

## CHAPTER 6

### SYNTHESIS AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

*'The best way to pursue meaning is through conscious, controlled use of strategies'* (NRP, 2000:4-46)

#### 6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, I explored the significance of my findings as they emerged from the data. I presented the findings through themes, which emerged from the data collected through various instruments. The themes emerged from teachers' voices and from my observations of learners in the classroom. During the individual interviews, the participating teachers expressed their understanding of reading comprehension as the ability to read text with understanding.

Most of them expressed their concern about their learners who struggled to read and had difficulties in understanding the text. They also reported that the teaching of reading comprehension was important, although a challenge for them. The teachers were critical about the intervention strategies provided by the government, viz. the NRS and FFLC, and the handbook *Teaching Reading in Early Grades* that was provided for them. The participating teachers of the research study did not find these documents very helpful for Tshivenda teachers as they were in English. They expressed dissatisfaction about the lack of guidelines on how to teach reading comprehension to Tshivenda learners.

During the interviews and focus group interviews, I noticed that the teachers had conceptualised the concept of reading comprehension in the context of Grade 3 literacy teaching. However, during the classroom observations it was apparent that the strategies they spoke about were absent in their teaching. As a result, most learners could not read and therefore could not comprehend the meaning of the text. Therefore, as an interpretivist, I concluded that the participating teachers in my case study had reason to regard themselves as stressed and frustrated because of this situation.

## 6.2 Implications of the findings for the inquiry

The curriculum aims to develop the full potential of each learner as a citizen of a democratic South Africa. It seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate and multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as critical and active citizens (NCS, 2002:8). Learning Outcomes describe what knowledge, skills and values learners should achieve, for example at the end of the phase. In Learning Outcome 3: reading and viewing, learners must be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values of the text (NCS, 2002:93). The study shows that learners should know various comprehension strategies that will assist them to read and understand the text. In the next paragraphs I answer the main research question by addressing each sub-question.

### 6.2.1 How do teachers understand reading comprehension?

Since the focus of the research study is on reading comprehension, the research sought to gauge the extent to which teachers understood reading comprehension as concept. The teachers were asked to indicate how they understood reading comprehension. While responding to this question, they also touched on what they regarded as important when teaching reading comprehension, which will be addressed in research sub-question 2. Data gathered during interviews (ITI) and focus group interviews (FG) revealed that the participating teachers said they understood the concept of reading comprehension. This clearly emerged as Theme 1, which I presented as **'There are two words which the reader must read and thereafter comprehend'**.

As I mentioned, when teachers were responding to the question they also expressed what they regarded as the importance of teaching reading comprehension to the learners and these emerged as category 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 of Theme 1. There was a general feeling among the teachers that reading comprehension entailed reading with understanding. The following remarks from teacher 1 of School A, teacher 3 of School B and teacher 6 from School C bear testimony to the above:

FGT1-SCH A, Q1: *'The reader must read and thereafter comprehend'*

IT/T3-SCH B, Q1: *'What you read you must be able to understand'*

FG/T6-SCH C, Q1: *'Learners must read, and as they read, they must understand'*

Based on their expressions one would expect that they were teaching learners self-regulating learning strategies. However, the findings from the classroom observation revealed that although the participating teachers said they understood what reading comprehension was, there was no correlation between what they said and what they did in 'real life' situations in their classrooms. During my classroom observations, I observed that reading comprehension was taught haphazardly and with little time allocated for this activity. The teachers spent more time in asking questions than in teaching reading comprehension. According to Ehri and Sweet (1991), the NRP (2000) and Oczkus (2004), teachers should provide ample time for teaching reading comprehension with all the various facets, since comprehension cannot just happen, it should be taught. In addition, more opportunities should be provided for learners to practise the use of the strategies while reading the texts.

During the teachers' individual interviews and focus group interviews, the participants in the case study expressed a common understanding of the concept reading comprehension, yet in the classroom they did not clearly apply their knowledge of reading comprehension and its importance in the lives of the learners. Reading comprehension was not taught in their classrooms in line with what they averred during interviews and focus group interviews as their practice (Appendix E, classroom observations checklist, component 5-6).

Clay (1993), Cohen (1996), and Parker and Harry (2007) concur that teachers sometimes report significant changes and great progress in their instructional practices, whereas in their actual classroom situations they had not changed their behaviours at all when viewed against theoretical principles and instructional goals. It was clear that they were in practice failing to encourage learners to become independent readers. McLaughlin and Allen (2002) and Learning First Alliance (1998) emphasise that teachers must not only teach learners to understand text on a literal level, but also on an interpretive and evaluative level.

In many instances, my observations indicated that learners were answering the questions on a literal level and could not relate the text to something similar or to their lives. In schools A, B and C it was very difficult for the learners to evaluate the text and explain their critical judgement, and to express different points of view about the text (Appendix E, classroom observations checklist, component 2). The teachers declared that they understood reading comprehension during interviews and focus group interviews. However, their understanding was not evident when they were teaching. In their study of teachers' use of questioning and modelling comprehension skills in primary classrooms, Parker and Harry (2007) found that in the 51 interviews they had with teachers, 48% of the inferences to direct teacher questioning were at the literal level and only 2% at the evaluative level during comprehension sessions.

Limited time was devoted to the teaching of reading comprehension. The respondents also highlighted this during the interviews and focus group interviews. Respondent 6 from school C made the following remark:

FG/T6-SCH C, Q3: *'Reading comprehension has many things, we need more time for reading comprehension but one hour is needed specifically for reading comprehension because reading comprehension has many aspects. They must read and understand so that they can answer the questions ...you see it takes time'*

In their studies, Durkin (1978), Pressley *et al.*, (1998) and Taylor *et al.* (2002) report that teachers did not give good attention to the teaching of reading comprehension. However, this implies that allocating ample time and practising can enhance reading comprehension to the learners.

The teachers of my case study seemed dissatisfied by the time allocated for reading comprehension. They taught comprehension hurriedly and in such a way that the actual teaching of reading comprehension was lacking. Fielding and Pearson (1994:1) state the following concerning the benefit of spending ample time for reading comprehension with learners:

*The first benefit of time for reading is the sheer opportunity to orchestrate the skills and strategies that are important to proficient reading-including comprehension. As in sports and music, practice makes perfect in reading too. Second, reading results in the acquisition of new knowledge, this in turn, fuels the comprehension process.*

This statement is important for my study. It illustrates the consensus in various research studies that time should be allocated for teaching reading comprehension. However, if teachers are not committed to teaching reading comprehension, it will never take place.

A print-rich classroom is one in which learners are able to interact with a variety of reading materials (Joubert *et al.*, 2008), for example, newspapers, magazines, books and labels (Joshua, 2001). Concerning the physical environment during my classroom observations, in all three schools the resources available were not enough to enhance reading comprehension for learners, for example, I did not find any evidence of resources such as phonic frieze posters, action pictures, or words in Tshivenda (Appendix E, classroom observation checklist, component 1).

In school A, there were not enough readers for the learners. Teachers sometimes used workbooks to replace readers. There was no school library. In the classrooms, there was no variety of reading texts or a reading corner. The only time that learners read, was when the teacher called them to the front to sit and read. They do not have Big Books. Reading took place during the reading session only.

The two classes were very different. In Grade 3A, teacher 1 had pictures and phonic frieze posters on the wall that she had made herself. Because readers were so few, she sometimes made copies from one reader that she had for the learners. In the same school, teacher 2 in Grade 3B seemed to be unconcerned. She relied on the workbooks as readers. This did not give learners an exposure to a variety of reading texts. She had a few pictures, which were not clear.

In school B, there was no school library. However, unlike School A, there were enough readers for the learners so that at least they could share, but there was no variety. Each class had 39 Grade 3 learners. The only time they read was when the

teacher called them to the front to sit and read. As in School A, they did not have a reading corner in the classrooms. Just like School A, reading took place during the reading session only. They did not have Big Books. In class A, teacher 5 had English phonic frieze posters on the wall instead.

In school C, there was no school library and no reading corner in the classrooms. The only time that they read was when the teacher called them to the front to sit and read. They had few readers available for the learners. They did have one Big Book that the teachers used on occasion. Just like schools A and B, reading took place during the reading session only. There was no variety of pictures or photos, and no Tshivenda phonic frieze posters on the walls.

In school B, teacher 3 had English posters pasted on the walls, possibly because only the English ones were available to her.

Carter (2000), McPherson (2007), Wessels (2010), Joshua (2001) and FFLC(2008) emphasise that reading corners and classroom libraries are important for exposing learners to a language-rich environment which can motivate learners and enhance their reading comprehension. During my classroom observations, the classrooms had no evidence of reading corners, a library or a small group reading area at all. What I noticed was that during reading, teachers put a rug in the front, and the whole class sat on it and the lesson proceeded. Learners were only called to sit in front on the rug during reading sessions and that was the only time they could handle readers. There were very few pictures, posters and sentence strips on the walls.

The lack of newspapers and magazines may be due to teachers' lack of knowledge of the importance of a print-rich environment to enhance reading. There are currently no magazines and newspapers in Tshivenda. However, teachers can make action pictures by cutting out pictures, pasting them on the walls and writing in Tshivenda under each picture. The same applies to phonic frieze posters. The classroom and the physical setting of the classroom are important to encourage learners' access to authentic reading materials (Green, 1999; Alexander, Jetton & Kulikowich, 1995; Shany & Biemiller, 1995; Pardo, 2004). Grade 3 learners should

be exposed to different kinds of text such as comics, magazines and newspapers. Learners in the schools in my case study were missing these opportunities.

Piaget regarded the physical appearance of the classroom as important for enhancing reading comprehension. Learners must be able to see the classroom with a variety of books, and see and hear the teachers or peers modelling the good behaviour of reading and the use of strategies. This idea is echoed by Vygotsky (1978) and is relevant to reading comprehension.

During reading comprehension the learners learn from the behaviours of the people around them, which in the context of the study, are teachers and peers (Chapter 3 on reading comprehension, developmental learning theories and conceptual framework, section 3.3.1, and Vygotsky's socio-historical theory of cognitive development in Chapter 3, section 3.2;3.3).

## **6.2.2 What do teachers regard as important when teaching reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking learners?**

As I indicated in 6.3.1, teachers responses to the question on their understanding about reading comprehension, when they reported on what they regarded as important when teaching reading comprehension to the learners. An important point that came to the fore was that teachers' responses to sub-question 2 came as an elaboration of Theme 1. Category 1.1 of Theme 1, states that learners should read and understand, and be able to apply the information in their daily lives.

The first part of the response of teachers from Theme 1 is the explanation of what reading comprehension is, and the latter part of the response relates to the importance of teaching reading comprehension. The following responses from teacher 1 from School A and teacher 3 from School B can help to illustrate this aspect:

IT/T1-SCH A-Q2: *'Learners need to read and understand and apply it in their daily lives'*

FG/T3-SCH B-Q2: *'At the end, they can implement it [the information] in their daily lives'*

This is in agreement with Durkin (1979), who said that reading comprehension is important academically and throughout learners' lives. Important as it may be, the teachers seemed to be concerned that there were learners in their classrooms who could not read and understand a text provided to them. The responses are in agreement with the RAND report (Snow, 2002:27), which state that "capacities to read with comprehension for the purpose of learning, applying knowledge, and being engaged is the highest priority." Therefore, it is important that learners should be taught to read and construct meaning from the text.

The participating teachers of my case study also emphasised the importance of teaching reading comprehension to enable the learners to read any text and know how to interpret it. This is found in Theme 1, category 1.2. To elaborate on this category, teacher 2 from school B made the following remark:

FG/T2-SCH B, Q2: *'We expect the learner to be able to read and understand the text, explain about and interpret what he or she has been reading about'*

The teachers who participated in the study felt that reading comprehension was important to the learners because it helped them to see the relevance of the story they read to their own lives. This insight is supported by teacher 2 from school B who said:

FG/T2-SCH B, Q2: *'They should be able to indicate or see the relevancy of the story that they have read, what does it have to do with their lives, what it is, why, the purpose of the text, the author in that story as to what does it have to do with our lives as readers and also they are able to add their vocabulary because they are going to encounter new words in the text'*

From these responses, it is clear that learners must be able to read the story and distinguish what is important and what is not from the text. In the literature, authors such as NAEYC (1998), Block, Gambrel and Pressley (2002), Armbruster and Osborn (2003), and Harvey and Goudvis (2007) state that if readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading.

My understanding is that the aim of reading is to read the words on the pages, to understand them and to be able to make meaning of the sentences in the text, as well as to comprehend the meaning of the whole text and apply and relate the information when needed. Harvey and Goudvis (2007:13) concur, arguing that “if the purpose of reading is anything other than understanding, why read at all?”

In essence, having a clear purpose for reading in mind keeps the reader engaged (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001). However, from my classroom observation checklist, I did not find the teachers explaining the purpose of reading the text in Tshivenda, teaching learners how to apply the content in other situations and how to answer questions appropriately.

The teachers indicated that teaching reading comprehension was important so that the learners could gain deeper knowledge about the written words. This idea emerged in Theme 1, category 1.4. The following comments from teacher 2 from school A and teacher 5 from school C were noteworthy in this regard:

IT/T2-SCH A, Q2: *‘Grade 3 learners should be able to read on their own in order to find meaning of the story’*

IT/T5-SCH C, Q2: *‘To help learners to analyse how the characters in the comprehension differ and how they relate to each other’*

Van der Schoot, Vasbinder, Horsley and Van Lieshout (2008) support these responses, stating that reading comprehension involves the formation of a meaning-based and coherent representation of the text that is read. So, in my understanding, meaning-making becomes the central aim of reading comprehension, and reading comprehension strategies are necessary to assist the reader to do so.

### **6.2.3 Which strategies do teachers use to teach reading comprehension?**

This sub-question revealed whether what teachers said during the interviews and focus group discussions was put into practice. While answering this research question, the teachers also used this opportunity to discuss and express their challenges and confusion that I thought should be noted and will be discussed.

The classroom observation checklist was composed of six components. The objective of the observation sessions was to determine whether what teachers said about the teaching of reading comprehension was actually taking place. I present a brief description of the components of the classroom observations checklist and key aspects that I analysed from these data sources as explained in Chapter 4. This included a supportive classroom climate, the pre-reading, during-reading and after-reading phases, modelling of strategies and teacher practice of comprehension strategies.

A strategy is “instructional mental actions during reading that improve reading comprehension,” deliberate efforts by a reader to better understand or remember what is being read (Shanahan *et al.*, 2010:11). It is critical that teachers know strategies and apply them in their classrooms. However, the participating teachers in my case study showed a lack of knowledge about teaching reading comprehension strategies during classroom observations (Appendix E). Zimmerman (1998) supports the view that teachers must be strategic and accurate in the implementation of the strategy so that it can be helpful to the learners, for example, learners should be motivated to read the text.

The following remarks from teacher 3 from school B and teachers 5 and 6 from school C were representative in this regard:

IT/T5-SCH C, Q3: *‘I do not know what to say, what to name it’ [reading comprehension strategies]*

IT/T6-SCH C, Q3: *‘I do not know because I do not use strategies, I just teach them how to read a text and answer questions’*

FG/T3-SCH B, Q3: *‘Nothing realistic, I do not have anything to say, today you start this way tomorrow you start this way’*

Ben-Ari and Kedem-Frederich (2000), McEwan (2004) and Slavin, Cheung, Groff and Lake (2008) suggest that during reading comprehension, the teacher must provide a clear explanation of the structure of the strategy to be learnt and explain why strategies are used. This implies that teaching strategies is critical for enhancing reading comprehension. In addition, Palincsar and Brown (1984), Trabasso and Bouchard (2002) and Henk *et al.*, (2000) suggest that teachers

should have knowledge of multiple strategies. In my understanding, if the participating teachers had the knowledge base, they would have taught the learners how to read with understanding.

However, the teachers of my case study showed that they did not have a theoretical knowledge of comprehension strategies. The findings of this study show that learners could not read and understand the text. Torgesen *et al.*, (2007) have pointed out that third-grade learners must be taught and supported in the correct use of reading comprehension strategies in order to constructing meaning from the text. In order to maintain and continually increase learners' ability to comprehend the text, the teaching of comprehension strategies becomes foundational.

I learned that participating teachers of the research study expressed different views when asked about which strategies they used in teaching reading comprehension during the individual interviews and focus group interviews. Learners should learn to use these strategies before, during and after reading the text in order to self-regulate their own learning (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Pintrich, 1995; Zimmerman, 1998; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Carter, 2000, Puustinen & Pulkkinen, 2001). Pre-reading activities are essential to prevent learners from "barking at print" (Wessels, 2010). This implies that teachers must teach learners the importance of pre-reading activities and their use for enhancing reading comprehension.

During the classroom observations, the teachers asked learners during the pre-reading phase to predict what would happen in the story. In all three schools, the teachers asked learners to preview the text and talk amongst themselves, make predictions (Theme 2, category 5, 4.3). However, the most commonly used strategy was to discuss the illustrations. Talking about illustrations is important because it can create the desire to read a book (Wessels, 2010). What I did not observe was teachers linking the predictions made during the pre-reading phase with the content (Appendix E, component 3).

During the interviews and focus group interviews in all three schools, it was apparent that during the pre-reading phase teachers asked learners to preview the text, talk amongst themselves and make predictions. However, during my

classroom observations I did not find any evidence of teachers telling learners why they should preview the text before they started with the actual reading of the text.

Teachers from schools A, B and C highlighted the aspect of previewing during the teachers' individual interviews and focus group interviews.

FG/T1-SCH A, Q3: *'Time is offered to children to can guess what will happen in the story'*

FG/T5-SCH C, Q 3: *'They can predict what will happen']*

IT/T4-SCH B, Q 3: *'Learners predict what will happen in the story'*

### **6.2.3.1 Guided reading phase**

The guided reading phase was not evident during my classroom observations. The term 'guided' implies a structure that is first modelled to the learners by the teacher, then practised with learners and eventually demonstrated by the learners themselves (Flynt & Cooter, 2005).

Even though not all learners were given a chance to read individually, there were few who were asked by the teacher during the reading lesson to read individually. In most cases, it was only the ones who could read and not the struggling readers that were asked.

There may be reasons for this as the teacher was well aware that most learners in the class could not read and understand the text. Another reason might be my presence as an observer. During the interviews and focus group interviews, the teachers said that learners could not read and understand the text. Teachers 1 and 5 from schools A and C had this to say:

IT/T1-SCH A, Q1: *'Children cannot read and write'*

FG/T5-SCH C, Q3: *'There are many challenges especially those children who cannot read and understand'*

One may conclude that the teachers of my case study were aware of the learners who could not read. The literature confirmed that primary grade teachers are failing to teach learners the strategies for becoming proficient readers (Harvey & Goudvis,

2007; NRS, 2008; Shanahan, 2006). This implies that reading comprehension is a complex task and that it is necessary that teachers should be supported to make it happen in the classrooms. In addition, Ivy and Fisher (2007:9) support this view when they state that educators are flooding the professional learning community with requests for strategies that work to improve the teaching of reading comprehension.

### 6.2.3.2 Questions

Asking questions to the learners or learners asking questions is an important strategy for teaching reading comprehension (Parker & Hurry, 2007). During the classroom observations, questions were asked frequently as indicated by the teachers below. They preferred to ask learners questions, but the learners struggled to give the correct answers because they could not read and understand the text. The following responses from teachers from schools A, B and C illustrate the point:

FG/T1-6-SCH A, Q3: *'Questioning is very critical at all times'*

FG/T4-SCH B, Q3: *'Yes, I agree we must ask questions'*

FG/T5-SCH C, Q3: *'Questioning is important, we use it'*

IT/T 1-6-SCH A, B, C, Q3: *'I ask them questions'*

From these responses it is clear that these teachers preferred to ask learners questions. However, most of the questions were at a literal level, possibly because most of the learners could not read and understand the written words in Tshivenda. A very challenging situation to both teachers and the learners was that during a test, teachers would read the questions for the learners because they could not read the questions.

Cummings, Steward and Block (2005), Reutzel, Smith and Fawson (2005), and Paris and Paris (2007) support the view that teachers should teach learners various reading comprehension strategies and their use for understanding the text. In addition, McNeil, 1992, Miller (2002), Reynolds and Brown (2001), and Goetz (1990) strongly suggest the use of strategy as beneficial for reading comprehension. Williams (2005:6) says the following about the importance of teaching comprehension strategies:

*A rationale for teaching comprehension strategies is that readers derive more meaning from text when they engage in intentional thinking. That is when people run into difficulties in understanding what they have read; the application of specific strategic cognitive processes will improve their comprehension.*

I selected this statement to remind the reader about the importance of teaching comprehension strategies. Most of the literature confirms that the teaching of reading comprehension strategies is important for enhancing reading comprehension in learners. The participating teachers of my case study said that they were not aware of comprehension strategies, that they regarded teaching comprehension as a challenge and that they were frustrated because they had learners who could not read and understand texts. One may conclude that this could cause frustration and stress amongst teachers.

In her study on reading comprehension, during classroom observation, Durkin (1979) found that teachers did not teach learners comprehension strategies and their application but they concentrated more on asking learners questions instead of teaching learners on how to comprehend a text. One might say this may be due to the lack of knowledge about the use of reading comprehension strategies by the teachers. What I noticed was that because of the lack of understanding, learners failed to answer higher-order questions, even though the teachers asked questions at various cognitive levels. The reason may be that learners could not read and understand the text. Surprisingly, there was no evidence of questioning from schools A, B and C. The teachers did not ask learners to generate questions about the text themselves (Appendix E, classroom observation checklist, component 3). The 51 interviews conducted by Parker and Hurry (2007) confirmed their findings during classroom observations, namely that only three passages mentioned strategies to encourage learners to generate questions.

### **6.2.3.3 'Fix-up' strategies**

'Fix-up' strategies are strategies that learners should use to monitor their comprehension and when the text does not make sense, learners use them (Lehr & Osborn, 2003). These are identifying where in the text the difficulties occur, looking

back through the text, asking oneself, reminding learners to make use of their knowledge of the text structure.

I did not find any evidence that the teachers encouraged learners to use ‘fix-up’ strategies. Keene and Zimmerman (1997), the NCS(2002), Palincsar and Brown (1984), Oczkus (2004), and Hedin and Conderman (2010) argue that ‘fix-up’ strategies are important because they assist learners to pay attention to whether they understand what they are reading, and when they do not. If they do not, to reread and use of strategies will help learners to understand what they have read (Shanahan *et al.*, 2010:12). This implies that ‘fix-up’ strategies may enhance reading comprehension for the learners.

During the classroom observation there was little or no evidence that the teachers encouraged learners to use the strategies of self-monitoring, self-pacing and self-directing to decode words at various points during the process of acquisition (Appendix E, classroom observation checklist, component 2, 3, 4).

During the interviews and focus group interviews, the respondents indicated that during reading they preferred to start the reading comprehension lesson by asking learners to learn the difficult words.

FG/T3-SCH B, Q3: *‘I can start by explaining difficult words’*

IT/T1-SCH A, Q3: *‘Learners underline the new difficult words’*

The literature agrees that teaching learners the meaning of difficult words is an important reading comprehension strategy because by the time learners read the text, they already know the words (Armbruster & Osborn, 2003). In the same vein, researchers in the area of reading strategies, such as Yuill and Oakhill (1991), Van der Schoot *et al.*, (2008), and Cain, Oakhill and Bryant (2004), found that decoding skills predict the ability of reading comprehension in children. Pressley (2000) strongly agrees that understanding of a text presupposes knowledge of the meaning of most of the words appearing in it.

The importance of teaching learners comprehension strategies is critical for enhancing reading comprehension. The NCS (2002:35) in Learning Outcome 3

emphasises that Grade 3 learners “should be able to read text alone, and use a variety of strategies to make meaning.” This implies that strategies are important to help learners to read the text alone and with understanding. In the same vein, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1998) and NRP (2000) indicate that the 9-year-old child (Grade 3 learners) should be able to use a range of comprehension strategies when drawing meaning from text, make critical connections between texts and read fluently and enjoy reading. In addition, the NAEYC suggested that the aspect of reading the text with understanding should be integrated across the curriculum.

#### **6.2.3.4 Modelling the correct use of this strategy**

During classroom observations, I did not find any evidence that the teachers were modelling the correct use of this strategy. According to Wilhelm (2001), Duffy (2002) and Miller (2002), the importance of modelling strategies during comprehension is that learners get opportunities to learn and to see how strategies should be incorporated by watching expert comprehenders physically modelling the strategies. It is therefore necessary that teachers be competent, since they are required to model and practice a given strategy and to give learners an opportunity to apply the strategy on their own (Sweet & Snow, 2002; Pressley, 2002; Texas Education Agency, 2002). In the same vein, Piaget (1978) emphasised the guidance of more knowledgeable others as important to the learners to enhance reading comprehension, since they learn from teachers or peers (see Chapter 3 on reading comprehension, developmental learning theories and conceptual frameworks, as well as section 3:3.1).

With regard to the after-reading phase of the text, in all three schools the teachers asked learners to read aloud and to retell what they had read. Sometimes the teachers reminded learners to concentrate on major events or to summarise.

However, I did not find any evidence of teachers’ asking learners to read sections of the text fluently that substantiated answers to questions they had made based on prior knowledge and to confirm or disprove predictions they had made based on prior knowledge. The absence of this may be owing to the lack of teachers’ theoretical knowledge of the use of reading comprehension strategies and the

importance of prior knowledge for reading comprehension. This resulted in learners' inability to become what Zimmerman (1998) refers to as "masters of their own learning."

As an interpretivist, I conclude that the absence of these aspects may be due to the teachers' lack of knowledge about the importance of reading comprehension strategies, as they indicated during the interviews and focus group interviews. This insight is related to Ausubel's theory (1963), as discussed in Chapter 3, because the learner should connect the known information to new information in order to understand the text. The role of the teacher is to continuously throughout the lesson, remind learners to confirm or disapprove predictions made during the pre-reading phase and based on their prior knowledge.

With regard to modelling strategies, the data revealed limited evidence of teacher modelling strategies (Appendix E, classroom observation checklist, component 1-6), for example, when asked which strategies they use in teaching reading comprehension during interviews, teacher 5 from confirmed that she did not know what to say, what to name it [reading comprehension strategies] (Chapter 5 Theme 3, category 5.4.2.3 and 5.4.3.1).

This may be a contributing factor to the low level of reading comprehension among the learners. Wessels (2010), NRP (2000), Shanahan *et al.* (2010), and Keen and Zimmerman (1997) emphasise that it is important for teachers to model good behaviour of reading and most importantly to model the strategies before reading. This is to ensure that learners could use strategies during their independent reading and when they experience problems, such as talking about the illustrations and the heading when previewing the text.

Across all instruments, only one teacher, teacher 5 from school C, indicated what she did before the start of reading comprehension:

IT/T5-SCH C, Q 3: *'I explain to the learners what to do like what must be done, why the strategy helps and demonstrate how they can apply the strategy independently'*

From my findings, the participating teachers did not seem to be aware of comprehension strategies, because they did not explain the strategy and their use in comprehending the text to the learners. Vygotsky's (1968) theory is relevant because for the learners to become independent readers who can read and understand the text. Learners should be assisted and guided by a role model, which in this context is the teacher. There was no evidence of teachers' encouraging learners to talk and use strategies. There was no evidence at all of teachers modelling during the teaching of comprehension strategies (Appendix E, classroom observation checklist component 5).

Reasons for the absence of modelling may be teachers' lack of theoretical knowledge about the concept of teaching learners' comprehension strategies as well as not being given opportunities to observe an expert teaching reading comprehension in Tshivenda. Parker and Hurry (2007) argue that teachers must be aware that teaching learners strategies is an important tool for improving reading comprehension. This implies that teachers must not turn the reading comprehension lesson into a show where learners sit and watch them modelling the strategies. Strategies need to be taught and practised by the learners in the actual time allocated for reading the text. In their study on the effects of teaching reading comprehension strategies used, Parker and Hurry (2007) found that learners who were trained to use strategies became more proficient than those who were not trained.

The literature reveals that comprehension strategies should be taught and learnt (Van den Broek & Kramer, 2000; Farrel, 2001; NRP, 2000; Durkin, 1993; Myers, 2005). Therefore, the responsibility falls on the shoulder of teachers (Shanahan, 2006). The teaching of reading comprehension was indeed a challenge, as expressed by the teachers during the focus group interviews (Chapter 5, Theme 3, category, 5.4.3.1). Blachowicz and Ogle (2001), Armbruster and Lehr (2001), Fountas and Pinnell (2001), Mooney (1999), Pressley (2001), and Harvey and Goudvis (2000) agree that in order to prevent reading comprehension difficulties, teachers should teach learners reading comprehension strategies. Consequently, teachers will develop a positive attitude towards their work and learners will read the words and understand what they are reading.

The findings of this study revealed that the participating teachers lacked knowledge of the concept of self-regulated learning as described by Zimmerman (1998) in Chapter 3 and exhibited in my conceptual framework. None of the six teachers who participated in the study indicated any process or plans for supporting the learners, for example, they did not indicate if they planned the reading comprehension lesson as well as how they taught learners reading comprehension strategies. They did not indicate any skill they taught the learners that would enable them to control their own learning. They did not seem to realise that learners could self-regulate their learning through acquiring specific strategies.

Self-regulated learning could assist to decrease teachers' negative attitude as this might lead to better learning and improve the performance of the learners. This idea relates to Zimmerman's (1998) idea that self-regulated learning assists learners to become "the source of plans, intentions, strategies and the emotions that are necessary to create meaning from the written text." In addition, Ausubel's (1963) theory of active learning is important, because in reading comprehension learners should be actively involved in their own learning.

In the context of the study, the knowledge of Zimmerman's applied social cognitive model of self-regulated learning is important to account for the low level of reading comprehension amongst the learners of this research study. The model suggests that during reading comprehension, learners must be actively involved in their own learning. Therefore, it is important that teachers should put them into practice in their teaching of reading comprehension. According to Zimmerman (1998), as learners became capable of choosing and using the strategies, teachers may gradually hand over the responsibility to the learners.

However, even though the teachers in my case study acknowledged that learners could not read and understand the text, they appeared to be unaware of reading comprehension strategies. What is critical in the context of the study is teachers' expertise and best practice. Best practice should be adapted from countries that are doing well, as explained in the literature review (Chapter 2 sections 2.2, 2.5.1-2.5.4.4 and Chapter 3 sections 3.3.6). Teachers should be encouraged to conduct research and to study related literature to gain a deeper understanding of the

subject of teaching reading comprehension (Ivy & Fisher, 2005; Shanahan, 2006; Shanahan *et al.*, 2010).

During the interviews and focus group interviews, the teachers complained about little time given for teaching reading as indicated in the policy document *Teaching Reading in Early Grades* (DoE, 2008). It was apparent from the responses that more time was needed for reading comprehension for learners to be able to answer questions on the text. Participating teacher 6 from school C made the following remark:

FG/T6-SCH C, Q3: *'Reading comprehension has many things, we need more time for reading comprehension but one hour is needed specifically for reading comprehension because reading comprehension has many aspects. They must read and understand so that they can answer the questions ...you see it takes time'*

From this and similar responses, the teachers indicated that time for reading should be increased since reading comprehension was a challenge to them. This shows that they were concerned and worried about those learners who could not read and understand the text. In addition, this confirms the findings of Moyles, Hargreaves, Merry, Pell and Esarte-Sarries (2007) that teachers are acutely aware of time pressures to meet objectives within the literacy hour. They say that when such teachers are under pressure they tend to use a more directive form of teaching with less emphasis on active learning, which in turn influences the teaching of reading comprehension negatively.

Participating teachers agreed that learners could not read and understand the text. During interviews and focus group interviews, they also highlighted their challenges, concerns and frustrations. The remarks by teachers 2, 3, 5 and 6 from school A, B and C were critical:

- IT/T2-SCH A, Q3): *'I am confused about comprehension and how to teach it'*
- FG/T3-SCH B, Q3: *'... because these kids who cannot read they really stress us, eh, we get stressed'*
- FG/T5-SCH C, Q3: *'You will find educators developing a negative attitude towards that young boy or girl'*
- FG/T6-SCH C, Q3: *'Like you heard from the beginning teaching reading comprehension is frustrating, to have learners who cannot read'*

From these and similar responses, it became clear that the lack of theoretical knowledge and practice seems to result in teachers' developing a negative attitude towards their learners. The fact that teachers are aware that there were learners in their classrooms who could not read and understand the text created stress and frustrations. This was indicated during the focus group interviews, and my findings from the classroom observations confirmed this (Appendix E, classroom observations checklist, component 5). The NRS (2008) confirmed that South African teachers are failing to teach reading [reading comprehension].

#### **6.2.4 What strategies can teachers use to improve reading comprehension?**

In all three schools, I failed to find evidence about the teachers' teaching or discussions of strategies with the learners. They do not seem to be aware of the strategies. These teachers did not plan the reading comprehension lesson. In essence, it was not clear if they knew what they should do when planning reading comprehension and their roles in teaching learners to read the text with understanding.

The conceptual framework (figure 3.1) shows teachers the steps they can use in order to improve the teaching of reading comprehension (see chapter 3:3.5). From the conceptual framework, self-regulated learners are meta-cognitively, motivational and actively involved in their own reading comprehension lessons. However, if teachers lack confidence in performing their job in school, then learners will not be able to self-direct and self-monitor their own reading. It is a matter of urgency to equip them with skills and knowledge to enable them to do their job well. As

depicted from the conceptual framework teachers must be aware of the reading comprehension challenge, plan strategically the reading comprehension lessons, teach reading comprehension strategies, be able to self-monitor, self-evaluate their own teaching and judge themselves if they have the capabilities to teach or not. Where there are gaps they should seek for assistance before they start again from phase 1.

It takes time for them to gain considerable experience and to establish their own image among colleagues in school before they could feel confident enough to teach reading comprehension in schools. Knowing reading comprehension strategies is not sufficient; what is important is to know how and when to use the particular strategies to assist learners to construct meaning from the written text. It may be a good idea to implement the strategies in stages, starting with explanation, modelling and application of the strategies. Lessons need to be learned from successful countries.

The NCS (DoE, 2002) Learning Outcomes 3: “Reading and viewing, stipulates that Grade 3 learners must be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values of the text.” This is done through the assessment standards. In addition, how could the teacher experiences and the intervention strategies inform their understanding of the teaching of reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking learners? What do the findings mean in terms of the expectations required in teaching reading comprehension? How best can teachers develop and sustain self-regulated learners in their classrooms? How can teachers draw from theory of what works and share these experiences among themselves? It is therefore important for the teachers as shown in conceptual framework to understand that the process of teaching reading comprehension is a cyclic process.

According to Zimmerman (1989; 1998), self-regulated learning requires the interaction between teachers and learners. During reading comprehension teachers must teach learners to be strategic also and be aware of their learning outcomes and their use of comprehension strategies to understand the text.

### **6.3 Possible suggestions resulting from the findings**

#### **6.3.1 The extent to which policies address the teaching of reading comprehension**

During the interviews and focus group discussions, the participating teachers complained about issues such as the lack of teachers' guides for teaching reading comprehension in the Tshivenda language. Heugh (2005) supports the idea that the DoE should provide the teaching guides in Tshivenda when stating that while a teachers' handbook for teaching reading in English has been developed and widely distributed across South African schools, the DoE has still not published a single handbook for teaching reading in any other African language. The absence of Tshivenda guidelines for the teachers may be a contributory factor to the low level of teaching reading comprehension in schools.

The participating teachers of my case study may not understand the content of the guidelines as it is written in English which is not their home language of the teachers. Having to read the guidelines that are written in English may create problems. It is therefore imperative that the DoE provide guidelines of teaching reading comprehension in Tshivenda.

All six teachers from schools A, B and C confirmed that the guidelines for teaching reading in early grades had been provided, but only in English. They indicated that there was a need to develop a textbook of teaching reading comprehension in African languages and especially in Tshivenda, since teachers currently had to rely on the English version. The Limpopo department of education should provide Tshivenda teachers handbook for teaching reading comprehension.

#### **6.3.2 Lack of trained teachers to teach reading comprehension**

Teacher training has a strong influence on practice (NRP, 2000; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen *et al.*, 2007). Teachers are the key role players in teaching learners to read and comprehend the text because they spent most of their time with the learners. When any components have to be taught to learners, teacher training is essential, as teachers are the implementers of a curriculum.

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions teachers indicated that teaching reading comprehension was a challenge and that they needed more information to teach learners to read and understand. Teacher training should focus more the aspects of reading comprehension and strengthen their content focus in the literacy module in order to involve the teaching of reading comprehension so that students' teachers should have benefitted by the time they complete their programme. Long and Zimmerman (2008) confirmed this, when they say "South Africa is still behind in introducing appropriate reading skills and [*comprehension*] strategies in different grades when compared with other countries." According to the NCS (2002), learners must be taught various strategies that help them to read with understanding and unlock the code of written text. Interactive self-regulatory learning is best for achieving the good results that we all hope for and for avoiding the mistakes of the past.

### **6.3.3 Unavailability of books and readers**

The NRP (2000), Torgesen *et al.*, (2007), Fleisch (2008), and Fawson and Reutzel (2000) attach great importance to the availability of a variety of readers for the learners. My research findings revealed that there were not enough readers in schools. The teachers taught reading from a chalkboard and few readers were available in the classes.

According to the NCS (DoE, 2002) and FFLC (DoE, 2008), the most important task of the Foundation Phase teacher is to ensure that all learners learn to read and understand the text. The lack of a variety of reading texts and readers may be a contributory factor in low reading comprehension.

Teachers 1 and 2 of school A indicated during the interviews that they did not have enough readers for the learners and that they relied on a photocopier. There is a great difference between what happens on the ground and what the literature says, for example, in Learning Outcome 3: reading and viewing, one of the assessment standards expresses that learners should be able to read a wide variety of fairly complex texts such as fiction and non-fiction books (NCS, 2002). Some schools do not have readers for the learners, for example, School A. This may be a cause of confusion amongst the teachers. While the curriculum emphasises teaching reading

comprehension, there are still schools with no readers for the learners. The DoE still does not provide books and readers for the learners (Heugh, 2005).

During my classroom observations there were few readers for the learners. In School A there were no readers for the learners at all as the teachers rely on the photocopier machine to produce reading materials. The absence of readers forced the teachers to use the workbooks as readers. The workbook cannot replace the reader because it is for the learners and cannot be used as a reader (Durkin, 1979). This situation may discourage the teachers, causing them to feel demotivated and consequently give less time to reading comprehension. The teachers have no access to readers. There was no evidence of graded level books to use during guided reading. The literature states that a lack of readers can discourage teachers to teach (Fawson & Reutzel, 2009; Guastelle & Lenz, 2005). This was not the case in the schools of my case study, for example, school A did not have readers for the learners yet the teacher continued teaching. On the other hand, learners may develop a low morale about reading because there is no variety of books available to encourage them to read; learners may not develop a love for reading and their reading vocabulary may not develop. Most importantly, this situation could hamper the development of comprehension among learners. This situation may fail to support both teachers and learners and ultimately learners would not reach their full potential.

According to the NRS (DoE, 2008) and Carter (2000), shared reading is a practice that should be carried out in the classroom, and this teaching method requires a learner to have a book (Joubert *et al.*, 2008). During this session, the learners join in reading where they feel comfortable to do so. Teachers must organise a shared reading session with the learners. None of the teachers did shared reading. The experience of shared reading is lacking for these learners due to the lack of books.

The DoE noticed the problem of lack of books in schools. In 2008, the DoE stated that there were classes without books and that it was rare to find books in well-used general libraries. In addition, books written in African languages are scarce so learners do not have the opportunity to read in their home language. Bruner (1986) believes that schooling is responsible for the growth of the mind and this can be enhanced by exposing learners to books and therefore influence the reading

comprehension of the learners. It is important that teachers should be encouraged to write books for Tshivenda-speaking learners.

#### **6.3.4 Contradiction between theory and practice of teaching reading comprehension**

During the individual interviews and focus group discussions, the teachers indicated that they understood reading comprehension and they regarded it as important to the learners in schools and in their daily lives. The classroom observations, however, indicate that the teachers were not clear about how to teach reading comprehension and which strategies to use when teaching. According to the data from all the instruments, the teachers hardly indicated any strategy, for example, teacher 3 from School B said that she told learners to make a summary. This is an indication that participating teachers of my case study seem not aware that reading comprehension strategies must be taught for the learners to understand the text. The language they were using was teacher-centred and not learner-centred. Nowhere did the teachers indicate that they (teachers) first explained the purpose of reading, the strategy and how to use it.

In their classroom observations Pressley (1998) and Kin (2006) confirmed that while teachers provided learners with opportunity to practise, but if learners had not been taught, neither the strategies nor the utility value of applying them could be achieved. As a result, many learners do not know how to use reading comprehension strategies.

During the individual teacher interview, only teacher 5 stated that she first explained the strategy before the reading comprehension lessons were mentioned. Even though she said that, she did not teach strategies during classroom observations. As an interpretivist, I concluded that the teachers did not know how to teach reading comprehension. This finding is related to the literature (NRS, 2008; Myers, 2005; Taylor, Clarke & Walpole, 2000) which confirmed that primary teachers do not know how to teach reading (reading comprehension).

During my classroom observations, the teaching of strategies was not evident. In addition, Durkin (1981:515-544) revealed that during the time of her classroom

observation, “there was rarely much in the way of modelling, guided practice, or substantive feedback suggested in their classrooms.”

The general picture is that these teachers were not comfortable during the individual interviews and focus group interviews to answer the question on how they taught reading comprehension. The teachers revealed a lack of knowledge about reading comprehension strategies. Teachers said that they need to be trained and provided with guidelines for Tshivenda learners and relevant examples to their language. The document *Teaching Reading in Early Grades* would be more appropriate if the examples were in Tshivenda. Heugh (2005) confirmed that the DoE has not yet provided any guidelines to the teachers on the teaching of reading in African languages. The teachers were also aware that they had a role to play in the classroom.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

This study employed three schools to investigate the teaching of reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking learners. The results of the case study can therefore not be generalised to include other contexts. However, I have described the case in-depth, as the aim of this study was to investigate and understand how teachers teach reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking learners for possible transferability purposes (Silverman, 2005). Therefore, this case study could be used to provide a research-based model for exemplary practices in the teaching of reading comprehension.

I have formulated recommendations about issues that need to be addressed in the light of the findings of the study. These recommendations emerged from the responses of the teachers who participated in the study, as well as my new insights gained as indicated in Table 6.1:

- Teachers should have ongoing professional development. Teacher development should become an integral part of the teaching of reading comprehension. Research showed that quality ongoing professional development has a strong impact on learners’ performance (NRP 2000; Moats, 2000; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen *et al.*, 2007).

- Teacher training institutions should develop and offer a module on the teaching of reading comprehension as part of a literacy programme or course. This module should include practical experience for students to teach reading comprehension to learners in the Foundation Phase. Such a module could assist graduate students to complete their training with the knowledge and expertise for competently teaching reading comprehension.
- Guidelines for the Tshivenda teachers are a necessity to improve the situation in Grade 3. According to the DoE, teachers should use a variety of strategies in order to meet the individual needs of learners. The teachers' theoretical, practical knowledge and their understanding of reading comprehension strategies should be improved. Participating teachers of my case study indicated that the policy documents were inadequate in assisting them to teach reading comprehension. In addition, they did not receive enough training to teach reading comprehension; therefore, more training is critical.
- Regular workshops overtime should be organised. The DoE should organise more workshops to help Tshivenda teachers to become strategic in their teaching (Zimmerman, 1997; 1998). The workshop series should focus on comprehension, scientific reading research on comprehension and the types of comprehension strategies that increase learner achievement and some theories and models for improving comprehension. An expert or an experienced teacher who has good reading results in class to model reading comprehension strategies needs follow-up and regular classroom visits.
- More time should be devoted to the teaching of reading comprehension.

Each aspect of reading comprehension should be dealt with explicitly and with caution in order to improve the situation. In their intensive research study on reading comprehension, the (NRP) recommended that “comprehension is not just something that just happens; comprehension needs to be taught” (NRP, 2000).

Literature on first language studies (Baker & Brown, 1984; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Hattie, 1992) confirms that the use of various strategies has been found to be effective in improving learners' reading comprehension. In my understanding, what is important is that teachers must have the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate reading comprehension to Tshivenda-speaking learners effectively.

- Books and graded readers: Schools must have adequate materials to support high-quality reading sessions. The DoE should make sure teachers and learners have access to a variety of material. Therefore, a variety of interesting, graded readers written at different levels in Tshivenda should be available in every school.
- In order to develop self-regulated learners, teachers should be knowledgeable about the phases of teaching reading comprehension in Tshivenda as explained in my conceptual framework. In Figure 3.1 the strategies that teachers can use to improve reading comprehension are depicted and discussed.
- Tshivenda-speaking teachers together with colleagues from institutions of high learning should develop Tshivenda guidelines for the teachers. The importance of empowering Foundation Phase teachers to develop graded readers is critical. The importance of self-efficacy is critical as explained in phase 5 of the conceptual framework.
- Teachers need foundational knowledge and skills to teach reading comprehension that goes beyond the curriculum.
- I finalised my study in 2012 and therefore studied the NCS (DoE, 2002) in-depth. The CAPS is an improvement of and replaces the RNC, Grades R-9 (NCS) of the DoE (2003). It states that learners must reach a high level of communicative competence and be able to read well by the end of Grade 3 (DBE, 2010:7-9) [with understanding]. More time should be allocated to teaching reading comprehension.

## 6.5 Ideas for further research

In the light of the above discussions, I therefore recommend the following for further research:

- Professional development is essential for teachers to develop knowledge of reading comprehension. Research has to be done on how to support teachers on the teaching of reading comprehension and indicate which strategies to use when teaching reading comprehension before, during and after reading. Teachers should know how theories should link with practice during teaching reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking classrooms and why strategies can assist learners to construct meaning

independently from the text. My argument is that ‘one size fits all’ guidelines may not be helpful to all teachers; there is a need for specific guidelines to be developed for the teachers of African languages.

- More research on the impact of reading material, time, language and workshops is critical. Teachers need in-depth, hands-on training and also guided practice for developing lessons and activities using their content material to teach strategies to Tshivenda-speaking learners. They also need to know the basis or precursors of comprehension and how reading comprehension develops. This could be achieved if grades readers in Tshivenda are developed for the teachers.
- More research is need in schools that are doing well in reading and document their use of strategies and insights to be copied to other schools.

## 6.6 Conclusion

There is a critical need for a quality reading comprehension programme to be given a higher priority in the Foundation Phase. What teachers know about professional development affects their practice in the classrooms. Learners’ ability to read the text with understanding depends on many factors. The main research question of this study is: How do teachers teach reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking learners at three primary public schools in the Vhembe district?

I acknowledge that this is a case study and as such, it is hard to draw conclusions that can be generalised. However, this study does reflect the state of teaching reading comprehension and underscores that reading comprehension is poorly taught in schools, partly because of the lack of theoretical knowledge and guidelines for the African language teachers (DoE, 2008; Fleisch, 2008; Heugh, 2008). In addition, because this is a topic under discussion globally, it can be argued that other communities facing similar difficulties can use the results of this study to their advantage. This can be achieved by examining whether the teaching of reading comprehension in those communities is caused by similar reasons, and if the causes are similar, apply the results and recommendations of this study to those situations.

This study, thus, found that the teachers who participated in this study expressed a very limited knowledge of teaching reading comprehension. This raised the question as to why the teaching of reading comprehension seems to be difficult to the teachers. I identified some obstacles to the effective teaching of reading comprehension in this research project during individual teachers' interviews, focus group discussion, and classroom observations. The intervention strategies on teaching reading comprehension outlined in the NRS (DoE, 2008), FFLC (DoE 2008) and *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades* (DoE, 2008) seem to have failed to support African-language teachers, in particular Tshivenda teachers. Teachers' understanding of the policies available also has an effect on the teaching of reading comprehension. The lack of practical examples to help Tshivenda teachers and unclear government documents contributed to the problem.

Without a clear explanation of proper guidelines and practical support, it is unlikely that teachers will improve their classroom practices. Teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of reading comprehension and when to use and how to apply it is apparent. Lack of resources is a challenge; a variety of readers or reading materials was not available for the learners, for example, during classroom observation in School A, the teachers sometimes used workbooks as a reader. A workbook is a book with exercises in it, often with spaces for learners to write answers in, to help them practice what they have learnt. Readers are books arranged in order or in groups according to difficulty. In my observations, there were not enough readers in the classes. Even where they were available, as in schools B and C, there were not enough for each learner. In addition, these teachers did not know the difference between a reader and a workbook, when to use a reader and when to use a workbook. In my opinion, a workbook is for the learners and cannot replace a reader. Teachers are supposed to spend quality time reading the readers and not the workbooks to the learners. This is a serious concern. The resources to improve the reading comprehension of learners should be made available.

This research study was my attempt to investigate the teaching of reading comprehension to Grade 3 Tshivenda-speaking learners. I hope to have contributed at least to the indigenous body of knowledge in order for Tshivenda-speaking learners to become "intelligent and informed" (Antjie Krog, 2006).