, *My Cousin Thabo*, asks learners to work out their opinions on rural and urban lifestyles. It looks at different ways of presenting text – in this case, cartoon-style text with speech bubbles. The manual gives the educator further reinforcement activities, such as getting learners to construct projects based on the stories.

The English Learning Project (ELP)

The ELP basic course uses another range of ABET books that assist educators in improving learner's reading skills. In the modules that deal with reading skills, the reading material is incorporated within the course material to promote reading skills. Each chapter begins with pre-reading activities that include discussion-type activities that introduce readers to the theme of the story. Then learners either read or listen to the stories.

ELP has also produced a number of readers based on the language experience development model, i.e. a collection of learner/worker stories

around particular themes. Learners work through the exercises that determine whether they have understood the story. Finally learners complete writing activities that check their understanding of the story. They also have an opportunity to practise writing skills.

Discussion questions

- With these materials in hand can you come up with ways to get adults reading?
- Do you think that adults would give up the time they use to watch television in the evening to read a book? Why? Or why not?
- Can everyday reading materials such as newspapers and magazines provide sufficient reading stimulation for adults?
- Can the electronic media be a substitute for reading in adult learners' lives?

APPENDIX 1: UNDERSTANDING ABET

ABE stands for Adult Basic Education and T stands for Training. Before the transformation in adult education, which began in the early 1990s, education for adults had little application to their lives and their work, while training meant drilling for routine jobs with no attention paid to knowledge and values. By combining adult basic education with training there was a commitment to making both education and training more meaningful and appropriate for adults. Today ABET offers a route to a general education that is aimed at making significant improvements for adults both in the community and in the workplace.

A National Adult Basic Education Conference in 1993 established the following minimum requirements for ABET:

- ABET is the basic education phase in the provision of life-long learning.
- ABET should be aimed at adults who have had little or no formal education.
- The exit point of ABET in terms of certification should be the equivalent to the exit point from compulsory school education (Grade 9/10).
- ABET should contain core skills, knowledge and values.
- Like formal education, ABET should have levels of learning.

The South African constitution considers ABET as a human right. It states: 'everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.' At the same time as these structural changes to adult education were in progress, donors, non-governmental organizations, publishers, corporations and government education departments also made huge strides and invested a lot of money to create policy, curriculum, materials and systems for ABET.

Launched in February 2000, a National Skills Development strategy was set up by government legislation. This strategy aims not only to redress inequalities in skills provision, but also to improve productivity and the competitiveness of our industry, business, commerce and services through increased skills training. An important component of this is the provision of ABET. Through ABET adult learners are able to move on to other fields of interest or study.

Both formal and informal ABET education falls within a larger education framework called the National Qualifications Framework. There is a general syllabus provided for ABET. The final qualification for this is called a General Education and Training Certificate. There are two fundamental subjects to the qualification: Language and Communications, and Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy. Learners can choose from a selection of courses to make up the rest of their qualification, which would depend on their fields of interest.

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF ABET PUBLISHERS

Heinemann Publishers	(16.63%)
Juta & Co.	(13.93%)
Kagiso Publishers	(10.83%)
<hr/>	
Viva Books	(9.67%)
New Readers Project	(9.09%)
Hodder & Stoughton	(6.68%)
Kwela Books	(6.42%)
Adult Basic Education Project (ABE)	(6.19%)
Sached Books	(6.00%)
<hr/>	
Film Resource Unit	(2.90%)
Soul City	(2.90%)
Maskew Miller Longman	(1.74%)
USWE	(1.74%)
Storyteller Group	(1.36%)
Unknown	(0.97%)
Trade Union Research Project (TURP)	(0.77%)
Gauteng Department of Health	(0.39%)
Old Mutual	(0.39%)
<hr/>	
Adult Literacy Unit, Rhodes University	(0.19%)
Community Aids Centre	(0.19%)
Environmental Development Agency/National Languages	(0.19%)
Greater Johannesburg Community Health Services	(0.19%)
International Committee of the Red Cross	(0.19%)
Matia Trust	(0.19%)
Media in Education Trust	(0.19%)
National Education Conference	(0.19%)
OLM Publications	(0.19%)
Progressive Learning Systems	(0.19%)
Unpublished	(0.19%)
Women's National Coalition	(0.19%)
Y-Press	(0.19%)

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF PROJECT LITERACY READERS

English readers

Level 1

The girl with the golden tooth
 Waiting for Lerato
 The Spaza
 Magweya

Level 2

People call us Bosslaapers
 We wait for Elandskloof
 The adventure of a bus driver
 Time to sit in the sun
 The ring

Level 3

We remember District Six
 The missing goats
 The building
 Amadlozi
 Sizamile: The story of Desmond
 Davids
 Hard to get life
 Congo days
 Nhlanhla

Level 4

True love at last
 Voices in the backyard
 The lesson
 Denzil's con
 Elizabeth's garden
 No more stars in my roof

Mother-tongue readers

Sepedi

Lengwalo la Mahlodi
 Manta
 Dikeledi
 Mmatswale

Setswana

Kutlwano
 Tsoga
 Bodila
 Go jela bothoko teng

siSwati

Luhambo Lwagogo Motsa
 Sibangani
 Inkhukhu Yababe
 Emlindzelweni

isiZulu

Ugogo Ushintsha Umqondo
 Epulazini
 Imfundo Ephakema
 Imihlangano

isiXhosa

Izikolo zale mihla
 Imfundo Likamva Lakho
 Zinga ziya labana nje
 Azihlabani
 Icebo Lokuziphilisa

Teaching Teachers to Teach with Books: The Experience of READ

Debbie Botha

The goal of this paper is to outline a model of book-based literacy instruction, present arguments for its effectiveness, and demonstrate how it can be practically implemented in South African schools. READ's literacy programme has been developed over many years through research and practice, as well as by adapting, to South African conditions, the instructional models that have proved highly successful in other countries.

Defining literacy

Literacy is commonly understood as the ability to read and write. The traditional South African school curricula regarded literacy education as learning a set of discrete reading and writing skills. The ability to decode printed words to spoken words qualified as 'reading skills'; writing was also rather loosely defined and often equated with penmanship – the ability to copy strings of letters neatly and legibly. However, the conception of literacy as the ability to put sounds and letters together is grossly inadequate for the demands of daily life in today's technologically sophisticated world.

Literacy is associated with a wide range of contextualized skills that are determined by the needs of the society. Today, being able to read and write effectively is an essential life skill. To serve its practical purposes, literacy must go far beyond the ability to put letters and sounds together. Information-age literacy must be defined as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages through print. Thus, a literate person is able to make predictions about the content and purpose of a book (or other printed resource) on the basis of its format, internal organization, graphic design and even the type of paper on which it has been printed. He or she can locate and retrieve information from a variety of resources, interpret its meaning and function, and determine its relevance to his or her purpose. A literate individual is also able to convey meaning effectively through writing. It is no coincidence that South Africa's outcomes-

based (OBE) curriculum defines literacy in a similar way. The need for a broader definition of literacy is recognized and a range of literacy skills is outlined in Curriculum 2005.

Benefits of book-based literacy instruction

Literacy skills need to be taught in practical contexts in which they can be applied for real purposes. Literacy cannot be acquired without regular interaction with meaningful print. Therefore, an environment rich in printed resources is indispensable in the process of learning to read and write. Books are a vital element of such an environment.

Research in the area of linguistics and psychology over the last twenty years has consistently offered valuable insights into the nature of literacy and literacy acquisition. It has been demonstrated that young children who are exposed to books and literacy activities in early childhood have an understanding of the functions of print and manifest literate behaviours long before they formally learn how to read. This stage in the child's literacy acquisition, called emergent literacy, is an essential part of the process of learning to read before the child is actually taught the symbolism of letters and their correspondence to sounds (i.e. decoding). Children who, through exposure to books, have developed some literacy concepts before they are formally taught to read learn to read faster and with greater ease than the children who have had no previous experiences with books.

Book-based approaches are effective with young learners because they are holistic: they do not segment meaningful educational experiences into isolated concepts for mindless skill drills. Books and stories stimulate not only children's cognitive and linguistic development but also their affective and social growth.

Immersion in a book environment has been shown to correlate with both verbal and reading skills of children from the age of five up; no other single variable (social class, family income, etc.) can be shown to carry the same significance. A recent study of reading ability of children around the world shows that one of the factors that positively influence children's reading achievement is the accessibility of books in their immediate environment: at home, in the classroom and in the school library.¹ Pupils who were good readers in high-scoring countries (such as Finland, the United States, Sweden or France) cited 'having many

¹ W. B. Elley, *How in the World Do Students Read?* The Hague: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA Study of Reading Literacy), 1992.

books around', 'having a lively imagination', 'liking reading' and 'having lots of time' as the key factors in becoming a good reader. These readers did not perceive factors such as sounding out words or doing language exercises as relevant in becoming a good reader. By contrast, readers in low-scoring countries (such as Indonesia, Venezuela, Botswana or Zimbabwe) attributed reading achievement to sounding out words, regular drills and much reading homework. These two views appear to reflect two different attitudes to reading. In high-scoring countries, reading is treated as a pleasurable activity that has little to do with formal classroom instruction. In low-scoring countries, reading is perceived as hard work that requires a lot of disciplined effort. Thus, the successful fostering of positive attitudes towards reading within the school curriculum was shown to be the single most important variable in predicting success in reading. Similarly, studies of literacy skills in the United States report a strong connection between the amount of pleasure reading and the achievement levels in both reading and writing.²

A major UK project focusing on reading development in 1981 discovered a strong connection between the amount of personal reading and the reading progress of learners. The study revealed that classes which had made most progress in reading were those in which the teachers allowed relatively more time to uninterrupted sustained silent reading; in these same classes teachers talked to children about the books they had read.³

A book flood approach, coupled with appropriate classroom strategies, has also proved extremely effective in teaching language and literacy to second-language learners. The reading of real books as a stimulus for the development of both oral skills and literacy in second-language learning has become standard practice in many second-language instruction programmes. The results of studies in Fiji⁴ and elsewhere⁵ demonstrate that non-mother-tongue learners who followed book-based programmes performed much better on language tests than those taught by more traditional, structured methods.

² S. Krashen, *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1993.

³ R. Beard, *Developing Reading 3–13*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2nd edn, 1990.

⁴ W. B. Elley and F. Mangubhai, 'The Fiji Book Flood Project', *Fiji Library Association Journal* (1981), 5 (June): 5–10.

⁵ W. B. Elley, 'Using book floods to raise literacy levels in developing countries', in V. Greaney (ed.), *Promoting Reading in Developing Countries*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1996.

Many adult readers who were taught to read on phonics primers are not convinced that book-based methods make any significant difference. Most of them underestimate the influences from outside the school – reading parents, the presence of books and other print resources at home, easy access to a neighbourhood library. They may have been taught the principles of sound–letter relationships working through the Dick and Jane readers, but it was more likely to have been the outside-the-classroom reading that helped them develop fluency.

The reality is that a high percentage of South African children, especially in rural areas, come to school from illiterate or semi-literate home backgrounds; many of them have never seen a book before they enter school. Rural children typically have very limited exposure to environmental print. For these children, the classroom provides the only opportunities to interact with the printed word. If reading instruction is limited to a textbook and a skills-based workbook, these children never have a chance to do any real reading and so do not develop and reinforce even the little that they are being taught.

There are several important reasons why book-based reading programmes are more successful than more traditional textbook-based skills-oriented approaches. One of the most important ones is the sheer volume of reading that can be done in a classroom with its own well-selected resource collection; no textbook can match the number of different texts available to a learner throughout the year. Numerous studies show that all aspects of reading – word recognition, linguistic comprehension and world knowledge – improve with more reading. One often hears a comment that children who are good readers read a lot because reading is easy for them; in fact, the logic here works in the opposite direction: children become good readers because they read a lot. The good news about the positive correlation between the amount of reading and reading success is that, barring serious developmental (physical or cognitive) impairments, any child can become a good reader. ‘Slow readers’ are not born; they are school-made.

The second reason why a book-based reading programme is superior to textbook-based instruction is that classroom resource collections can be custom-made to meet the needs of learners with varying levels of language and reading skills, cultural backgrounds and interests. For example, different selections can be made for rural and urban schools. A typical resource collection contains book titles reflecting a wide variety of genres and topics. The books within each selection represent several reading levels to match a range of reading abilities in an average classroom.

READ's balanced literacy programme

In order for books to fulfil their literacy teaching function, they must be mediated by the teacher who applies effective instructional strategies and provides continuous support to the learners as they grow as readers and writers. Over the years, READ has developed and successfully implemented a book-based literacy programme that stimulates a holistic and balanced growth of all aspects of literacy.

Since reading and writing are essential learning tools, READ's programme extends literacy practices into other areas of the curriculum. The inclusion of non-fiction books on topics relating to areas such as science and technology, social and environmental studies, arts and business allows learners to acquire the terminology and also to learn to understand how concepts and relationships typical of each learning area are expressed in language and presented in print. They also acquire crucial information skills such as the use of reference sources and extracting and interpreting information from charts, tables, diagrams and other graphic representations.

Following from the belief that no single method can sufficiently develop all necessary skills or be equally effective with all children, we employ a variety of instructional strategies which jointly comprise a balanced literacy programme. The four pillars of the programme are reading aloud, shared reading, group and guided reading, and independent (also referred to as personal or silent) reading. Each strategy has its own specific objectives and requires suitable reading resources. Each strategy is accompanied by pre-reading and follow-up activities that respectively introduce and reinforce new concepts and skills; these include appropriate writing-development techniques.

Reading aloud

There is growing evidence that reading aloud to learners, both in beginning grades and later on, when they are able to read on their own, has numerous linguistic, cognitive and academic benefits. For example, the significance of 'book talk' and understanding the conventions of story reading and the story-reading event in literacy learning has been well documented. Children who are regularly read to become better readers compared to those who do not have that experience.

Reading stories to children also provides a bridge between familiar oral discourse and new written discourse. Reading aloud enables children to enjoy stories that perhaps they cannot yet read by themselves. Listening to stories familiarizes children with different types or grammars of stories;

they are consequently able to predict some of the events in stories and their possible outcomes. In the cognitive domain, listening to stories helps children to understand temporal and causal relationships among events. Listening to stories that are read to the class impacts on language development in the area of vocabulary, syntax and discourse structure, and is especially important to second-language students as it provides them with a wealth of real language input and exposes learners to conventions and components of different written genres.

A teacher reading a story aloud to the class models the reading for the children in terms of pronunciation, stress and intonation. Simple dramatization techniques, such as using different voices and ways of speaking for different characters, make the story more comprehensible and enjoyable for the children. A teacher who reads books and enjoys them also becomes a role model for the pupils, who are then likely to develop a lasting positive attitude toward books and reading.

Shared reading

The second strategy is shared reading. This method is really a strategy which supports a beginning reader. It is designed to eliminate the potential sense of failure on the part of the child and the possible development of a failure mentality in the learner. In the classroom situation, shared reading involves the whole class and a teacher reading together from a Big Book. The teacher reads aloud while pointing to the words and the learners join in whenever they feel comfortable to do so. In shared reading, a learner is never asked to read aloud alone, and can choose to listen while following the text silently with his or her eyes. Since there is no pressure for learners to perform, they can relax and enjoy the story while absorbing important literacy knowledge that they will need to apply when they begin to read by themselves.

Group and guided reading

Group reading is a classroom reading strategy that allows children to enjoy a more intimate contact with books while relying on peer support within a small group. In group reading, children take turns to read aloud to their group mates. A group reading strategy requires not more than six copies of the same book per class (rather than providing a copy per each pupil); thus, more titles can be purchased from the same budget and children are exposed to a wider range of books. For many learners, group reading is less stressful than reading in front of the whole class, so pupils read with more confidence. Group reading strategies enable the teacher

to spend more time on weaker readers and to offer more attention and guidance to individual pupils. Group reading has emerged as the most common and most successful form of classroom reading in senior primary grades in the schools that have adopted the READ programme.

Guided reading is essentially group reading with the assistance of the teacher. While all groups are engaged in reading, the teacher works with one group, guiding them through discussion towards a better understanding of textual, linguistic and extra-textual (world knowledge) dimensions of the material. Guided reading activities may also include specific language, reading and writing skills (phonics, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, etc.).

Independent reading

Independent reading is the most advanced of the reading strategies promoted by READ. Independent (silent) reading is viewed by theorists as the most mature type of reading; it allows the reader to move through the text at his/her own pace according to his/her own needs and purpose. Going backwards and forwards, skimming, looking for details and taking notes while reading are all techniques that can be employed in silent reading.

Independent reading is most beneficial for readers who are past the decoding stage and are able to read more fluently. Research has demonstrated that learners who are allowed time for personal reading in the classroom make faster and better progress in reading than those who spend their classroom time doing workbook exercises.

The choice factor is an important aspect of independent reading because it allows individual pupils to select materials according to their reading abilities and personal interests. It thereby also helps them to discover that reading can be a personal pleasure and to develop their own, individual reading tastes. Over time, reading becomes not only a classroom routine, but also an activity of choice.

These four instructional pillars of the programme enable learners to progress from listening to and enjoying stories read by the teacher, to reading together with the teacher, to reading with a peer group or a partner, and eventually to selecting their own books to read independently. Books are read, discussed, critiqued and dramatized; new stories are created through the concerted efforts of brainstorming, composing, illustrating and publishing a class-made book to read and share proudly with other classes. Books are also used as information and reference sources in cross-curricular explorations and as models of written formats

and styles to be followed in writing tasks. During these engaging, purpose-oriented activities, learners' literacy skills expand and mature. These broad literacy skills, as opposed to the narrowly defined reading skills in skills-oriented approaches, extend beyond phonics, word recognition and spelling to include elements of literary analysis, genre analysis, stylistic considerations. They also embrace reference skills and interpretation of non-prose print (for example, charts and graphs), known collectively as information skills, which are vital in today's data-based world. Such a wide spectrum of print-related expertise can be aimed at and achieved, only if interaction with printed resources becomes the learners' and teachers' daily bread.

Preparing the teachers

READ's book-based approach could not be successful without a rigorous teacher training and monitoring programme. Its teacher education programme includes both pre-service and in-service training. The important aspect of READ's in-service training is its emphasis on working with whole school communities instead of selected individual teachers. We found out, through our experience of working in schools, that training one or two classroom teachers in resource-based methods did not work. The school principal in particular must be convinced that there are gains both for the pupils and the teachers if the book-based approach is adopted. The new approach must be embraced and supported by the whole school community to ensure a lasting change in attitudes to reading and reading practices.

Another training policy that came out of our field experience is working in geographically close clusters of schools, and not in single, isolated schools. Clustering enables more cost-effective use of resources and time, especially in rural areas distant from the READ regional offices or training centres. Training teachers in a number of schools that lie a relatively short distance from one another has a strong team-building effect. After the training is completed, the schools form a support network for each other and develop professional ties, which positively effects not only the schools themselves but also the lives of their communities. We have observed much better results in teacher and pupil performance in schools that have been trained in clusters than in schools that have been isolated in their training.

The training programmes for schools follow from READ's broadly designed continuum of courses. Over the years, as our practical training experience has accumulated, the courses have been evaluated and re-designed to ensure their optimal effectiveness.

Continuum of courses

The content of READ's training programme concentrates on effective classroom strategies for language and literacy development. All the courses promote book- and resource-based literacy education and instruct teachers in practical ways of teaching reading and writing, as well as expanding and enriching oral expression through the use of real books. Our core courses deal with age-appropriate methodology for teaching language and literacy across the grades, from the Foundation to Senior Phase. These core courses deliver the content and skills necessary for implementing specific instructional strategies as well as for organizing and managing a classroom resource collection. The course content includes reading aloud to children, shared reading, group and guided reading, independent reading, developing writing, reading and writing for real purposes, using books across the curriculum (with special emphasis on non-fiction books) and selecting books for various instructional purposes. All the READ courses have been developed in a modular format, which ensures their flexibility. In addition to multi-modular courses, READ offers workshops that deal with more practical issues, such as making one's own teaching resources.

The classroom resources used in the training have been developed or adapted by the READ staff. This parallel development (training material and resources) guarantees the same underlying philosophy and instructional methods. It also means that the resources are easily available to teachers and can be immediately put into use in schools.

The implementation of the full continuum of READ's courses is planned for approximately three years. At the outset of the training programme, a one-year plan is typically developed to meet the most urgent needs of a particular school or school cluster. The selected courses are implemented and resources are simultaneously delivered, so that the teachers begin to implement the book-based approach in their classrooms almost from the very beginning of their training. During that time, as well as for a period following the training, teachers receive the full attention and support of the READ trainers and have opportunities not only to use in practice but also to adapt and expand what they have learnt in the courses. After the initial bulk of the training is completed, schools have the option to continue with further courses. Since training funds are usually limited, some schools have developed their own fund-raising strategies to afford further training or to purchase more resources. This is encouraged, as it proves the schools' own motivation to improve their performance as well as their commitment to effective educational practices.

Mentoring, monitoring and Leader Teachers

Teachers' completion of training courses and their willingness to use book-based methods in their classrooms do not guarantee effective implementation. Left on their own after the training, teachers often lack confidence in their ability to follow the programme and cannot always solve practical or methodological problems and queries which may occur during implementation. As a result, they tend to revert to their old ineffective practices simply because they know how to handle them.

To help schools with the actual implementation of the book-based approach after the teachers have been trained, READ set up mentoring and monitoring systems. READ monitors, who are predominantly recruited from among previously trained, high-performing teachers, pay visits to schools in order to observe, show how, suggest improvements and generally support less experienced teachers in their endeavours to do their best. This friendly professional exchange about concerns, solutions, observations and ideas not only serves as a confidence boost to newly trained teachers but also provides the READ monitoring staff with valuable insights into the process and alerts them to potential problems or areas of difficulty. Feedback from monitoring visits allows READ to identify and improve the imperfections of our system.

However, the programme could continue successfully only if the schools felt confident enough to assume responsibility for its implementation. To help schools achieve independence, a Leader Teacher programme was established; it remains one of the most successful READ initiatives to date. Leader Teachers – professionals with outstanding leadership abilities, skills and commitment – serve as channels of ongoing communication between READ and the schools in which they work. They are directly updated, through regular Leader Teacher sessions, on the current developments within READ, such as instructional innovations or publications, and disseminate the information throughout their school communities. They also lend assistance to new or less confident teachers to improve the quality of instructional practice at their schools.

To ensure that the READ literacy programme is sustained in the school after the training has been completed, READ selects a small group of teachers in each school who appear to be highly motivated, committed, and demonstrate excellent teaching and leadership qualities. These teachers are offered further training as Leader Teachers. READ continues to work with Leader Teachers for about five years after the whole school training has been completed. Leader Teachers are trained in a number of additional courses and workshops and they take responsibility for

organizing further training for the teachers in their school. Thus, READ programme innovations and new resources are disseminated and incorporated into schools at minimal cost. Leader Teachers play an instrumental role in building capacity and transforming the culture of their schools by providing support to their colleagues, encouraging a collaborative approach to teaching, and maintaining links between READ and the school community.

READ's resources

The quality of the materials that we make available to potential readers is as important as the methods we use to foster reading growth and the sophistication of taste. The content, genre, language and style, format and graphic design, all contribute to the quality of reading material and determine its attractiveness to readers. Educators and librarians bear primary responsibility for applying high standards in the process of selecting reading materials for learners and potential library users.

As it became virtually impossible to fill classrooms with high-quality, attractive, culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate books, READ embarked on its own book development and publishing programme. READ's materials development programme formulated as its objective the origination, production and provision of high-quality, relevant and low-cost resources, with emphasis on readable books, in order to foster the development of pupils' language and reading skills across the curriculum, stimulate cognitive growth and facilitate the acquisition of information skills.

Over the years we have developed an extensive collection of low-cost, high-quality books, posters and resource packs for classroom use, and for pleasure reading. Our publications include Big Book packs at four reading levels, sets of group readers, stories for reading aloud to children, and wordless books for fostering oral narrative and writing skills.

READ's primary goal in resource development is to make the materials relevant to the readers. Our book development projects rely on research, testing and co-operation with school communities as we aim to create materials that are original and firmly anchored in African cultures and lifestyles, both urban and rural. The topics and plots derive from folklore, history, contemporary events, family anecdotes and real people's life stories. The stories are originated and written by READ staff with assistance and input from teachers and learners. In addition to fiction genres, we have also developed and published informative books, posters and complete thematic packs. All material is thoroughly tested in both

rural and urban settings before it is put into production. Individual teachers' and schools' contributions are acknowledged in the publications, which gives the school communities a sense of ownership in the final product and motivates them towards their own literacy endeavours.

Apart from creating our own resources, READ has developed partnerships with commercial publishing companies that specialize in educational materials. Partner publishers collaborate with READ in adapting some of their publications to meet the needs of South African learners; cultural and linguistic considerations are given priority in the selection and adaptation process. New titles have also been published through extensive collaboration between commercial publishers and READ. Publishing partnerships have allowed READ to increase dramatically the number and range of high-quality selections that we can offer schools, which, in turn, allow schools to choose from pre-selected lists the materials that most closely match the instructional needs of teachers and the interests of their learners. The freedom to choose materials for classroom use is very important within the OBE curriculum, which stresses teachers' input and decision-making in selecting topics and designing learning activities.

Want to Read: A Project of Library and Information Services, City of Johannesburg

Sue McMurray

The City of Johannesburg was established after the local government elections of December 2000 from the four local metropolitan councils and the metro council that had come together to form Greater Johannesburg, together with some outlying areas like Midrand that did not previously fall into Greater Johannesburg. The metropolitan area has been divided into eleven regions, and services are delivered through the regional structures according to policies set by the centre. The new city includes old established areas with well-developed library and other services as well as older formerly disadvantaged areas and newer areas that do not have a well-developed infrastructure and services. Library provision is unequal across the city and there is little or no reading culture in many areas.

Both the library and the city as a whole have targeted children as an important focus point, so the library was excited at the idea of being able to apply to the Carnegie Corporation for a grant to revitalize children's services in neglected areas. As the project is a city-wide one, it is being co-ordinated from the centre under the directorship of Bongi Mokaba, the Director of Social Development. The Project Leader is Sue McMurray, who reports directly to Ms Mokaba regarding the project.

Why? The project goal

The goal of the Want to Read project is to ensure that the children of Johannesburg and, in particular, those children who are at a disadvantage because of historical inequities and current socio-economic circumstances are not deprived of the opportunity to learn to read fluently, to enjoy reading, and thus to prepare themselves for meaningful participation in society. The emphasis of the project is on encouraging reading for personal satisfaction rather than reading only for utility. There is an urgent need for intervention owing to the unequal facilities and exposure to books and reading that exists over the new City of Johannesburg.

How? Strategic objectives

The strategy that is being employed to achieve this objective is the creation of opportunities for children to get to know books and develop the reading habit in a stimulating and enjoyable way. This is being done by:

- systematically resourcing 15 appropriate and strategically located libraries [the project libraries] throughout the geographical area of Johannesburg with sufficient numbers of appropriate books and skilled staff in order to actively support and promote the development of reading skills;
- offering programmes in and from these libraries that will assist children in the particular community to develop and enhance reading skills, and develop a lifelong love of reading.

How? Proposed activities

The major activities to support the strategy that are now under way are:

Collection development

- Embarking on a collection-development programme employing the knowledge and skills of experienced children's librarians to replenish and revitalize the stock of children's books which has suffered severely because of unprecedented budget shortages over several years.

Staff and training

- Employing five additional staff members as project assistants who are being trained as children's librarians and to assist in organizing and implementing programmes at the project libraries over the three-year life span of the grant.
- Training and redeploying existing staff to become dedicated children's librarians in the project libraries.

Programmes

- Story-telling and introduction to the library for pre-schoolers.
- Story-telling and introduction to the library for Grades 1, 2 and 3.
- Reading Enrichment for Grades 4 and 5.
- The Story Skirmish, a book-based inter-school knockout quiz for pupils in Grades 4 and 5.

These programmes are being offered in all the project libraries in co-operation with local pre-primary and primary schools.

Story-telling and introduction to the library for pre-schoolers

Aim

To introduce as many young children as possible in the particular community to books and libraries.

Activities

- Story-telling using picture books. Activities include the use of rhyme, drama and story-telling by children themselves based on the stories that have been read to them.
- Introduction to the library by library staff.
- Regular borrowing by the children from the library.

Benefits

- It will stimulate the desire in the participants to learn to read for themselves.
- It will develop language skills.
- The children who participate should become aware of the facilities offered by the library and comfortable about using them.
- The children will experience the library as a fun place with interesting book-related activities.

Story-telling and introduction to the library for Grades 1, 2 and 3

Aim

To promote the love of reading and the library's resources to young users in the community.

Objectives

To hold story-telling sessions to groups of children after school or to school classes during school hours, whichever is most convenient for the participants. In this way new users can be brought into the library, making them aware of the facilities and exposing them to books and stories, thus laying the foundation for an interest in reading for fun.

Activities

- Story-telling, mostly using picture books so as to relate the story to books.
- Basic library education.
- What are libraries?

- How are libraries organized?
- What the librarian can do to help.
- How to find a good book to read.
- How to find information.
- How to look after library materials.
- Puzzles, games and worksheets to reinforce the message.

Benefits

- Children's desire to learn to read for themselves will be stimulated.
- Language skills will be developed.
- The children will experience the library as a fun place with interesting book-related activities.
- The children who participate should become aware of the facilities offered by the library and comfortable about using them.

Reading Enrichment for Grades 4 and 5

This programme has already been run with success in some libraries in the past. It widens children's reading experience, and so plays an important role in the development of a reading culture. A high percentage of South African children's books are used and recommended to foster an awareness of South African literature and develop a pool of readers for good local titles.

Aim

The aim is to promote reading for fun and the library as a source of leisure reading among young users in the community it serves.

Objectives

To get groups of children into the library, either in a class or as members of a Reading Enrichment Club, to read, borrow and talk about books in a friendly environment, thus promoting reading for fun. This will lay the foundation for easy access to books and academic success, as well as form the basis for the appreciation and enjoyment of literature.

Activities

- Story-telling and reading aloud.
- Reading practice.
- Group book discussion and review.
- Library education.



A public library in Johannesburg.



Display of Want to Read publicity materials at SCECSAL 2002.

Programme

The programme will be run, depending on needs and circumstances in the particular community, either after school with a group of children who join a Reading Enrichment Club or with school classes during school hours. The club members or classes will be asked to commit themselves for approximately an hour and a half at a convenient time once a week for a seven-week term.

The level of activity is adapted to the age of the children and the amount of exposure to books that they have experienced. Ideally it is hoped that they will come for more than one term. In that case the activities will become more challenging as the learners progress. The emphasis will always be on fun and enjoyment, leading to exposure to books that the children would not otherwise have encountered.

The Story Skirmish

The Story Skirmish programme is based on the highly successful Battle of the Books for Grades 6 and 7 which has proved to be so effective in encouraging reading for fun, broadening reading experience, and turning non-readers into readers while effecting a noticeable improvement in participants' reading and comprehension skills. The Story Skirmish is a much easier competition for younger, less skilled readers, especially targeted at second-language English speakers.

Aim

To establish the reading habit in young readers in Grades 4 and 5 for whom English is a second language.

Objectives

The Story Skirmish will be a book-based inter-school knockout quiz for pupils in Grades 4 and 5, which is designed both to encourage co-operation between schools and libraries and promote reading for pleasure, thereby helping to establish a reading culture which is the foundation of lifelong literacy and learning.

Activities

Schools will field a team of six learners who have between them read the twelve books on a prescribed list. Teachers may either choose children to be in the team or, preferably, run intra-school play-offs to select the team. Activities will involve:

- Reading from a list of books that has been carefully compiled to

include interesting, appealing, easy-to-read books from South Africa and abroad.

- Participating in a series of quizzes in the library. Questions will be based on the books on the list.

Prizes and a floating trophy will be awarded.

Expected outcomes

It is expected that the Want to Read project will lead to:

- An increase in the borrowing of children's books from the project libraries.
- Improvement in reading skills and enthusiasm for reading of participants in the programmes.
- Participants becoming active borrowers of library books, and eventually also users of other library services.
- Accelerated development of children's services throughout the library system.

Discussion session: Designing an ongoing in-service training programme in reader development for children's librarians

Issues

- What experience of children's books have most new librarians had?
- What do children's librarians need to know about books and reading before they can actively promote them?
- What do children's librarians need to know about children, their development and their response to books?
- What kinds of people (e.g. librarians, authors, etc.) can be used to transmit book knowledge?
- What is/are the best way/s to promote books and reading to children? Individually or in groups?
- What training is needed to be able to devise suitable book promotion activities and programmes?
- If both book knowledge and programme-specific training are needed, how can they best be scheduled in large library systems where staff is in short supply and large distances make regular meetings difficult to organize?

Outcome

Agreeing on a set of priorities for training so as to make the most effective use of the time and resources available.