

## Transitional influences on early adolescents' reading development

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*We report on a qualitative study that explored the influence of transitional factors on the reading practices of early adolescents in their progress from primary to secondary school. It is hypothesised that the measure in which they adapt to changed psychosocial conditions after primary school not only influences their academic and social development but can also blunt the fostering of salient reading habits. As more rigorous literacy practices are required for optimal development of advanced reading skills, it is important that teachers understand the impact of transitional stressors. Secondary school is the beginning of the final instructional phase during which learners can be guided to effectively read to learn through advanced reading instruction. We explored Grade 8 learners' experiences through semi-structured interviews and found that transitioning from primary school was accompanied by qualitative changes. The findings show that the emotional, social, and physical upheavals many early adolescents experience, across the transition to secondary school, may have a negative impact on their advanced reading development. We propose key components that educators and policy makers can consider when guiding adolescents' reading practices through this critical developmental phase.*

**Keywords:** adolescent transition; literacy practices; reading development; reading skills

When the adolescent makes the transition to thinking in concepts, his remembering what he perceived and logically comprehended must disclose completely different laws than those that characterized remembering during primary school age (Vygotsky, 1998, 97).

### Introduction

For most early adolescents, the transition from primary to secondary school is often described as a turbulent experience, fraught with challenges, exposing a vulnerable learner to, *inter alia*, anxiety, distress and uncertainty (Erikson, 1968; Grolnick, Gurland, Jacob & Decourcey, 2002; San Antonio, 2004; Vygotsky, 1998; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). The momentous changes accompanying adolescent transitions have a powerful influence on identity formation, relationship building, academic practice and socio-cultural activities, to name but a few. A developmental aspect that often wanes in the wake of these changes is the early adolescent learner's literacy practice and advanced reading development (Chall, 1996; Scheffel, Shroyer & Strongin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1998).

Since learners are assumed to have learnt to read at primary school, they are expected to read to learn at secondary school. This progress, however, hardly takes place automatically, and the consequences of inadequate reading skills are particularly distressing, since salient literacy practices at secondary school are required for optimal learning in all subjects, not only in the language class. There are many reasons why learners fail to adequately progress to more advanced reading levels. Barriers such as adverse home, community and economic environments, sensory deficits, insufficient language stimulation at home and at school, limited intellectual ability, learning disabilities, anxiety, depression and poor schooling contribute to unsuccessful reading practices. Although many studies report a decline in early adolescents' assumed linear reading development as they transition from primary school, the influence of transitions has not been studied comprehensively. Some studies report on the correlation between reading problems and emotional disorders, postulating that poor readers are almost four times as likely as other children to show signs of maladjustment in school (Irvin, 1998, 19; Scheffel *et al.*, 2003, 83; Snow, Barnes & Chandler, 1991). Others suggest

that not only are good readers often academic high achievers, but that poor readers are more prone to experiencing learning problems (Olën & Machet, 1997, 92; Snow *et al.*, 1991).

The psychosocial stressfulness of transitions during early adolescence and the declines in self-esteem and academic performance associated with these school transitions (Anderman, Austin & Johnson, 2002, 213) received “surprisingly little” (Seidman, Lambert, Allen & Aber, 2003, 167) academic attention until the past two decades. This has serious implications, since it is crucial for teachers to understand, acknowledge and accommodate the emotional, physiological and cognitive forces on their learners’ development so they can more adequately provide guidance and diminish the impact of those factors that may prevent learners from attaining the rigorous reading practices expected of school leavers, and consequently, tertiary students. Notably, Grade 8 is the start of the final phase of learners’ school career which affords the last opportunity for teachers to exert a positive influence on reading motivation. In this article we report on an investigation into the factors that influence early adolescents’ literacy practices in the transitional phase, between the last years of childhood and the emergence of puberty and adolescence, which can have a deleterious impact on their advanced literacy practices. We first focus on those aspects of adolescent development that can influence reading practices, before describing the methodology and findings of the study.

## Reading development in early adolescence

Vygotsky (1998, 21) argues that the transition to early adolescence requires the expansion of language in order for learners to acquire more rigorous intellectual attitudes and more fully understand concepts. Learners’ system of activity is determined at each specific stage both by the degree of “organic development” and by each child’s degree of mastery in the use of intellectual tools. However, an impasse is reached if the very activities that will enhance the acquisition of these skills undergo a decline in the early adolescent phase. Research has shown that the enthusiasm and motivation that characterise children’s early reading experiences decrease as they progress from primary to secondary school. Different terms are used to describe this decline: Reynolds (1996) refers to the assumed reading decline as “book-dropping”; Ivey and Broaddus (2001, 350-355) describe “a growing resistance toward reading” and state that early adolescents become “apathetic, reluctant readers” characterized by negative attitudes and reading resistance; Anderson (1994, 180) laments that children at secondary school age are “apathetic readers”; Chall (1996, 6) asks: “Why don’t the significant gains in reading achievement found for primary grade children continue in the intermediate and upper grades? And in high school?” (1996, 5). Olën and Machet (1997, 89) deplore the fact that South African reading programmes provide far too little opportunity for learners to read for pleasure, resulting in the apathetic reading habits displayed by early adolescents. Most alarming is the fact that this reading decline occurs before the crucial final phase in the school career of learners.

The revised South African National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education (DoE), 2002, 10) states that learners should be encouraged and supported “to do wide reading”. Policy, however, only dictates that reading be taught until learners are perceived to have mastered basic skills, allowing teachers of adolescents to rest on the assumption that the teaching of reading was completed at primary school. Secondary school learners, however, are assigned increasingly complex texts to read, but their teachers do not guide them to do this effectively. Furthermore, while learners are expected to be able to read a wide range of materials, class reading is limited to a few selected textbooks and works of fiction. Although policy expects learners to read critically, most literary study at secondary school is contextual. There is theoretically a greater emphasis on learners as individuals, yet teachers do not differentiate their instruction to address learner needs individually. If the goal is to create skilful, versatile, engaged readers, it is little wonder that reading education at secondary school “may be missing the mark” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, 350).

Academic developments that need to have taken place before learners’ transition to secondary school include an expansion of background or a general knowledge of a more sophisticated nature

together with greater cognitive maturity, deepening conceptualisation, changes in reading attitudes and strategies and a growing intrinsic motivation. This should foster a refinement of reading skills to accommodate these developments and to access more advanced texts (Covington & Dray, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).

The greater abstraction and the linguistic, cognitive, and conceptual requirements of more advanced texts make it difficult for some learners to create meaning from text and they consequently fail to develop a higher reading level. According to Chall (1996, 75), a reading “slump” easily occurs with such learners inevitably becoming reluctant or disengaged readers. Ironically, this occurs at a time when children display a keen interest in the world and a penchant for collecting facts. Since adolescent learners’ desire to acquire knowledge is at a premium, learner interest should now be fed — and rewarded — by salient reading practices. However, unless a learner can bring to books knowledge, experiences and input, they may not achieve a higher academic level. This is a circular event: greater learner input is required and reading best extends the experiences for enrichment; the greater the knowledge and input, the more effective the transition and the greater the need for more advanced literacy practices.

Adolescent literacy development should consequently embrace the transition to more rigorous reading practices and, since these developments take place against the background of their own age level transitioning, various aspects of the phenomenon of transitioning need to be investigated. Narrowly defined, transitioning denotes progressing across a threshold into another phase as a consequence of the interaction of relevant forces during the previous stage. As a bridging period between two phases it is usually accompanied by some instability and uncertainty, some ebb and flow of conditions. Vygotsky (1998, 15) identifies two distinct transitional periods in the course of childhood development during which the child rejects the “old” and transitions to another phase. The first takes place around the age of three, and the second at approximately 13, which is the beginning of sexual maturation. Each transitional period in a child’s life brings additional factors into play and these inevitably cause qualitative changes in the individual psyche (Anderman *et al.*, 2002, 210; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002, 112).

Around eight years of age children often become engaged in activities that abet the acquisition of new knowledge. The enthusiasm for such endeavours, according to Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev and Miller (2003, 94), often reaches a peak at around age 11 or 12 but begins to lose energy at about age 15. Vygotsky claims that the continuous development of the child’s personality is then delayed for the time being, with “processes of dying off and closure” (1998, 192) characterising the critical period of adolescence. He argues that transitioning to this age level does not bring new interests, new aspirations or “new forms of internal life” (1998, 192). On the contrary, adolescence is characterized by the loss of interests that only a little while before guided all activities and consumed much of the individual’s time and attention. The result is a decline in “forms of external relations and internal life developed earlier” (Vygotsky, 1998, 192).

Developmentalists agree that the transitions that accompany the life change of adolescence have the potential for anxiety and distress (Covington & Dray, 2002, 39; Grolnick *et al.*, 2001, 164; San Antonio, 2004, 259). Even seemingly innocuous changes can be stressful, such as the fact that learners, because they change classes from subject to subject in secondary school, are now exposed to many different teachers and new peers. More seriously, academic achievement can suffer since there is less teacher attention to individual progress (Schunk & Pajares, 2002, 20).

## Adolescent interests

Teachers of adolescents have as little reason to expect their class to be restful and homogenous as early childhood educators, who know to accommodate the physical constraints of learners in the early grades. Secondary school teachers should also expect restiveness, brief concentration spans and divided foci. Moreover, adolescents experience fluctuations between lively physical activity and apathy, resulting in their reacting differently, not only from day to day, but in the course of a single

day, from morning to afternoon, as a result of the vacillation of hormonal changes (Irvin, 1998, 18).

The volatility and stressfulness accompanying adolescence add to its classification as a “critical transitional period” (Erikson, 1968, 16). Erikson indicates that “crisis” in developmental context does not signify impending catastrophe but a “necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshalling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation”. For Vygotsky (1998) a fundamental principle of adolescent development is a transition from “lower” psychobiological processes to “higher” conscious psychological functions. The former includes spontaneous reflexes, temperamental behaviour and impulsive, fundamental processes, whereas the “higher” conscious psychological functions are the developed, voluntary, mental functions and related personality traits. The latter is a result of “the transition from direct, innate, natural forms and methods of behaviour to mediated, artificial, mental functions that develop in the process of cultural development” (Vygotsky, 1998, 168). A major “crisis” which often presents in negativity is also caused by sexual maturation, which could result in the adolescent’s behaviour changing within a matter of weeks.

In addition to a sharply expressed negativism manifesting in areas of an adolescent’s life, with old interests dropping off sharply or taking new directions, negativity also emerges in a decreased success rate and work capacity. Following the primary school period of “normal” rates of success and work capacity, lapses in work appear. A sudden failure to do assignments, for instance, has adolescents stubbornly explaining that “I didn’t want to do it”. A flouting of discipline, especially among boys, becomes common. Verbal negativism and rebellious acts such as contempt for rules and opposition to family are common adolescent behaviour. Many girls enter a passive, apathetic and dreamy state at this stage (Vygotsky, 1998, 23).

Transitional changes manifested in decreased work capacity directly influence creative tasks. This is the result of adolescents progressing towards new, “still not firmly established forms of intellectual activity” (Vygotsky, 1998, 22). This adversely affects reading development, since creative and intellectual endeavours, more than tasks of a repetitive or mechanical nature, can only succeed if they derive from the adolescent’s creative interests, which are suppressed during this period of changing interests. Much reading, especially higher order reading, requires both intellectual and creative input to be fostered effectively and enthusiastically. Adolescent interests, therefore, cannot be understood outside the process of development, mainly because in the course of the relatively short period of five years, “such intensive and deep changes in the driving forces of behaviour take place that they absolutely clearly form a special line of development” (Vygotsky, 1998, 12). However, not all learners experience the disruptions of the period so dramatically because the processes of adolescent development are immeasurably more complex with an inestimably finer structure than can be generalised. It is, however, crucial to understand that certain adjustments take place during the transition from primary to secondary school, especially since this has significant implications for later development (Grolnick *et al.*, 2002, 165; San Antonio, 2004, 104-105; Vygotsky, 1998, 23).

## Method

A qualitative approach with in-depth interviews was selected to probe the experiences of 10 Grade 8 learners. The participants were interviewed six months after they entered secondary school, since this period allows for some distancing, yet is recent enough for experiences to be sufficiently fresh. The participants were identified as successful readers by their teachers. It was assumed that such learners would more readily appreciate the rewards contingent on reading and were therefore more suitable for the investigation than, for instance, problem readers who do not read if they can help it for reasons such as dyslexia, a “threshold fear” of books, ineffective reading skills or a lack of interest. The participants, moreover, came from homes sufficiently functional and affluent to make reading a viable option. The four schools the participants attended, as well as the primary schools nine of the 10 hailed from, had well-stocked school libraries that, although they were not open every

afternoon or during breaks, made easy access to books possible. The respondents came from homes in which learning for its own sake was highly valued. Five of the participants indicated that they belonged to a community library and had been able to freely select books from early childhood. The fact that the availability of books was not a problem for the participants, either in their homes, schools or community, made these learners' book experiences the exception rather than the rule. The population from which this highly selected sample of learners was drawn is therefore hardly representative of the vast majority of adolescent readers in South Africa. This is, however, the ideal sample, since only effective readers with ready access to books would be susceptible to the charms of a solitary activity such as independent reading.

A retrospective methodology allows the significance of earlier experiences to be weighed against present practices. However, although reflection successfully formed the basis of the interviews, it also has limitations, since early adolescents — as most other people — can colour a past event affectively and recalled experiences, therefore, may be less than “true”. Adolescence is an emotionally changeable stage and the power of selective memory is ever-present. To authenticate data and guarantee descriptive validity, thick description was used. In qualitative investigations dependability remains uncertain and there is often the temptation that researchers, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000,120), detect and report only “the loudest bangs or the brightest lights”. However, this qualitative approach was selected for its “fidelity to real life, context and situation specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, 120).

The participants ranged in age from 13 years to 14 years, three months and they attended four secondary schools in a single urban district in Tshwane, Gauteng. Since the participants were under-aged, informed consent was obtained from their parents prior to their involvement in the study after permission was granted by the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct interviews with learners. To protect the respondents' identity, they were given nom-de-plumes which revealed their gender and were called Arthur, David, Dwayne, Iris, Mary, Nina, Simpiwe, Richard, Therese and Zelda. The hour-long, recorded interviews were conducted at venues convenient to the learners — which were either in their homes (for instance, Zelda, who termed herself a “latchkey kid”) or an empty classroom (for instance, Simpiwe, who routinely waited after school for his parents to pick him up.)

The first set of questions probed the respondents' experiences as they progressed from primary to secondary school. A further set of questions about class reading, prescribed books and personal interests served as a link between the domains of literature and independent reading practices. A final set of questions explored the manifestation of transitional and motivational factors, with some probes of the “adolescent” nature of their experiences. Although respondents were asked to describe their own reading experiences, their teachers' management of literacy practices and interpretation of policy were inevitably also reflected in the responses.

Data analysis consisted of a reflective interpretive procedure during which the transcriptions were combed for revelatory responses. A theme-based analysis of the coded transcriptions made possible a classification of categories within the data. Logical chains of evidence were compared to the thick descriptions of each respondent to contextualise the themes and enrich the data, in addition to serving as a validity check. The analytic process produced a matrix to facilitate the uncovering of rich layers of meaning in the respondents' descriptions of their experiences and views. Meaningful segments were factorised into major themes to attain conceptual/theoretical coherence and create authentic constructs with which to understand and explain the research problem.

## Findings

A new school with new challenges, peers, teachers, subjects and activities, understandably makes this transition a time of great vulnerability during which self-concepts can be either bolstered or weakened. The participants' experiences confirmed that their transitioning was accompanied by

qualitative changes, some greater than others. The combination of the psychosocial, academic and physiological changes influenced the participants' advanced literacy development and independent reading experiences to a greater or lesser degree. The first set of findings focuses on the transitional influences of the learners' literacy experiences and the final set of findings reflects on the participants' advanced reading development after the transition and on their language teachers' classroom practices.

## Changing interests and reading

According to Vygotsky, the development and manifestation of interests lie at "the base of all cultural and mental development of the adolescent" (1998, 12). Many changes in the participants' interests were reported, together with some "decline in school progress, a weakening of formerly established habits", particularly of "productive work of a creative nature", as predicted by Vygotsky. A new peer group, changed circumstances, a greater workload and more options regarding extramural activities were some reasons given by the participants for their changing interests.

Despite a heavier workload, eight participants reported that they only read marginally fewer books since entering secondary school. These learners reported changes in reading interests and a shift from fiction to non-fiction in many cases, but the purported widespread reading decline was not evident. Independent reading, in their case, was clearly abetted by well-developed individual interests. In contrast, Mary, a newly "reluctant reader", reported that she had stopped reading recreationally but explained that her home situation made independent reading difficult. Nina explained that she felt swamped by the increased workload at secondary school and extramural demands and had stopped reading for pleasure. Nina is the kind of reader who can and should be encouraged by secondary school teachers and reading promotion strategies because her reading had hitherto always been linked to teacher support. This, however, did not happen at her school. Nina mentioned that she did not feel intellectually challenged by secondary school classes, describing (in spite of being an acquiescent girl) some teachers as "boring" and the pace in the maths class "terribly slow". She enjoyed the Afrikaans class more than the English because learners "talked about the books" a great deal, discussing the characters' appearance or motivating the protagonists' behaviour. The English class was less satisfactory because reading was only done as homework with the completion of work cards the only follow-up activity. Although the latter is common practice, researchers (Chall, 1996; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004) regard work charts as an ultimately harmful practice, especially since it usually constitutes the only after-reading activity.

The participants described their primary school language classes also far more positively and especially valued their classroom libraries and the fact that they were encouraged to peruse the books whenever they wished, whether for class or leisure reading. Despite the fact that the classroom library is one of the most successful strategies for reading promotion (Palmer, 1995), no classroom libraries were found in any of the secondary schools.

Contrary to reports of the incidence of reading reluctance after the transition, Simpiwe stated that he had only lately started reading avidly. At the end of his primary school year his teachers awarded him a book prize as encouragement for independent reading and he experienced this as highly motivating. For Simpiwe leisure reading had become something he now looked forward to during free periods and while waiting for his parents to pick him up after school. He even expressed irritation with his parents who persisted in talking to him in the car while he preferred to read. The finding that a learner could actually become an avid reader in this transitional year was significant and the importance of teacher encouragement is clear.

## Secondary school reading practices

At secondary school there was a clear discrepancy between the participants' actual reading achievement and the leanness of the cognitive demand of their prescribed texts. Nina's teacher, for instance, gave them a class reader that they had read in Grade 7, and although the learners complained, "she

said she knew we had already read the book. But we are going to read it again anyway. So". Another teacher displayed as little motivation for promoting the pleasure principle since she inflicted on her learners a class reader despite the fact that it was generally disliked by all the learners. In spite of spending three weeks on the (unfinished) book, no activities or discussions derived from it. There were also found class reading less enticing than at primary school:

*The teacher reads a little, lets us read a little, and then she explains the book for the children who don't understand ... She gives children the opportunity to read, but there are some who don't want to read. Then we others read sort of a paragraph. But the children who don't like reading sort of read just a sentence, and then, if they don't read themselves, they don't concentrate on what they are reading. So they copy what their friends have written down.*

The success of transitioning depends on various "interconnected dynamics" (San Antonio, 2004, 249) which influence not only the emotional but also the cognitive development of learners. Vygotsky emphasises that the developing intellect does not simply continue smoothly along preceding lines with previously acquired concepts that are merely enriched and internally connected with associated concepts. The adolescent's cognitive development is a qualitative change involving a new form of intellectual activity, making it almost a "new method of behaviour" (Vygotsky, 1998, 40). Evidence of this qualitative change in cognitive thinking was found in many responses. Although the participants were above-average achievers, a dichotomy was detected regarding the difficulty level of the work at secondary school. Half found the increase in cognitive demand quite challenging, the others declared that they were often bored. Arthur, a high achiever, described himself as someone who can handle a great deal of work without becoming unduly stressed, and he found the greater cognitive demand a powerful motivator. David, on the other hand, reported that he found the quantitative increase in schoolwork rather intimidating.

All participants reported a distinctive change in their relationship with their teachers after their transition to secondary school phase. Teacher involvement is a significant influence on academic development, and Wigfield and Eccles (2002, 238) link the lessening of the nurturing relationship between teacher and learner to corresponding declines in academic motivation and achievement. Their research shows that adolescents have very firm expectations of teachers, ranging from expecting democratic treatment to an ability to generate interest in their subject. Teachers' lack of affinity with their learners was mentioned by all participants in this study and Nina's experience is typical:

*Another difference is also the teachers in the primary school. The teachers in secondary school, I don't want to say they are impersonal, but in primary school, like the maths teacher, she was more like a mother, but in the secondary school, the teachers see so many children ... In the primary school all the teachers knew your name. In the secondary school only some know your name, even after five Mondays, only some know your name. So, they concentrate very much on the work. Like last year's teacher. She was very good. She explained things well. People understood things. But this year, hmmm, the teacher doesn't explain things so well.*

The fact that the participants asserted that teachers didn't know their names for many months can be attributed to subject teaching with too many learners in a grade for teachers to easily establish relationships with learners. However, teachers' lack of interest in reading promotion, the setting of "boring" assignments, uninspiring class practices or ill-chosen books are more difficult to explain.

Not only did teacher/learner relationships change across the transition, all participants reported some uncertainty and even anxiety. All had to adapt to changes in their routine, with their experiences ranging from being rather overwhelmed or acquiescent to being defiant of the new hierarchy. They reported that it was daunting to be the juniors in secondary school after being leading seniors at primary school only a few months before. Some experienced a loss of face, others adapted quickly to the new hierarchy. Although the participants indicated that they managed to adjust successfully to the changes, three girls reported that they knew of classmates who did not cope well. The finding of a new group of friends loomed large in all responses:

*The group of friends also changed, like the cool group split up. And now the one girl again plays with us and the other one plays with girls from other (primary) schools. Work became*

*much, much more, like last year we still had enough time to relax, to rest and now we only have to learn for tests ... so we have to work very hard.*

The stresses of the transition to secondary school and an increased workload with greater cognitive demand were in most cases outweighed by the adventure of a new school and an expanded circle of friends. Despite momentous changes in the biopsychosocial dimension, the “average”, self-efficacious adolescent under “average” circumstances met the transitional challenges and upheaval with cautious optimism, growing independence and feelings of excitement. The two participants who reported a waning interest in reading across the transition indicated that their earlier enthusiasm for reading used to be abetted by their primary school teachers, and that this was not the case with lack-lustre literacy practices at secondary school.

## Discussion

The respondents’ experiences confirm the views of educators and researchers (Grolnick *et al.*, 2002; San Antonio, 2004; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002) that stressors follow in the wake of transitional changes, from innocuous ones, such as the frequent changing of classes, to more critical ones, such as the encounter with new ideas or a new group of peers. The significant expansion of the respondents’ psychosocial experiences inevitably influenced their self-efficacy views, which in turn had an impact on their interests and reading practices. The transition to a more advanced reading stage requires direct teacher guidance, which was either lacking or insufficient. Literacy practices at secondary school need to be fostered by more challenging texts that embrace a multiplicity of knowledge, and assignments designed to entice and guide the adolescents to grapple with concepts and ideas. This, however, did not happen at the participants’ schools. Texts were trivial, assignments lacked challenge and teachers were simply not focused on developing the learners’ advanced reading strategies. Arthur, a particularly avid reader, for instance, indicated, if rather apologetically, that there was a dearth of reading experiences:

*We don’t really read at the moment. We’re starting in the third term. The Hound of the Baskervilles ... Sherlock Holmes. Then we only do things, we work on language, the different things like verbs, and common nouns, and things like that. I forgot some of the things. The last time I did it in Grade 6. So it’s nice to revise some of the things. (In the Afrikaans class) we also don’t actually read. I don’t know if we are going to read. Because we didn’t have to buy a book for reading. But we do a lot of written work. Lots of comprehension tests out of our textbooks. Articles and short stories and poems and things out of our textbooks that we read. Comprehension tests to see if we understand. So we read at least, but we don’t really read out of books.*

The choice of a 19th century book such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as a class reader for a boy whose greatest passions are the cybernetic world and science fiction, is not a happy one. How Arthur’s classmates who disliked reading were going to take to Conan Doyle’s book is also questionable. Arthur’s intrinsic motivation and individual interests, however, would most probably prevail and keep him reading avidly, despite such discouraging reading experiences at secondary school.

The performance goals set by the Department of Education or the school were not conducive to developing literacy practices. The six participants, who reported that they increasingly read more challenging texts, would probably continue doing so despite the lack of guidance, because feelings of competence and pride feed into the challenge of more demanding texts. The four participants who indicated indifferent literacy practices were left to their own devices with not even their language teachers providing the needed challenge, guidance and support to help them engage more actively in cognitive activities to develop advanced reading skills. One of the reasons for the neglect of independent reading at secondary school is that teachers do not appreciate the fact that they play a pivotal role in the fostering of their learners’ reading habits. The lack of teacher training specifically geared towards advanced reading instruction is responsible for much of this carelessness. The

findings show that with regard to reading education after the transition from primary school, secondary school may indeed be “missing the mark”.

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