

**THE RECREATIONAL READING HABITS  
OF ADOLESCENT READERS:  
A CASE STUDY**

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree

Magister Artium

in the subject English

of the Faculty of Humanities

at the

University of Pretoria

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October 2001

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Professor S. M. Finn, for his steadfast guidance and kind support in the preparation of this dissertation.

I wish to thank the Gauteng Provincial Department for permission to conduct a survey at schools in the Tshwane South district; the principals and teachers whose professional input and generous co-operation made the survey possible; the grade eleven learners who participated enthusiastically and offered their opinions with adolescent candour.

Responses would not have become statistics without the patient assistance of the experts from the Department of Statistics of the University of Pretoria, Arianne Neethling and Elana Mauer. I am blessed with friends and family who have been unstinting in their support; Vreda for cybernetic counsel; Peet, Marina, Laetitia and Pierre for their affectionate acquiescence. I thank you all.

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### NOTE

British spelling has been favoured over American spelling, and quotations from American sources have been adapted to the British spelling system for the sake of uniformity. In a few cases the bracketing of capital letters or lower case letters at the beginning of quotes from references have been avoided in favour of a complete sentence to facilitate reading. Certain aspects in the survey's questionnaire related to the limited perspective of the study have been discussed, but the responses of almost 700 grade eleven learners to eighteen questions and 99 variables can still disclose much about adolescents' experiences and perceptions. The questionnaires are available for perusal by any person who requests to view them and the Department of Statistics of the University of Pretoria keeps a copy of the statistical analysis of the data for a period of five years.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE IMPORTANCE OF READERSHIP

Reading was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life.

*David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens

Reading maketh a full man.

Francis Bacon

Time and again we have it confirmed that the reading child depends upon the reading adult. To put it crudely, illiterates are made by illiterates.

Aidan Chambers: *Letter from England*

All the dust the wind blew high  
Appeared like gold in the sunset sky,  
But I was one of the children told  
Some of the dust was really gold.

Robert Frost

Children are not born loving good books; neither are they born hating to read. They can be encouraged and influenced in either direction.

Sutherland & Arbuthnot, *Children and Books*, 1972

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of reading is never seriously disputed - not even by the illiterate. On the contrary, the illiterate, as well as the dyslexic, the deprived, the disenfranchised and the reading-disabled, are the very people who acutely know that to cope with the demands of life, if not to prosper, in the twenty first century, it is imperative to be able to read, and to read well. The fact that these people - and others for whom reading has held little success and less joy - find even basic civil acts or routine duties difficult to perform, is not the least of the handicaps that illiteracy carries in its wake. As Meek (1984:11) explains:

The social disadvantages - not being able to read street signs or the notices in the post office - are easy to understand. But what about the encounters with new ideas, and the ways we confront ourselves, and society, and our view of life, even when we seem to be doing nothing more sophisticated than reading a novel? We are at home in the world to the extent that we discover there are other people like ourselves, and reading is one of the most significant ways of doing this . . . Real reading cannot be done without thought. As it is a kind of 'inner speech', it is bound to have a marked effect on the growth of the mind of the reader.

That literacy is integral to living successfully in modern times, is a primary assumption. The importance of higher order reading - so-called aesthetic, recreational or extensive reading, in other words, reading above and beyond basic functional or informative reading - is remarkably often disputed. Modern critics who feel that reading is a waste of children's time that should be spent instead on actively acquiring 'real life' experiences, are in the good company of educationists and philosophers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. For instance, Coleridge, the poet and essayist, wrote disparagingly of the reading of novels and stated that nine-tenths of the reading public were "that comprehensive class characterized by the power of reconciling . . . indulgence of sloth and hatred of vacancy." These people did not read 'properly' but indulged in "beggarly day-dreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility" (1884:24).

To say that a person does not need to read extensively is - for the avid reader - tantamount to saying that one needs only cement and no bricks when building a house, or that protein is totally unnecessary in healthy diets when one eats enough carbohydrates, and yet the marginalization of recreational reading is loudly proclaimed even by some educators. The famous educationist, Jean Piaget, for example, was no great lover of books for children and neither was the naturalist philosopher, Rousseau, who actually condemned book-reading in his famous study of a perfect childhood, *Emile* (first published in 1762). Negating the role of books for children, Rousseau, for instance, said: "Men may be taught by fables; children require the naked truth" (quoted in Hunt, 1992:158). Although Rousseau's ideals were a part of a general cult of sensibility that encouraged children to follow their instincts at their own pace rather than guiding them to become acquainted with culture and learning through books and teaching, his message is proclaimed by many anti-book adherents even today.

As part of what Nell (1988:32) calls the Protestant Ethic - that made the reading of fiction for pleasure and the squandering of time and money "on the purchase of profane works" an offence - children were forbidden to read fables and fantasies in the sixteenth century. It was not until the eighteenth century that a body of literature was specifically created for children through the zeal of people like John Newbery and his chapbooks and other purveyors of fairy and adventure tales (Kinnell,1996:147). Until as late as the twentieth century, however, some critics remain judgmental in their attitudes towards children's reading. Q.D. Leavis (1932:50) refers to reading as a form of the drug habit and disapproves of children who are inordinately "addicted" to light reading. According to Nell (1988:28), a modern critic in the 1970s wrote that the reading drug may be quite as pernicious as "overindulgence in alcohol or aspirin" and warns that the most popular works of art feed the senses with illusions and indulge the cheapest emotions, which "wither and become loose and deliquescent . . . and the unaroused brain degenerates".

The case for extensive reading is not always helped by those very researchers who are vociferous in their support of extensive recreational reading. Whereas modern reading researchers unanimously deplore the marginalization of extensive reading in school, they have reached little consensus about the actual nature of recreational reading, the mechanics of the reading process



or about the methods employed to promote readership. Even if reading researchers had managed to agree sufficiently on basic issues, such as emergent literacy, for instance, their recommendations would carry little weight if they were not also endorsed by teachers, school boards, training institutions and the community in general. Such universal agreement, however, is hard to come by, since reading is never a neutral topic.

Any programme of research and development in reading must be conceived in full knowledge that reading has extraordinary consequences for individual people and for the nation. And, it must be conceived with the understanding that reading is a public concern. Citizens know reading is important (Anderson, 1994:17).

Political leaders are well aware of the fact that a country's national indices of economic development and health are closely related to its level of reading literacy (Elley, 1992:xi). Law-enforcing bodies and social workers know that in some countries adult illiterates compose 75% of the unemployed and 60% of the prison population (Blair *et al.*, 1992: 4). Governments know that a skilled work force is more valuable to a country's economy than an illiterate one. Responsible politicians prefer literate citizens who can read and analyse news stories and in-depth articles and are not swayed by television manipulation and propagandist slogans. In the most recent decades basic literacy has been promoted worldwide, but especially in developing countries. However, the acquisition of literacy is a self-defeating exercise unless the newly literate are encouraged to continue reading - and they will only do so if they find suitable reading material that is relevant, exciting and useful. This makes the need for locally published materials especially acute since experience has shown that the new literates may revert to illiteracy within a few months after completing a basic course if they do not have enough reading material that makes sense to them in the context of their everyday lives (Staiger & Casey, 1983:8).

During the past two decades, the promotion of basic literacy and the development of related industries - such as book production and distribution - have necessitated another kind of effort: the promotion of readership and the need to encourage a lifelong reading habit. Readership promotion first emerged as an issue during the International Book Year in 1972 when the

UNESCO General Conference approved the promotion of the reading habit as one of four objectives included in its long-term plan of action under the heading “Books for All”. Since then concerned countries have been endorsing book campaigns because they know that the

benefits of literacy are not only of an economic nature but also can have significant positive impact on the quality of the intellectual and spiritual life of individuals, and help all segments of the population become true participants in the development of their countries. Perhaps through these efforts governments will come to recognize that the development of the reading habit is as essential to the well being of the country as universal primary education and basic literacy programmes (Staiger & Casey, 1983:8).

It is little wonder that 2001 has been proclaimed as the Year of the Reader by the South African Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, clearly illustrating the priority given to reading by the present South African government.

Extensive readership, however, has not always enjoyed governmental sanction. In the early nineteenth century, for instance, fears of a revolutionary uprising following in the wake of literacy for the poor, took hold in England. Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (published around 1792) threatened the ruling classes and the book’s huge sales (a million and a half copies) did little to assuage these fears. “What ploughman who could read . . . would be content to whistle up one furrow and down another, from dawn in the morning, to the setting of the sun?” (Nell, 1988:16, quotes George Hadley - 1786 - on these anxieties and Paine).

Only later in the nineteenth century did fear of the literacy of the masses abate - probably in the more pragmatic and mercenary light of the Industrial Revolution - and did the conviction that literate workers were more productive than illiterates take hold (Nell, 1988:16) .

In the late Twentieth century industry required a larger pool of literate employees than ever before and this led most governments to support literacy programmes (Staiger & Casey, 1983:66). The motives of the business sector with regard to reading are hardly altruistic. In his paper, *Reading: Why Industry cares and What One Company is Doing About It*, read to the

International Reading Association's annual convention in 1981, Lauterborn (quoted by Staiger & Casey, 1983:67) of the International Paper Company presented case after case where US industries experienced significant financial losses, sometime amounting to millions of dollars through accident or damage to equipment, because their employees could not read adequately. Some of these business enterprises responded to the problem by establishing literacy courses on site at their own expense. Today, all human rights bodies (Irving's UNESCO document, 1980) aspire to make literacy a fundamental right of all peoples.

A fundamental assumption of this study, then, is the conviction that extensive reading is a cultural and educational activity of primary importance for children and adults alike. Secondly, extensive reading is not - and should not be - regarded as an elitist activity; on the contrary, the state benefits if the individual is not only literate but an active reader as well. Thirdly, because of the unique relationship between language and form while reading, the best expression of the human imagination is found in literature (in its widest sense), and reading affords the most useful means by which "we come to grips with our ideas about ourselves and what we are" (Chambers, 1985:46).

Since reading fosters personal, moral and intellectual growth, it is a principal source of inspiration, information, entertainment, and insight into ourselves and others. Such benefits, however, can only accumulate maximally if learners choose to read during their leisure time, if reading becomes a lifelong habit. Unfortunately, the perception is that recreational reading, far from being the custom for the majority of adults, is considered an elitist pastime for people who eschew outdoor activities. Experience with learners has shown that recreational reading is not a preferred activity with children; although the acquisition of literacy is regarded as a fundamental right of learners and a top priority with government and educators, the promotion of readership is neglected; the relationship between literacy and literature has not received the attention it warrants, with the resulting decline of both.

## 1.2 LITERATURE

Literacy and the reading of literature are twin vehicles for the functional, imaginative, intellectual and emotional life. By definition, literacy is the minimum competence with which this experience is made possible; literature, on the other hand, infers the optimal experience to be derived from the reading of texts. For the enthusiastic reader, then, reading is far more than a method of information retrieval or an acquired skill to aid daily living: it is one of the most rewarding aspects of life itself. In *Democracy and Other Addresses: Books and Libraries*, published in 1893, James Russel Lowell describes the value of extensive reading as follows:

Have you rightly considered what the mere ability to read means? That it is the key which admits us to the whole world of thought and fancy and imagination? To the company of saint and sage, of the wisest and wittiest moment? That it enables us to see with the keenest eyes, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voices of all times? (Quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:iv).

For many authors and critics the domain of literature is the human condition, a reflection of life with all its feelings, thoughts, and insights. Huck (1979:4), for instance, emphasizes the relationship between aesthetic and linguistic aspects, defining literature as the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language. “The graphic symbols of literature consist of language and illustrations presented in such a way that the reader is made aware of an order, a unity, a balance, or a new frame of reference.”

Literary artists are expected to regard the *aesthetic* dimension of literature as its primary justification; however, some artists endorse the view held by reading researchers who emphasize the *linguistic* aspects of literature, describing literature as a central function of language. “Not, in its origin, an artefact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story.” (Author Ursula le Guin, quoted by Hunt, 1996:3). Other artists endorse this opinion, regarding literacy as merely the handmaiden of literature. The aesthetic, spiritual and emotional dimensions of literature form the apex, all else is peripheral.

Novelist, poet and three-times Pulitzer Prize winner, Robert Penn Warren states that literature is read because it contains conflict - and conflict is at the heart of life. The lives of book characters will give the reader a clue to his own life story. Literature, he continues, “allows us to vent our emotions with tears, laughter, love, and hate, and above all releases us from life’s pressures by allowing us to escape into other people’s lives” (quoted by Trelease, 1984:34).

In his seminal work about the value of fiction in general and folk fairy tales in particular, *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim, the psychoanalyst and inveterate exponent of Freud, emphasises the psychological importance of literature and the role it plays in endowing life with meaning.

Regarding this task, nothing is more important than the impact of parents and others who take care of the child; second in importance is our cultural heritage, when transmitted to the child in the right manner. When children are young, it is literature that carries such information best (1976:4).

Dubow (1993:236) agrees that literature affords meaning in our lives and adds that reading provides pleasures that are intellectual (in that they stimulate thoughts, generate new ideas, challenge the capacity to reason and make logical deductions), emotional (because they stimulate feelings of sadness and joy, empathy and compassion, exhilaration and pity) and sensuous (in their stimulation of the senses through imagery and description).

As far as children’s literature is concerned, Tucker (1992:168) says that “fiction has always been a medium wherein the child’s here and now can be transcended, enabling the child to move into foreign worlds and different social roles.” According to Tucker, the ability to do this is what “Vygotsky saw as the ultimate difference between humans and animals, since only humans can use their brains to envisage a different way of doing things at another period of time”.

Whatever the definition, this study regards as a primary assumption the fact that the experience of literature is, if not imperative for successful living, at least highly enriching to adults and children alike. This explains why there are many educators - especially those endorsers of the

school of bibliotherapy - who emphasize the emotional, psychological and cultural value of literature for children (cf. 1.5.3). To them,

literature is a means by which children widen horizons, heighten awareness, develop the imagination, stimulate thinking, discover meanings, expand vocabulary, develop sensitivity to words, and grow in understanding of both other people and themselves. As children come in contact with the cultural heritage of the past and present through literature, they are guided to appreciate the gifts of past generations and of other peoples, and so understand better the cultural milieu in which they live (Logan & Logan, 1976:486).

Arnold, a reading researcher, states more simply that “literature is that which satisfies because it connects the passion of the inner world with the prose of events and circumstances. Or, to twist the analogy again, the ‘passion’ of ideas is shaped by the ‘prose’ of an appropriate linguistic framework” (Arnold, 1994:57).

The experience of literature should constitute the basis of school curricula. However, whereas all educators agree that functional or informative reading is a prerequisite for intellectual development, literature (used here in its widest aesthetic sense) is often still regarded as a luxury, or a peripheral pastime at modern schools. Teachers are often too busy with basic instruction to dedicate time to the “softer options” supplied by literature.

In our anxiety to teach children to read, to prepare them for living in a technological, computer oriented society, is it possible that we fail to cultivate in them an appreciation for good literature? Are the schools yielding to external pressures to emphasize reading primarily as a utilitarian tool and neglecting reading as a means of developing moral and ethical values through literary experiences? (Logan & Logan, 1976:486).

The answer to this question is, unfortunately, *yes*. Teaching is so often a race against time, if not against a curriculum that has become so outcomes-based that it hardly sees past the pragmatic, the mercenary, the obvious, the superficial. The debasing of literature is bound to have disastrous consequences on education in general, as it can no longer function in school as it should. A

devalued literature no longer is

a component of our cultural heritage, can enrich the lives of students in middle grades, can encourage critical and imaginative thinking, can educate while it entertains, can lay a foundation for literary experiences later in life. As students begin the process of deciding their own futures, experiences with literature provide young people with an opportunity to explore other worlds and other lives, those very different from their own as well as those similar to their own (Lynch-Brown, quoted by Irvin, 1998:107).

It is literature in most classrooms that has unfortunately become the handmaiden, or even worse, the slave of literacy.

### 1.3 LITERACY

Ideally, the acquisition of literacy is a means to an end, the end being the total experience of text in all its forms. It is unfortunately only too clear that many educators see literacy as an end in itself, and in many deprived communities this much is an idle dream.

There are “numerous conceptual and methodological problems in studying literacy, not the least of which is its definition” (Harris & Sipay, 1990:5). Literacy is defined in relative terms in the field of reading research. Educators who speak of *survival literacy* or *basic literacy* usually apply reading skills to everyday needs such as reading food labels, train schedules or warnings on road signs. *Functional* literacy seems to involve the reading and writing skills needed to understand and use the printed materials normally encountered in work, leisure and civic duties. As such it can also be called *occupational* or *utilitarian literacy*. There is a clear distinction between *reading achievement* - the literacy skills taught and measured in school - and *functional literacy* - the literacy skills practised outside school. *Emergent literacy* may be defined as literacy learning that occurs before the introduction of formal reading and writing instruction (Harris & Sipay, 1990:35). It occurs during the period between birth and the time when the child reads and writes in ways that adults would identify as reading and writing. According to this definition literacy is an advanced form of language acquisition.

Furthermore, there are researchers who speak of *literacies* in the plural, rather than literacy *per se*. Wolf (1990:121) even refers to ‘higher literacies’, i.e. when reading includes questioning and interpretation, not just decoding for information, and writing creates meaning, and not merely consists of spelling or reporting. Technological advances have brought terms such as visual literacy and computer literacy; tech-literacy was coined to describe the ability to use computer languages such as BASIC, or LOGO (Baratta, 1990:216); the reading of train schedules, timetables and maps requires a specific kind of literacy; learners can now be preliterate, or they can be multi-literate since they arrive at school confidently possessing many literacies already (Styles, 1994:2); postliterate poetry has become a genre (Kumar, 1997:35). Styles employs the term *literacies* not only to refer to the individual’s skills of decoding, but also, since “no two texts are alike”, to each text’s individual requirements and the fact that readers, therefore, have to use different modes requiring different processes of reading. For example, Ladybird books require reading in another way than the picture books of Maurice Sendak or *Captain Underpants*; to read the information supplied by joke books, TV guides or computer games requires yet another *literacy* than reading children’s classics or newspapers.

Thus literacy turns out “to be a mercurial thing. Like our conceptions of modernity, femininity, or poverty, it shifts as our own circumstances change” (Wolf, 1990:121). This shifting definition of literacy causes a constant adjustment in our understanding of the processes which make a person become a reader or writer. The definition of literacy adopted by the Australian Departments of Employment, Education and Training illustrates to what extent the conception of literacy has evolved from a basic ability to sign one’s name or to read and write simple texts:

Literacy involves the integration of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations (quoted by Bull & Anstey, 1996:231).

Ultimately, then, literacy provides the basis for successful living through the mastery of reading and writing skills. Literacy is a firm footing, it does not reach great heights - literature is



required for the quality of such a life.

If we choose the conviction of certainty, we can believe that there is a known, loved and approachable literature, that there is correspondingly a known, fixed and achievable literacy, and that the straightforward connection between them is that one must be achieved so that the other may be approached (Styles, 1994:1).

Other researchers dispute the fact that there is a “known, fixed and achievable literacy”, maintaining that literacy is not a single skill that simply gets better with age or instruction, as a long-distance athlete’s times get better with practice and conditioning. “The tasks that can reasonably be set at the various levels of literacy are different and the resources available to approach these tasks are different as well. Accordingly, the factors influencing literacy achievement may also be different” (Snow *et al.*, 1991:6).

The definition of *reading* has undergone even more changes of meaning than *literacy*. Thomas and Loring (1979:viii) state that the term *reading* has various meanings.

It is more than a decoding process which involves recognizing or analysing graphic symbols. Reading is gaining meaning from graphic representations. Reading is a communication skill along with writing, speaking, listening and thinking. However, reading requires that the communicator be able to decode printed messages into meaningful thoughts. While mere decoding is not reading, it is impossible to read without decoding. Reading should be perceived as the ability possessed by the reader to decode and gain meaning from the written message of the author.

Whereas educators in the past regarded reading as a straightforward task of decoding text by recognizing words and reproducing the ‘message’, they now concede that reading is a complex process whereby readers construct meaning using a variety of strategies and prior knowledge. Meaning, then, is something that is actively created rather than passively received. Irvin (1998:37) describes the reading process as “the interaction of *what is in the head* with *what is on the page* within a particular context that causes students to *comprehend* what they read”.

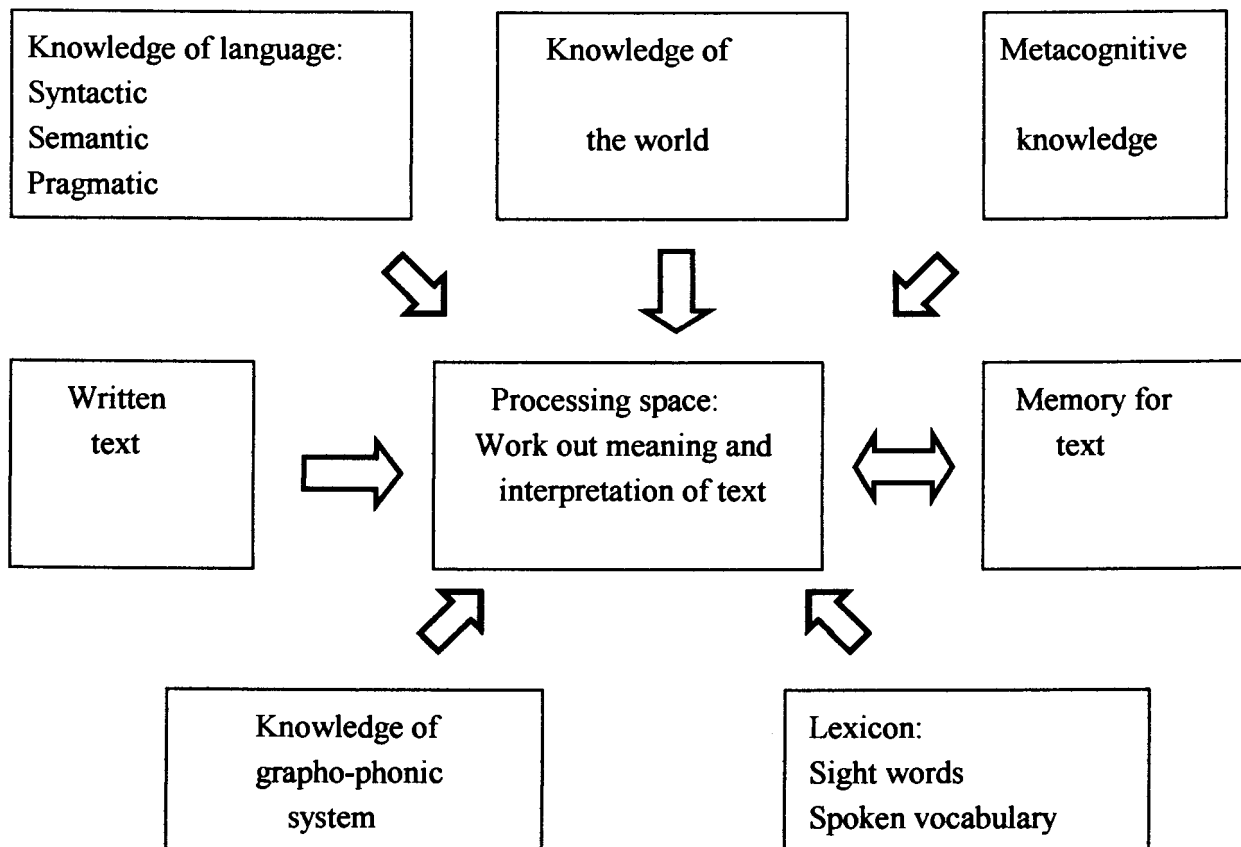
Many other reading models have been devised over the years - some very simple and some very ambitious. Harris and Sipay (1990:12) summarise some of the more viable models and place them in three classes. The first class is the so-called *bottom-up* reading model that regards reading as essentially a process of translating graphic symbols into speech when reading aloud or into inner speech during silent reading. The reader manages to read when he applies knowledge from his own memory store to the understanding of letters, words, phrases and sentences.

The second kind of model is the *top-down* model in which the reader's prior knowledge and cognitive and linguistic competence construct meaning. Upon receiving any graphic input, the reader creates hypotheses regarding the meaning of the printed material based on prior knowledge, the specific content of the material, and syntactic parsing. "Graphic cues are sampled only as needed" (Harris & Sipay, 1990:13). In other words, readers make use of integrative suppositions to confirm their best guess at the meaning of the text, derived from their understanding of the text up to that point, as well as from their own previous knowledge and experience.

The third kind of model is the *interactive* model that emphasizes the correlation between the first two since the reader hypothesises through top-down processing, guided by the results of bottom-up processing, which are directed in part by the expectations imposed by top-down processing. The most effective model, according to Nell (1988:85-86), will be the one that is nearest the way readers in the real world do their reading, "which is a judicious mix of both data-driven, bottom-up processes and ongoing hypothesis-driven interpretations of the semantic content of the text."

Ehri (1995:13) describes literacy in simpler terms: "At least five ways to read words can be distinguished: by sight, by sounding out and blending letters, by analogizing to known words, by pronouncing common spelling patterns, and by using context cues." As readers attain skill, they learn to read words in all five ways.

Owen and Pumfrey (1995:11) employ the following interactive model to illustrate the networking of all sources of knowledge that are required to operate in parallel when text is read:



However, since “at present, no model specifies exactly *how* decoding, word recognition, reading vocabulary, or reading comprehension can best be taught and learned” (Harris & Sipay, 1990:16), much work still remains to be done before educators reach consensus on the acquisition of literacy.

#### 1.4 READING RESEARCH

Reading research has experienced phenomenal development in the past twenty years or so, and it is important to take note of some major trends. Although this study does not attempt to explore scientifically the act of reading, cognisance at least has to be taken of some of the latest theories on the process of reading.

That the actual process of the reading act is researched by crowds of reading researchers is to be expected, but what is remarkable is that the process of reading is also hotly disputed by publishers, psychologists, sociolinguists, anthropologists, sociologists, neurophysiologists and even politicians (Anderson, 1993:19-35; Sulzby, 1993:41-52; Turner, 1995:80-89; Windell, 1993:37). This is not only the result of the realization that reading *per se* is essential for present and future success, but is also indicative of a greater awareness of the importance of cognitive growth to cope with the latest technologies and the new millennium's demands.

The considerable progress in reading research in the last couple of decades, has been made possible by, among others, government investment. However, a more important reason for this rapid progress

is the paradigm shift in psychology and allied disciplines. In the field of reading, the fruits of the 'cognitive revolution' are now everywhere to be seen. It should be a point of honour among people in this field that reading researchers were among the leaders in developing the new cognitive view (Anderson, 1993:18).

This so-called cognitive view has not only expanded the knowledge about the process of reading, but has also created widely differing concepts of reading *per se* through the often opposing methodologies of research employed by the researchers of the various fields. Research methods have included "case studies, longitudinal designs, literary theory, historical studies, ethnographic methods, meta-analyses and other types of research synthesis, as well as experimental designs" (Sulzby, 1993 :38). Shannon (1989) speaks of 'paradigmatic diversity' as different conceptions of the reading process are expounded or rejected in a continuous research melee.

These paradigm shifts concerning the fundamental beliefs about the process by which children become literate, have greatly influenced teacher training and staff development and continue to do so today. Transformations in various areas of teaching such as whole language, outcomes-based, cooperative learning, authentic assessment, inquiry teaching, problem solving, literature-based instruction, higher order thinking, process writing, integrated instruction, learning styles,

strategic teaching, and test-taking abilities have followed in the wake of new advances in cognitive research. All this points to “a philosophical focusing that embraces process learning, child-centred approaches, context-rich and authentic environments, and collaboration” (Irvin, 1998:6).

#### 1.4.1 ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF READING RESEARCH

Reading researchers have persistently asked one question that keeps eluding a simple answer: “Why is it that speech is universally and automatically acquired while other symbol systems (reading, gestural language, Morse code, musical and mathematical notation) are acquired labouriously or not at all?” (Nell, 1988:84). Nothing about reading is ‘natural’, and certainly not automatic; reading, just like the other symbol processes, requires prolonged practising of particular skills before mastery is possible.

The attempts at describing the very process of reading, i.e. the history of reading research, is like “Joseph’s coat . . . . a thing of many colours. It is not a single, continuous stream of human endeavour but at least four and perhaps as many as six independent threads, each with its own methods and each moving to the beat of a different drummer” (Venezky, 1984:3).

The most prestigious aspect of reading research, according to Venezky, is the basic research conducted on the reading processes, although these studies have influenced the reading practice adopted in schools the least. In contrast, “research on reading instruction, although lacking suitable methodologies and often done by careless researchers, has nevertheless had a larger impact on practice” (1984:3). Whereas present reading research emphasizes the *process* of reading, researchers previously concentrated on the *products* of reading, i.e. what the reader remembered *after reading* (Beck, 1993:66).

Although independent reading research projects can be traced back at least two centuries, serious study started only in the late nineteenth century with observations by researchers such as John Cotton Dana and his limited and localized experiments in 1896 (Palmer, 1995:26). Reading

research only became a creditable science when specialists entered the field and employed more methodical and meticulous methods. The most successful early researchers were psychologists, or even philosophers. For instance, Wilhelm Wundt and his assistants studied cognitive psychology in his laboratory in Leipzig circa 1870 (Venezky, 1984:4-5) and contributed greatly to the early understanding of the reading process. James McKeen Cattell, Wundt's first assistant, generated great interest in the experimental study of reading processes and his legacy can be found in psychometry and in creative experimentation.

By the turn of the nineteenth century many leading researchers had published their work on the psychology of reading, of which Edmund Huey and his text, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* (1908), proved the most informative contribution, especially regarding subvocal speech, the nature of meaning, the history of reading and reading methods, and reading instruction (Venezky, 1984:7).

Present theories on the teaching of reading come from a refining of research started in the 1930s and published a decade later in works such as Emmett Betts's 1946 classic textbook, *Foundations of Reading Instruction* (Sulzby, 1993:48). Betts's theory - the notion of reading readiness in a psychological sense - explains that any new learning is dependent on the learner's being developmentally ready for the next step. As a result, a teacher can only teach that which is slightly above the child's current level of functioning. This approach is an endorsement of Piaget's developmental levels and has been a guiding principle for educators for many decades.

A more disciplined approach of scientific investigations into reading came about in the late 1950s and 1960s when psychologists re-entered the fray with renewed interest in cognitive processes (Carter, 1979:52). Such research efforts were made when "generous funding policies in the United States created the climate and opportunity" (Nell, 1988:84). Beck (1993:65) refers to several studies on human cognition that have played an important role in both reading research and practice, for instance, Bruner (1957) and Miller (1965), as well as more recent theories developed by Vygotsky (1978), Resnick (1989) and Weinstein (1991).

Far fewer studies, however, have been conducted on children's reading *interests*. One of the first ever conducted scientifically was a 1897 study in Colorado that used a questionnaire to record children's interests in reading (Carter, 1979:52). The study included 1500 pupils in grades five up to high school level. The subjects were asked, among other things, to indicate their preferences for "stories of adventure, of travel, of great men, of great women, love stories, ghost stories and war stories". The pupils were to respond within this given range of answers. More noteworthy and recent were the studies of Clark (1976) and the work of the United States of America's National Reading Research Centre (Sweet & Anderson, 1993). Locally a number of publishers and doctorandi have endeavoured to reflect South African learners' reading habits, including Mulder (1975), Geysers (1986), Green (1987), Combrink (1989), Britz (1993) and Palmer (1995).

Much of what is expounded as policy in educational research is based on ideology and the philosophy of education. This approach is deplored by many researchers, as for instance by Anderson (1993:22) who asks

what is the proper form and what are the proper methods of educational research?  
Polemics on both sides of this issue argue there is only one way. I believe there is a good case for both approaches. To those who say scientific research is the only way, my reply is that interpretive scholarship can enrich understanding and allow issues to be addressed that are difficult to examine in scientific research. To those who say interpretive scholarship is the only way, my rejoinder is that this dismisses a tradition of scholarship with several centuries of success behind it, including palpable achievements within education.

According to Tucker (1992:166), psychoanalysis has had its own effect upon children's literature. Freud often employed ideas from fiction and myth to illustrate his theories, and his exponents, such as Bettelheim (1976), psychoanalysed fairy and folk tales extensively, often cleverly, and sometimes injudiciously. Bettelheim's work ignored or marginalized modern and young adult fiction and regarded it as inferior to myth and fairy tale or simply psychologically 'incorrect'.

Psychoanalytic analyses of fairy tales apart, other developments in psychology influenced children's literature in general and the study of reading processes in particular. Piaget was one of the first educationists who reflected scientifically on the education of children. Like Rousseau not a 'bookish' educationist, he emphasized the role of experience itself rather than learning by so-called predigested instruction. His theories have had mixed results and he has more critics than supporters, but at least "one result of this change of emphasis was the decline of the bad old textbook written in a style well above most children's heads. These were gradually replaced by books placing more emphasis on illustration and less on verbal explanation" (Tucker, 1992:166).

Piaget (and his followers such as Isaacs and Montessori) developed a new child-centred theory of teaching based on a better understanding of how small children think (Stuart-Hamilton, 1995:79). Piaget argued that children do not think less 'logically' than adults; instead, children's thinking has its own rules and structures, and people who wish to communicate effectively with children have to acquire these rules for themselves first. Criticism of Piaget's theories first appreciated the 'broad' theorizing and design that attempt to explain the child's intellectual development, before censuring him for a too rigid scheme that grossly underestimated ability, or forced teachers to wait for certain developmental characteristics to emerge before continuing to the next level. However, "Piaget's particular genius was always more concerned with the development of children's logical thought than with the development of their imagination" (Tucker, 1992:167).

In summary, Piaget's theories are centred on the belief that children's thinking develops in a hierarchical manner, level following upon level, from birth to adulthood. Each developmental phase requires a specific kind of book. The central characteristics of the phases are as follows:

- \* The first phase is the **sensory-motor phase** which starts at birth and continues until approximately one and a half years of age. This phase is characterized by the growth in ability from simple perceptual and motor activities. Cognitive activity is mainly based on immediate experience, mostly by means of the senses. Language



acquisition is also a feature of this stage. Since literacy wording can also start during this stage, it is essential that parents read to their children, even if they only point out recognizable objects in picture books. Multicoloured picture books, material, pop-up, chewable or plastic books can make the world of books attractive and exciting long before the child even begins to learn to read.

- \* The second phase is the **pre-operational phase** from one and a half years to approximately seven years. During this phase the grammatical structures of language, symbolic thinking and play develop which contribute significantly to the memorizing of concepts and the development of language. Vocabulary slowly increases and the average five year-old understands approximately 2000 words. Activities that aid the acquisition of literacy should be designed to imitate the child's pleasure in the testing of a great number of words. Many children teach themselves to read during this phase through memorization and the retelling of stories, and parents who help the child to learn the alphabet are surprised when their children read independently towards the end of this phase. Enjoying fairy tales and other works of fantasy is a feature of this phase since the power of imagination begins to play an important role in the life of the child.
- \* Piaget calls the third phase between seven and eleven years of age the **concrete operations phase**. In this phase the child develops the ability to think objectively and logically and to recognize relationships. The child is capable of hierarchical classification into categories. The concepts ordering and number form a part of this stage of the development of operational thinking. Books at this pre-adolescent stage include a wide variety of genres and subject matter, from realism and nonfiction to science fiction and horror. Series books (*Nancy Drew*, the *Famous Five*, the *Hardy Boys*, *Goosebumps*) and humorous stories (by Roald Dahl, for instance) prove very popular.
- \* The fourth and final level is the **formal operations phase** that includes children from eleven to approximately fourteen to sixteen years. During this phase the child can think scientifically, make deductions, interpret and develop hypotheses. Thought is now freed from concrete reality. In the teaching of reading this phase can help a learner to become fully literate through stories, books and other reading matter (D'Ath, 1994; Hunt, 1996;

Stuart-Hamilton, 1995; for book selection see 3.1.2.2).

Much criticism has been levelled at Piaget's insistence that a child only progresses to the next level if the present level has been successfully mastered first, but many researchers and teachers still find this model an adequate explanation of the child's cognitive development and use it to aid the selection of suitable reading matter for children. Piaget's developmental levels can also help to determine how students learn content in other school subjects as well as the strategies teachers can employ to help their students do this more effectively (Anderson & Sweet, 1993:ix).

A serious limitation of Piaget's theories is their neglect of children's feeling for narrative as opposed to logic. Post-Piagetian psychologists, for instance, found that children learnt far more through play and social situations than Piaget gave them credit for, and in the 1960s researchers such as Vygotsky held that "play and language represented the most fundamental of human attempts to transcend the here and now in order to construct symbolic models for the better understanding of the nature of the world we live in" (Tucker, 1992: 167-168).

The different approaches to and definitions of reading that were fashionable in the 1970s and 1980s are divided into four models by Stoodt (quoted by Geysers, 1986:27). The first is the Gray-Robinson model that identifies five skills which are equally important in the reading process, namely observation, understanding, reaction, assimilation and speed. With observation both identification of word and meaning-association are meant. Understanding refers to literal and implied meaning as well as those further applications of the meaning. Reaction refers to critical reading and evaluation of the content. Assimilation concerns the integration of the new, written content with information that is already established in the memory. The component of speed was added later. Speed refers to the flexibility of the reading speed, the kind of reading matter and the purpose of the reader.

The second model, designed by Dechant ( Geysers, 1986:27), defines reading as the interpretation of graphic symbols. Reading is a twofold process that includes the identification of symbols in the association with meanings. Word identification and understanding are thus the basic

components of the reading process.

According to Goodman's psycho-linguistic model based on the relationship between language, thinking and the learning processes, the reader who has already mastered language, anticipates words in their written context. This guess work or anticipation is based on the reader's knowledge of the language.

A fourth model is an information-processing model based on the premise that written language is translated into meaning through a whole series of processes. The series consists of five processes:

- \* visual observation;
- \* a comparison of visual images with images in the memory;
- \* the identification or recognition of an image that leads to stabilizing;
- \* the word is taken up in memory;
- \* the word becomes part of the reader's long-term memory. To learn to read thus infers the storing of enormous amounts of information in the long-term memory (Geysler, 1986:29).

Whereas past educators viewed the act of reading as a simple task of decoding words, placing emphasis on sounding out words, recognizing words by 'sight' and in isolation, and reproducing what was in the text by answering comprehension questions, modern research in cognitive psychology, linguistics and education, has led to a new conceptualization of the reading and learning process - one that recognizes that reading is a far more complex process (Irvin, 1998:37). Much current reading research attempts to give an inclusive and adequate account of the reading process, with a full specification of all its component skills and their hierarchical integration. This is considered a great improvement on the reading models propagated in the 1970s that displayed a serious weakness in their emphasis of the cognitive aspects to the exclusion of the affective domain of reading (William, quoted by Harris & Sipay, 1990).

More recently, psychological developments have tended to concentrate more on the nature of fiction, and the covert as well as overt nature of its message, and also on the personal nature of each individual reader's response to it. Modern linguistic critics (such as Saussure) insist that

meaning in a text is something necessarily imposed on readers by the arbitrary nature of language itself (Tucker, 1992:170). Tucker also refers to critics such as Barthes and others who believe that individuals can make sense of a text only by creating their own version of it in their imagination in accordance with their own particular needs and experiences.

In conclusion, much research is still required before a single model becomes acceptable to all as the perfect explanation of the process of reading. At present it is easier to take note of the great variety and to admit that reading is such an extremely complex ability, such a dynamic process that no one fully understands it

because reading is a cognitive activity that occurs rapidly and privately in the mind, and is thus difficult to study. Not only is the process unobservable to others, but even skilled readers are hardly aware of what they do during the reading process. Given the complexity of the human mind and our modest, although growing, ability to understand its workings, our incomplete understanding of the reading process is understandable (Harris & Sipay, 1990:9).

#### **1.4.2 DESCRIPTION OF TERMS**

Since no perfect explanation of the reading process has yet been advanced, the following definition will suffice for the moment. Reading, then, is

a complex psychological process and function which depends on the ability to associate patterns of visual symbols with sound and meaning. The general set of skills required by a reader in associating visual units with meanings includes the ability in segmenting phonetic strings into their underlying phonemic constituents, and associating phonemes with their corresponding graphemes. Other than these rudimentary skills, reading is thought to be associated with competence in general linguistic and cognitive abilities as well as with basic attentional and motivational factors (Windell, 1993:21).

It is also necessary to define what is meant by reading *per se*, since the term can apply both to the *act* or process of reading and the *art* of reading. Regarding the former, Harris and Sipay (1990)

distinguish between three kinds of reading, namely developmental, functional and recreational reading. Of course, these three major kinds of reading cannot be kept entirely separate, but the focus of this study falls on the latter, which is reading that is done above and beyond the reading required to supply information in or outside school. *Functional* reading can also be termed *informative* reading and can, of course, also be voluntary and afford pleasure. However, the kind of reading that is applicable here concerns the reading children do of their own free will, mostly in their own free time, because they derive pleasure from it - in other words, the kind of reading that is *chosen*, and that, if reading teachers have their way, becomes a lifelong habit. The following terms are used by reading researchers to describe the kind of reading that takes place of the child's volition: *voluntary* reading (Irving, 1980; Ciani, 1981; Marshall, 1988; Elley, 1992), *recreational* reading (Harris & Sipay, 1990), *informal* reading (Jones, 1999), reading for *pleasure* (Klein, 1985; Jackson, 1989), reading for *entertainment* (Hunt, 1992), *extensive* reading (Carter & Abrahamson, 1990), *aesthetic* reading (Karolides, 2000), *independent* reading (Ingham, 1981; Blair, 1992; Irvin, 1998), *ludic* reading (Nell, 1988) or merely *readership* (Staiger & Casey, 1983; Leeson, 1985). The term *recreational reading* here includes all kinds of optional, leisure reading, freely chosen, of a wide range and for pleasure.

Children who do not like reading, read only when forced to do so and avoid it whenever they can, are termed *reluctant readers*, since they can read but choose not to do so.

Although it mainly falls outside the scope of this study, some attention is paid to early reading strategies and the teaching of reading since most reading and motivational problems that emerge later in secondary school have their origin in these early encounters with reading. The term *emergent literacy* is used to describe the processes around the initial mastery of the ability to read. The intellectual, physiological and psychological operations that occur when someone reads fall under the general term the *reading process*. A detailed study of this *act* or *process* of reading is not possible in this study (although it plays an important part in studies on *remedial teaching* and *reading recovery*) and will only be referred to in passing.

*Flexible reading* is sometimes used as a synonym for reading maturity, which refers to a reader's intentional adjustment to his or her reading rate in response to changes in either the readability level of the text or the reader's purpose when reading.

Strictly speaking, to use the term *literature* for reading material is not correct since *literature* already implies some quality judgement and may carry the narrow confines of 'good' reading material too far. Also, much suitable or popular youth fiction will never be considered *literature* by most critics. Although the term *text* may be used to describe some reading material, the term *literature* is the only suitable one.

*Pleasure or ludic reading* (from the Latin *ludo*, meaning 'I play') describes the kind of reading that is "at root a play activity, intrinsically motivated . . . that is engaged in for its own sake" (Nell, 1988:2). Ludic readers often describe themselves as reading addicts and cite a variety of reasons for reading voraciously - from escapist reading to reading for entrancing involvement (Nell, 1988:228-229). *Ludic reading*, then, is leisure reading that is done enthusiastically and solely for the sake of the reader's enjoyment.

## 1.5 RECREATIONAL READING

It is abundantly clear to all that functional reading is necessary for successful living. Not everybody, however, regards recreational reading as equally important. Reading beyond and above the purposes of gathering information is often seen as a mere pastime that can be dispensed with altogether, or practised occasionally, if one so wishes, like stamp collection or gardening. Trelease (1984:35) finds such an attitude alarming and says that if teachers and parents ignore the warnings of this widespread lack of interest in reading, it "is to invite disaster for our children and our culture".

Most reading researchers regard recreational reading as an absolute necessity for a variety of reasons, least of all for the reinforcement of functional reading. If newly literates don't read recreationally, it has been shown that they relapse into illiteracy within months of becoming literate (Staiger & Casey, 1983:8).

Palmer (1995:10) refers to the much-quoted results of research conducted by Gray and Rogers who compiled a list of reasons why people read extensively. According to their research, it appears that “the habit of reading is based upon real human needs”. People, they have found, choose to read for the following reasons:

- \* as a ritual, or from force of habit;
- \* from a sense of duty;
- \* merely to fill in or kill time;
- \* to know and understand current happenings;
- \* for immediate personal satisfaction or value;
- \* to meet practical demands of daily living;
- \* to further vocational interests;
- \* to carry on and promote professional or vocational interests;
- \* to meet personal-social demands;
- \* to meet socio-civic needs and demands (good citizenship);
- \* for self-development or improvement, including extension of cultural background;
- \* to satisfy strictly intellectual demands;
- \* to satisfy spiritual needs.

Clearly, people read for many more reasons than simply for recreation. However, the term *recreational reading* - although it is wholly inadequate to describe the full range of purposes and motivation for reading actively or voraciously - will continue to be used to describe reading above and beyond the functional.

In her work for UNESCO, Irving (1980:5) refers to the British Bullock report (London, HMSO, 1975) to the Department of Education and Science on the matter:

There is no doubt at all in our minds that one of the most important tasks facing the teacher of older juniors and younger secondary pupils is to increase the amount and range of their voluntary reading. We believe that there is a strong association between this and reading attainment, and that private reading can make an important contribution to children’s linguistic and experiential development.

Palmer (1995: 8) quotes Lonsdale and Mackintosh who list some of the benefits for children and declare that recreational reading

- \* provides opportunities for fun, relaxation, and recreation;
- \* helps individuals define their roles in the home school and community;
- \* helps them to understand society and the people in it;
- \* helps them to become acquainted with different cultures in the world;
- \* helps them to understand their problems and the problems of others;
- \* develops pride in their own cultural heritage;
- \* helps them to develop their own set of values which are in harmony with society;
- \* builds a sensitivity to beauty in them;
- \* helps to develop a permanent interest in literature.

Nell (1988:1) regards reading for pleasure as an extraordinary activity:

These are the paired wonders of reading: the world-creating power of books, and the reader's effortless absorption that allows the book's fragile world, all air and thought, to maintain itself for a while, a bamboo and a paper house among earthquakes; within it readers acquire peace, become more powerful, feel braver and wiser in the ways of the world.

Nell is not alarmed by the fact that the voracious reader may indulge in escapist reading and categorizes reasons for pleasure or *ludic* reading: some readers read to dull consciousness, whereas others read to heighten consciousness. "A book therefore ceases to be primarily an instrument for shifting attention from the self to the environment to block out self-consciousness and becomes instead a vehicle for involvement with the characters and situations in the book" (Nell, 1988:229). Such involvement may in turn lead to self-exploration through the awakening of personal memories and aspirations, which enlarges experience and allows readers to live more intensely, to solve problems, and so on.

Apart from all the obvious benefits of extensive reading, the linguistic advantage children enjoy when they are exposed to literature from a very early age is also loudly proclaimed by reading researchers.



### 1.5.1 LINGUISTIC ADVANTAGES

Extensive reading has a definitive influence on the development of linguistic skills, and the earlier and more conclusive the contact with books, the better (Clark, 1976; Meek, 1984; D'Ath, 1994). According to Meek (1984:38), "early contact with stories and poems has the greatest single effect on a child's linguistic development. Stories are at the heart of learning to read because they make a pattern of the deep imaginative play in a special way."

Language acquisition takes place when parents and others in the community and later schools hand down linguistic tools to children. Therefore, parents and schools that are "niggardly in their attitudes towards play and language will be passing on a much more limited set of tools for children trying to make sense of the present and also plan in the imagination for the future" (Tucker, 1992:167-168). The ideal for linguistic excellence is clearly an environment that provides children with lots of positive verbal stimulation which in turn becomes the necessary mental scaffolding that will help them in time to construct their own rich models of the world.

Parents who read stories and poems to their pre-school and young children give them a decided intellectual and linguistic advantage (cf. 1.5.1). D'Ath (1994:10) quotes a study that calculated that children whose parents read to them from story books for 30 to 45 minutes per day during their pre-school years, will have gathered 1 000 to 1 700 hours of linguistic, literacy and literary experiences before they even start school.

A comprehensive series of experiments in Glasgow and environs conducted with early fluent readers found that as a group these children were certainly more advanced linguistically than their peers. "It was quickly apparent to the school how advanced some of these children were in reading and related skills - and also that some of them were highly intelligent" (Clark, 1976:59). There were other advantages to a superior early linguistic development: as a group these children were regarded favourably by their teachers who considered them to have good concentration, wide interests and to be acceptable to their peers. As is often the case, some teachers feared that the early readers might find school 'boring' and that they would find it difficult to stimulate children who could already read when they started school. However, when

their precocious reading was coupled, as it was in some instances, with a high level of intelligence and general knowledge well beyond their years, these children were a challenge to their teachers. By the time they had been several years at school, many were, however, being regarded by their teachers as ‘an asset’ . . . . They were accepted by other children, could enjoy their company, but could also be contented when alone. The choice was theirs (Clark, 1976:60).

Trelease (1982:34-35) believes that reading is the only way in which the detrimental influence of the language used on television and the “primal grunts and groans of a rock album” can be countered.

A large portion of television’s language is ‘street talk’ - jargon and slang. It is poorly constructed and imprecise. It is hardly what a child needs as a model. . . Literature’s words, as opposed to those of the electronic media, offer a wealth of language for children to use. Because good literature is precise, intelligent, colourful, sensitive, and rich in meaning, it offers the child his best hope of expressing what he feels. Hundreds of tests have been conducted to measure the effects of reading aloud upon language skills, and the results have been significantly positive. In one study, twenty classes of Harlem 7-year-olds were read to for twenty minutes a day for one school year. At the end of that time, the children were tested and compared with a control group that had not been read to. The experimental group showed significantly higher gains in vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Although there is little serious research on the positive effects of recreational reading on linguistic development, many studies claim positive results such as higher reading achievement scores, improved vocabulary, written language fluency and comprehension, and a more positive attitude to reading in general (Palmer, 1995:26). It is also assumed that there is a positive link between early and superior linguistic development and high achievement.

### 1.5.2 HIGH ACHIEVERS

In her Glasgow experiments with early fluent readers, Clark researched a group of children who achieved so well that they were promoted to a higher standard a year, and sometimes two years, early. These children, in general, “were successful in school, many in oral as well as in written work and in arithmetic as well as in language” and “seemed popular with other children and many were leaders” (Clark, 1976:65). The reasons why such early acceleration is often detrimental to these children’s social development fall outside the scope of this study. These children’s linguistic and intellectual development and their reading interests are extremely illuminating and Clark’s valuable work proves that early fluent readers enjoy a decided advantage and high achievement is the norm with them. Elley (1992:xviii) too has shown that the amount of recreational reading that older children do is positively related to their achievement levels.

Early linguistic development is acquired also and especially when parents read aloud to their children from a very early age. Robinson and Good (1987:32) quote Gallup who notes that “70% of the high-achieving first graders in his study had been read to regularly from a very early age, compared to only 49 % of the low-achieving group”. Fortunate indeed are children who can say:

You may have tangible wealth untold:  
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.  
Richer than I you can never be -  
I had a Mother who read to me.

‘The Reading Mother’ by Strickland Gillian, from  
*Best Loved Poems of the American People*)

Not only has it been shown that good readers often become high achievers, the opposite is unfortunately also true: poor readers more easily experience learning and adjustment problems than fluent readers. There are many reasons why children fail to make progress in reading. Adverse home, community and economic environments, sensory defects, insufficient language stimulation at home and at school, limited mental ability, anxiety, depression and poor schooling

all contribute to unsuccessful reading. Many studies have shown the close correlation between retardation in reading and emotional disorders. Poor readers are almost four times as likely as other children to show signs of maladjustment in school (Irvin, 1998:19).

The problem of poor overall achievement in children from impoverished homes is another sad reality. In 1966, in a monumental study in America, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, based on a survey of thousands of children, it was found that children of low-income families did significantly worse than those from families of middle and higher incomes (Snow *et al.*, 1991:3). Reading retardation is more common in children from disadvantaged homes.

The scenario for the disenfranchised would have been entirely hopeless if at least some studies did not show that there is the possibility of teaching underachievers to become achievers. Working with severely underachieving students, Griffin (quoted by Irvin, 1988:49) concluded that some students seemed to catch good qualities from the important people in their lives and internalize them. The situation in which disadvantaged adolescents find themselves may seem overwhelming to educators, but research shows that some children succeed despite overwhelming adversity. The following factors can help the disadvantaged to succeed:

- \* Children who do well academically under adverse conditions scored well above the median on self-acceptance and self-respect measure.
- \* Despite deprivation, these children saw their families as worthwhile and valuable.
- \* Although these children were from low-income families, they had books at home.
- \* Their parents expected them to go to university or college.
- \* They did not see their difficult personal situation as a determinant of what they could become and did not dwell on their victimization. They believed that *they*, not their situations, were in charge of their lives. These students had the attitude that whatever good or bad happened to them depended on their own behaviour. They did not wait for fate or miracles to improve their lot in life.
- \* From the earliest years, these children were expected to meet high standards and were rewarded for doing so within their families.
- \* They were loved by someone (Snow *et al.*, 1997:4; Irvin, 1988:48).

That parents should read to their children as much and from as early an age as possible, has been documented by so many researchers that it will be treated as an axiom (Clark, 1976; Trelease, 1982; Chambers; 1983, *et al.*). Unfortunately, whether from a disadvantaged or a privileged home, modern children are not only read to less and less, they are deprived of an even more basic and therefore even more crucial experience: storytelling. The oral tradition has been the domain not only of the parent, but of the extended family and the community since time immemorial. Long before a child can begin to appreciate reading, stories must be told and enjoyed. The average modern family, whether affluent or struggling, simply feel too pressured to indulge themselves and their children in the shared pleasure of storytelling. Far more convenient is the products of the TV set, whether for inane animated versions of children stories, or adult video dramas dealing with issues beyond the child's scope. The paucity of storytelling experiences in the home must be redressed by the school now. The classroom must now take the place of the hearth; the teacher now becomes the elder who keeps the child mesmerized with stories of the tribe.

In most schools, this is unfortunately not the case. Storytelling simply does not figure in a classroom where 'serious' study takes up all the time. The oral tradition is considered a 'soft option' and regarded as a luxury, or something to pass the time with if nothing else can be found. Whereas adults only read when they choose to do so, school-going children's reading is still directed, to a greater or lesser degree depending on their age and level of reading, by their teachers and parents. Secondary learners, except for the small number of enthusiastic readers, mostly read only when guided or coerced by teachers setting assignments or requiring information to be gleaned through reading. It is only too clear that most schools do not take their responsibility to encourage extensive reading very seriously. The long-term effects of the demise of the art of storytelling will only be apparent in years to come.

### **1.5.3 BIBLIOTHERAPY**

Bibliotherapy has been practised since ancient times, "when the library was known as the healing place of the soul" (Le Roux, 1993:225), but the first formal definition of the term as it is applied at present appeared only four decades ago in the authoritative *Encyclopaedia of library and*

*information science* (c1968-c1991):

The term bibliotherapy is derived from the Greek: *biblion*, book, + *oepatteid*, healing or treatment. Bibliotherapy is the use of books and related materials in the treatment of the sick. It is a programme of selected activity involving reading which is planned, conducted, and controlled as treatment, under the guidance of a physician, for emotional and other problems. Bibliotherapy is a mode of communication. Books and related materials are media used to assist in establishing a means of communication, and in reinforcing the therapeutic climate of acceptance.

Bibliotherapy is one of the many possible values of recreational reading.

Bibliotherapy is an attempt to promote mental and emotional health by using reading materials to fulfill needs, relieve pressure, or help an individual in her development as a person. Theoretically, the reader identifies with the story character, thus lessening her sense of isolation; catharsis occurs as the reader vicariously experiences the motivation, conflicts, and emotions of the character. Identification and catharsis lead to insight, through which the reader's tensions are relieved (Harris & Sipay, 1990:682).

To the adherents of bibliotherapy, the reading of fiction can and should be more than mere entertainment and is of far greater value than an innocuous pastime. To therapists, librarians, psychologists, remedial teachers and hospital schools the reactions of the child reader are a revelation of troubling feelings and fantasies that would have remained hidden. Teachers at school often provide fiction in class not only for the literary merits of books "but also the opportunity they give pupils for the better understanding both of themselves and of others through discussion, comparison and introspection" (Tucker, 1992:170).

Fiction maintains a continuous form of dialogue with those readers who find themselves comparing their own personalities, reactions, emotions, thoughts and modes of speech with those of the author and the characters in his or her book. Such comparisons can suggest new possibilities to readers in the conduct of their own lives. Whether readers then take up any of these possibilities is another matter. But giving them a type of choice that is both wide and informed is something else that literature at its best has to offer (Tucker, 1992:169).

The modern metamorphosis from children's fiction as 'mindless entertainment' to 'psychoanalytic revelation' came about with the help of Freud to whom the child's inner life mattered more than the external experiences of which he or she was supposed to be the sum. Typically, Freud studied the "fantasies and feelings that were either inherited as part of the human condition or else were the inevitable outcome of the tensions inseparable from all family life, happy or unhappy. Such fantasies could often be extremely aggressive not to say sadistic, frequently revolving around strong sexual interest" (Tucker, 1992:161). Fiction can be used to help resolve these troubling issues or hidden feelings in an effective and harmless way. Bibliotherapists can do so without clinical diagnosis, but with "sensitive discernment . . . which enables them to detect an individual's emotional or psychological need, and . . . a broad enough knowledge of books to be able to suggest the kind of reading or the specific books or articles that will be of the most help to a particular individual" (Brown, quoted by Green, 1987:62).

However, not all educators believe that it is important for the child's development to read books that deal honestly and directly with troubling issues; there is still a school of thought that endorses the opinion that children's books should perpetuate the mistaken belief that 'good, clean fun' in an idealistic, pristine setting is what developing children need. Töttemeyer (1993:162) states that the belief that children's literature should primarily be enjoyable and entertaining was firmly entrenched by the middle of the twentieth century, with the result that the emerging trend to portray social issues was met with perplexity and even indignation among some literary critics and educators. "Dope-smoking, unwanted pregnancy, alcoholism, broken homes, racial discrimination, physical and psychological handicaps (including, lately, anorexia nervosa and bulimia) and the death of loved ones were considered to be aspects from which children needed to be protected." Tolerant teachers and educators, however, feel that to deal dishonestly with or prettify reality "makes children emotional and spiritual amputees" (Töttemeyer, 1993:162). It is ultimately 'unethical' to tell children that the problems they encounter in real life do not exist. Bibliotherapists believe that the portrayal of social issues in children's literature can help them to cope with the social problems they are grappling with daily.

Children's books that describe childhood as a state of pristine purity, cannot deal with the complexities and uncertainties that real children encounter in modern life. Sugarcoating harsh realities or simply ignoring the complexity of life becomes harmful when it creates in a child the impression that he alone is missing out on an experience that to others is simply sweet and trouble-free.

Our common clichés about the ways in which children are close to nature or to God, about how their ignorance is really a saving innocence, disguise a profound distrust for the realities of life as we must view it as adults - and perhaps most significantly, a nostalgia for that which never was. For as Derrida shows, there never was an 'other' - never anything before writing, never a prior, truer mode of speaking or thinking except the ones we invent as a means of belittling our adult selves; and similarly, there surely never was a childhood, in the sense of something surer and safer and happier than the world we perceive as adults. In privileging childhood as this sort of 'other', we misrepresent and belittle what we are; more significantly, we belittle childhood and allow ourselves to ignore our actual knowledge of real children. For while all that we see as 'other' may appear to be privileged, it is so only at the expense of becoming inhuman, marginalized, actually insignificant. To express nostalgia for a childhood we no longer share is to deny the actual significance and humanity of children (Hunt, 1992:13 -14).

Bettelheim's work went a long way to dispelling the myth that children's literature should present a trouble-free world. Other researchers go further and believe that children's literature should actually make provision for the dissolution of horror by allowing expression and public presentation of 'hidden traumas' in a literary tradition. Sacks (1993:179-181) paints an engrossing picture of children's private nightmares and suggests the experiences of literature as a suitable and painless exorcism.

Most children fantasise restlessly about vampirism and cannibalism, violence and murder. They suffer the confusion of incestuous thought, of perverse family relationships. These horrors, deeds without a name, may include the fear of being abandoned, of loneliness, of ostracisation; sexual perversion; primordial love, hate and guilt; sibling jealousy and hatred; attacks by animals such as fierce dogs, snakes, lions.



The pill of horror, first swallowed in infancy, may remain undigested, poisoning the inner life of the child. Yet throughout the ages, provision has been made for the dissolution of horror in a particular way: by encapsulating forbidden desire or submerged guilt in an art form, e.g. in stories. This allows them public presentation in an oral or literary - and also pictorial - tradition, which is a highly regarded and very real part of the outer world.

Instead of causing fear and nightmares, the young readers may find purification when their “unexpressed horrors are ‘neutralised’ and a means of coping with a strong emotion in a way the child’s society finds acceptable, is suggested” (Sacks, 1993:181).

Bibliotherapy does not only offer absolution in this most extreme form; more reassuring is the fact that children are attracted to tales of heroism and myths of supernatural heroes. In these myths and legends - even in their modern form as contemporary stories about first team rugby captains or triumphant children from broken homes - there is also a latent morality, “a code often absent in the adult world: that goodness will prevail, and vulnerable innocence be protected” (Sacks, 1993:181).

However, horror for the sake of horror can be harmful and does not serve a bibliotherapeutic purpose.

If the story is unsuccessful because it is badly told or unconvincing, if the emotional trauma is unresolved, or treated unacceptably, if violence and horror are presented solely to shock and terrify the reader, if perversion is presented for its own sake, the torment of the child’s private nightmare will remain. These are the stories to shun. The child’s innate good taste and instinctive rejection of them will ensure their demise (Sacks, 1993:181).

Green (1987:62-69) distinguishes between different kinds of bibliotherapy. She starts with *reader’s guidance*, a rather superficial kind of bibliotherapy with the initiative coming from the reader who asks guidance from the librarian who does not experience a deep sense of responsibility for the personal well-being of the reader but can supply guidance in a particular

field of fiction. *Developmental bibliotherapy* commences when the librarian has insight into the reader's most likely problems and attempts to encourage the reading of certain books which may help to alleviate the problems. Media teachers, parents and other adults can direct adolescents to those books that will make a positive contribution to their emotional or psychological needs. Green (1987:67) endorses the view that recommended books have a nurturing role since "all books for children and adolescents are, at some subtle level, didactic . . . Everything they read, like everything they hear, touch, smell, dream, expands their universe. In books for young adults we can teach in a very non-threatening way."

*Preventive bibliotherapy* helps to solve anticipated problems and is the most promising form of bibliotherapy, although

it seems unlikely that anyone would actually want to describe growing up, even with all its problems, as an illness that requires treatment. No one would deny that children and adolescents should be provided with standards of behaviour and with attitudes which will help them to adjust to whatever problem they meet. This seems to be what 'preventative bibliotherapy' provides (Green, 1987:68, quotes from Darling's *Mental hygiene and books: bibliotherapy as used with children and adolescents*, 1957).

*Curative or remedial bibliotherapy* may help an adolescent who is developing difficult personality traits to "change before the bad habits become too entrenched" (Green, 1987:68). The suggested books need to be closely related to the incipient problems of the reader to be beneficial and it is hoped that the reader's identification will be followed by a change of behaviour. When an adolescent is seriously disturbed, treatment by a trained psychologist becomes necessary and *clinical bibliotherapy* can be prescribed.

Bibliotherapy not only affords children an understanding of their own problems, but also valuable insight into other people's psyches in a way nothing else does. This realization that other people's opinion may be different from one's own is a first and essential step in Vygotsky's outline of how young brains best develop. It is therefore "no accident that arguments for the importance of providing fiction in schools now often stress not simply the literary merits of books but also the opportunity they give pupils for the better understanding both of themselves and of others through discussion, comparison and introspection" (Tucker, 1996:169).

Modern juvenile literature, therefore, no longer automatically portrays perfect parents in a nuclear family setting with ‘naughty but nice’, eminently confident, ‘normal’ children. Good books, however, “do still offer reassurance, security and hope. Even incomplete families can become happy if they can learn to adjust, if family friction can be resolved, and the gang can give the needed security if there is no other option” (Töttemeyer, 1993:163).

To committed teachers, bibliotherapy is an ingenious and effective way to communicate with their troubled learners. Great care, however, must be taken when books or other materials are selected for bibliotherapeutic purposes. Firstly, it is important that the pupil must be able to identify strongly with the chosen literary work. A book in itself is not therapeutic, nor is this the intention of the author who creates a literary work and not a psychotherapeutic tool. Bibliotherapy is a by-product that depends on the emotional and intellectual response of the reader, and it is facilitated through the dialogue and interaction between child and ‘bibliotherapist’ (Le Roux, 1993).

Secondly, projection, “one of the most well-known and frequently used defence mechanisms” (Le Roux, 1993:228) comes into play when a reader projects his or her own negative and unacceptable thoughts and behaviour on to a character in the book with whom a strong identification has been established. Experiencing problems unconsciously and vicariously through the fictional character creates a safe distance between problem and reader, and the further processes of emulation and catharsis are facilitated. This is preferable to direct confrontation with problems which at an early stage usually produces negative reactions of defence and denial. Of course, problems must and will be faced and recognised eventually, but they are more successfully dealt with at a later stage when some emotional growth has been reached (Le Roux, 1993: 228).

Lastly, identification and projection may bring insight into the reader’s own, analogous problems and a resolve to emulate the actions of the characters in the book may be taken. “Self-knowledge is the key which unlocks troubled minds from the stranglehold of false assumptions and unhappiness. At times, and hopefully quite often in the bibliotherapeutic process, the recognition brought about by literature is so strong that it brings about an emotional catharsis . .

The particular power within literature is that it can lower defences, thereby increasing psychological accessibility in order for the bibliotherapeutic process to take place” (Le Roux, 1993: 229).

Professional interest in bibliotherapy has steadily increased and is no longer the exclusive domain of bibliotherapists, psychologists and library services as teachers and educators have come to recognize its value. An early forerunner, Nikolai Rubakin, a highly erudite Russian revolutionary, created the science of bibliopsychology as early as the 1920s. He planned to devise a classification that would perfectly match readers with suitable books. He advocated a system whereby all printed books would eventually bear on their title page an indication of their bibliopsychological classification. “A parallel classification of books and readers ensures a compatible book for everyone . . . It follows, then, that libraries should offer each reader in each subject a selection of books corresponding as nearly as possible to his psychological type, and make them easily accessible” (Nell, 1988:115-116). Naturally, such an ambitious and inherently limiting project did not succeed.

Despite the salient advantages of bibliotherapy, there is some evidence that it may have some undesirable effects too. Discussing traumatic experiences arising from a book may actually induce them in many children who had never thought about such fears before. “The casual use of bibliotherapy can make a bad situation worse” (Harris & Sipay, 1990:682). Another disadvantage is the shortage of librarians or teachers who are trained and experienced in the technique. Also, most teachers simply do not have the time to become acquainted with the available book stock and might, therefore, suggest books to children that could harm rather than help them.

However, if bibliotherapy is employed by sensitive and knowledgeable teachers to help less seriously troubled pupils gain insight into their problems, if it is understood as a way of validating difficulties and fears and enriching a child’s personality rather than as a way of ‘curing’ or ‘changing a personality’, then bibliotherapy can be most useful.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE TEACHING OF READING

Many children, imputing the pain they endured at school to their books . . . so join those ideas together that a book becomes their aversion . . . and their reading becomes a torment to them, which otherwise possibly they might have made the great pleasure of their lives.

John Locke, 1687. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter xxxiii, 15:250

Children do not, in the main, learn to read by accident, by inspiration, contagion or osmosis, or by being encouraged in attitudes that others deem socially desirable. They learn by being taught.

Turner, 1995:80

You can't tell a five-year old about the importance of literacy; you can only help him to discover the fun of it.

Margaret Meek (1984:18)

All the old 'ills' of a hermetic approach to English teaching - reading through skills, language through drills, and, with the imminent publication of prescribed texts, literature that kills.

Mike Taylor, in Styles, 1994:115

If reading were a natural, easily acquired skill, then there would not be such a large volume of research directed towards finding out why a significant proportion of school-age children do not become competent, independent readers.

Johnson, Connely and Watson, 1995:32

First, the beginnings of learning are the work of memory, which in young children is tenacious. Next, as nature has implanted in us the instrument to seek for knowledge, can we be too early in obeying her behest? Third, children can learn more readily at an early age. Fourth, since children can learn manners at that age, why not begin to learn elements of letters, grammar, fables, and stories? By disciplining, the mind gains far more in alertness and vigour than the body is ever likely to lose.

Desiderius Erasmus, 1529 (quoted in Pearson)

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although emergent literacy falls outside the scope of a study which concentrates on the recreational reading habits of adolescent readers, the teaching of early reading must be addressed, if only cursorily, to determine the influence of the acquisition of literacy on the pupils' perception of reading. Since the influence of the home on reading habits is treated as an axiom, the focus here is on the school and the variety of teaching methods with outcomes - ranging from most successful to woefully inadequate - that must be at least partly responsible for the problems experienced all over the world with reluctant reading.

When most four year olds are asked why they want to go to school, the answer, almost without fail, is that they want to learn to read. In an ideal world such enthusiasm and sharp focus would serve to achieve the great expectations, enhance all learning, and help pupils to become excellent and enthusiastic readers during the next twelve years at school and beyond. In reality, however, statistics and research on reluctant reading prove that early zeal is all too often replaced by apathy, fear and resentment regarding reading, and that illiteracy becomes the end-result for a disturbing number of pupils. Although it is, unfortunately, very easy to blame the way reading is viewed and taught at schools in the foundation phase and in later years, the fact remains that inadequate teaching is only too often a primary cause of failed reading.

Research conducted in America revealed that despite the emphasis educators place on reading, approximately a third of its citizens have a reading problem. According to Thomas (Thomas & Loring, 1979:vii), 15% of school-going children have *severe* reading disabilities. In South Africa, research paints a far more dismal picture. For instance, the *Report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005* declares bluntly that "we are bereft of a strong reading culture". The 35 school-based studies commissioned for the President's Education Initiative concluded that: "Books are little in evidence and reading is rare" (Chisholm *et al.*, 2000:44).

As the years of reading failure increase feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with school in general, the academic record of problem readers is severely affected. Foundation phase underachievers become secondary school underachievers, with a resulting tendency to leave school illiterate and unqualified.

Reading problems are not confined to school dropouts. Thomas and Loring (1979:viii) quote figures supplied by the US Office of Education and the American Association of Junior Colleges that estimate that from one-third to one-half of the new students at their colleges have significant reading problems and that twenty percent of students in the most disadvantaged areas are unable to profit from their present remedial programmes since their handicap is so severe. Sixty percent of the enrollees in the Job Corps Urban Centres have less than a sixth-grade reading ability, and about twenty percent of those read below the third grade level. A more disturbing figure is the fact that seventy-five percent of juvenile delinquents are significantly retarded in reading.

The problem of inadequate reading skills is especially serious in South Africa. Dire statistics are cited after research was done over “an extended period of time to sample the functional skills levels of learners, students and employees - both mother-tongue users of English and SAAL-transferees” (Horne, 2001:2). The dilemma of language transferees (non-native English speakers) at several South African tertiary institutions is particularly alarming. The deterioration of general reading skills and reading in English in particular (the preferred language of study) is clearly demonstrated in the following example of a representative sample of SAAL-E (South African Language who choose English as their preferred language of study) school-leavers applying for admission to technikons, mainly in the Gauteng area. (Horne, 2001:3)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number Assessed</b>	<b>Functionally Literate, i.e. Grade 8 or above</b>
1990	568	51%
1991	490	35%
1992	899	33%
1993	770	31%
1994	930	28%
1995	1 314	25%
1996	520	24%
1997	434	22%
1998	621	20%
1999	537	19%
2000	451	18%

Another sample reflects the gravity of the problem since the learners tested qualified as teachers at the end of 1998:

*“Class” of Grade 12 SAAL-E school-leavers after successfully applying to be trained as teachers in a province in the northern part of South Africa. N=766 (Horne, 2001:3).*

	FUNCTIONAL SKILLS LEVEL IN ENGLISH			
	Below Grade 8	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
No. of learners	728	23	8	7
Percentage	95%	3%	1%	1%

Horne notes that the vast majority of the above teach English and / or use English to teach content subjects. Although the figures reflect the reading and writing skills levels of what could be described as a *rural* SAAL-E contingent, they clearly endorse the report published by the President’s Education Initiative (Horne, 2001:5) that showed that many teachers are poorly trained and experience difficulties in basic English reading and writing. Horne states:

We all know the maxim: “Readers are achievers.” We also know that our learners, in particular our SAAL-E, don’t read because they can’t, won’t, or don’t have books to read. How can we turn our learners into readers? Should language-of-learning READING be incorporated into the school curriculum as a full-fledged school subject AND made compulsory up to Grade 12? If not, why not? (Horne, 2001:7).

It is abundantly clear that all is not well with reading education in general and extensive reading in particular; the reasons for this state of affairs, however, are far harder to determine.

Bettelheim and Zelan (quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:13) contend that many young children learn to dislike reading in school and that this accounts for the poor reading achievement of many students. They believe that the boring and condescending nature of early readers is most to blame and that children cannot be expected to enjoy texts, for instance, such as found in Bloomfield and Barnhart’s 1961 reader: “Nan can fan Dan. Can Dan fan Nan? A fat rat ran. A fat cat ran at a fat rat.” The early pleasure that word recognition brings will soon fade if pupils



have to continue reading pointless texts that do not lead directly to meaningful content. Bettelheim (1976:4) emphatically states that

the idea that learning to read may enable one later to enrich one's life is experienced as an empty promise when the stories the child listens to, or is reading at the moment, are vacuous. The worst feature of these children's books is that they cheat the child of what he ought to gain from the experience of literature: access to deeper meaning, and that which is meaningful to him at his stage of development.

In this chapter the focus falls on the two related aspects in the teaching of reading: the process of acquiring literacy and the texts that are used to procure this.

## **2.2 PREPARING TO READ**

If educators really knew how children learned to read, the way to mastery in reading would not be strewn with conflicting and discarded methodologies - many of which have enjoyed some success, others which have failed and some that have survived by sheer tenacity, force of habit and tradition. "If, after all the theory and research, we still have little idea of how the brain processes print to effect the transfer of meaning from the mind of a writer to the mind of a reader, then this surely limits the extent to which reading can be 'taught', and emphasises rather the importance of helping children to 'learn' to read" (Dubow, 1993:235).

Teachers of early reading mostly use methods they acquired when they attended university and college and, therefore, they adopt and adapt any one of an eclectic mixture of paradigms, techniques, styles and methods which were the vogue at the time of their study, or at the time their lecturers studied the suggested methods. Although the in-service training of teachers attempts to keep practising teachers abreast of the latest developments, the truth is that the little time and limited resources at a school's disposal for teacher training make the acquisition of new skills and the application of the most recent methods difficult and sometimes almost impossible. Practising teachers, therefore, employ any or some of the strategies developed in the last twenty of thirty years with a variety of outcomes.

Great dissatisfaction is experienced by many teachers and education authorities alike with the training of reading teachers. In the *Report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005*, it is acknowledged that although training in the various South African provinces varies widely and most teachers receive some form of training, “the training was generally regarded as insufficient and at times inappropriate. This has a negative impact on the level of confidence of the teachers. Most expressed a need for training that was less theoretical and more sustained. Dissatisfaction with short 2-3 day training workshops without follow-up support, was a general feature” (Chisholm *et al.*, 2000:80).

At present, foundation phase teachers are taught according to theories advanced in the 1980s and since then one of the key issues regarding emergent literacy has been the concept of reading readiness before commencing with the teaching of reading. In some education systems primary school begins at age five, while in other countries, such as South Africa, school-going is delayed until the year in which a child reaches the age of seven.

### **2.2.1 READING READINESS**

The concept of reading readiness was not an issue until approximately the second half of the twentieth century when several models and approaches were developed, ranging from a simple screening test that assesses the child’s physical attributes and gross motor skills to measure them against a general ‘standard’, to an investigation through a battery of highly individualized tests to determine either ‘scientifically’ or more informally when a child is ‘ready’ to commence reading.

Until 1930 reading instruction began when a child started school at an age between five and seven or whatever was convenient to the parents. “Little or no adjustment was made for individual differences and those who could not keep up with the instructional pace (30% to 40% in some classes) repeated first grade . . . Concern for these high rates of failure led to the concept of *reading readiness*” (Harris & Sipay, 1990:32). Since not all children could effectively learn to read from the first day they started school, reading readiness activities were designed on the basis that if such exercises were good for some children, all children could benefit from them. Another

school of thought advocated the maturation theory, which held that reading instruction should be withheld “until the child showed a spontaneous desire to learn to read” (Harris & Sipay, 1990:33). This ‘wait until ready’ theory, unfortunately, unduly delayed the start of reading for a great many children.

Many reading researchers in the 1930s and 1940s - and some even today - feared that a child’s later intellectual development and scholastic achievement could be impaired by beginning to read ‘too early’. To avoid this, it was suggested in 1931 that reading be postponed until a child has attained a mental age of six years and six months (Robinson & Good, 1987:26). Educators of this more formalist mode prepared lists to help assess pupils’ readiness for reading instruction, as for instance Adams *et al.* (1949) who asked:

Is the child 6.5 mentally?

Does the child score well on a reading readiness test?

Is the child emotionally adjusted?

Is the child’s health normal?

Are the eyes and hearing normal?

Does the child talk freely and does he have a vocabulary which is adequate for good expression?

Does the child have a background of meanings?

Are the child’s work habits good?

Can the child sustain attention? (Quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:35).

By the 1980s reading readiness was no longer viewed as something distinct from reading that prepares the way for it, but as the teaching of specific prereading skills that merge gradually into reading (Harris & Sipay, 1990:33). The phrase ‘emergent literacy’ was coined to describe the process of literacy acquisition which begins long before the child enters school. It became clear at the time that the earlier rational readiness programmes concentrated largely on the development of inappropriate skills.

A more informal approach to reading readiness is taken by researchers such as Chambers and Meek, who believe that the acquisition of literacy has been taking place for centuries without

pedagogical aid or interference, especially from educationists. These researchers see early reading as following naturally on speech in a literate and supportive environment.

The first of these simple truths is that children become readers with the greatest of ease and lasting effect when they are prepared for it, preferably from birth, by a daily experience of literature read aloud to them and an abundance of books shown to them. Speech comes first, words heard; reading follows (Chambers, 1979:41).

Meek endorses the view that the acquisition of reading skills can and should take place informally and painlessly: However,

when reading experts describe the reading process, it seems very complicated, so that when a four-year-old reads successfully, we are rightly astonished. Clearly, there is something special about beginning to read that makes the start important. 'Getting the hang of it' is still a mysterious business, which is why reading experts spend a great deal of time with the small number of children who, despite careful teaching, don't seem to be able to make reading work for them (Meek, 1984:20).

Since reading can develop naturally and informally if the circumstances are conducive to literacy, it follows that an environment that neglects a child's verbalization and vocalizing can become detrimental to his early experience with reading:

It is almost an axiom: You cannot begin to read what you have not heard said. Neglect of this preparatory relationship between child and language, child and book, means that by the age of five, a child is already in need of remedial teaching. The effect is just the same on the child's mental and imaginative growth as the lack of essential ingredients in his/her diet would be on his/her physical growth. Judged by this test, most children start school educationally undernourished; so most teaching in the early years is rehabilitative (Chambers, 1979:42).

Instead of a 'wait until ready' approach, teachers should realise the importance of an early start to reading. The British Bullock Report made the point that "delay in making even a modest start in reading beyond the age of seven puts the child at educational risk, not merely because a good deal of learning depends on the ability to read, but because poor readers are less likely to receive

skilled attention the older they become” (Merrett, 1994:3). Children who fall behind at seven drop even further behind at eleven, whereas fluent readers at seven will probably be reading a great deal and their skills grow rapidly through practice. Such an advantage will increase exponentially.

The major paradigm shift in the past two decades or so has been the move away from the fixed idea that reading readiness is inseparable from more general cognitive characteristics and especially motor skills. According to this view, children first had to “distinguish colours and shapes, sequence pictures, separate bell from drum sounds, hold and draw with a crayon, or even crawl, hop and skip” before they could start reading (Mason, quoted by Pearson, 1984:536). Since then - and as part of the ‘cognitive revolution’ (cf. 1.4) - the view is held that children learn to read best in a task-oriented way. Cognitive psychologists argue that “preparation for reading is better addressed with specific experiences that are closely related to reading than to general cognitive and motor tasks” (Mason, quoted by Pearson, 1984:536).

At present, in theory, if not in practice, the child’s development as an individual should decide whether he or she is ‘ready to learn to read’. Harris and Sipay (1990:37-51) suggest that neurological, physiological and physical factors be taken into account when deciding on a child’s reading readiness. They list the following aspects as crucial determinants: chronological age, gender, sensory and health problems, lateral dominance, general intelligence, logical thinking, specific cognitive disabilities, visual discrimination, visual-motor ability, auditory discrimination, auditory blending, associative learning, attention. Linguistic factors include oral language development, linguistic and metalinguistic awareness, home environment, and emotional and social maturity.

The ideal - as advanced by reading readiness specialists - is the combination of professional readiness tests and teachers’ judgements and observations. Standardized readiness tests measure factors such as visual discrimination (of words, letters and pictures), auditory discrimination (of beginning sounds and ending sounds), listening comprehension and use of oral context, visual-motor co-ordination (and copying), word-picture relationships and number concepts. Combined with this, teachers should consider the results of a

- \* health check, with emphasis on vision and hearing;
- \* group intelligence measure;
- \* parent interview (home background, student interests, etc.); and most importantly
- \* teachers' perceptions and observations of a child's behaviour in many different circumstances, including both formal instruction and other activities.

(Robinson & Good, 1987:50-51)

The answer, then, to the question about when a child is ready to start reading lies between the extremes of formalism with a reliance on 'standard' physical, linguistic and mental traits, and an informal approach, in which good examples and available texts will 'automatically' lead to the acquisition of literacy. This complicates a teacher's task greatly since academic knowledge of the teaching of reading alone will be to no avail unless he or she is also sensitive to each pupil's developmental level and individual needs. In addition, the teacher must also possess a good knowledge of the literature - apart from the prescribed basal reading series - that can enhance the child's reading at whatever level.

A child's ability to understand adequately a particular reading passage is not contingent on reaching a certain age, but rather is directly related to the reader's background of experience, the reasons for reading a passage, and the difficulty level of the material. Thus, no matter the level of the material or the purposes for reading it, because of their varied backgrounds, students will range on a continuum of reading readiness from nonreaders to proficient readers. It is the teacher's responsibility to know each child's relative strengths and weaknesses in terms of readiness for any particular reading or language experiences, and to adjust instruction accordingly (Robinson & Good, 1987:36).

Combined with an expert teacher in an ideal class, all that remains to make enthusiastic and successful readers of all pupils should be the perfect choice of reading material. Unfortunately, whereas great prominence has been given to the reading readiness of the learner together with the role of the teacher in the reading programmes of the last four decades, the role of the text has only lately begun to be properly understood.

### 2.2.2 EARLY READING TEXTS

For centuries children learnt to read by being taught from whatever was available, usually religious tracts or traditional literature. Earlier than the sixteenth century there was little distinction between readership ages in the popular literature. Only since the sixteenth century has a body of literature developed that can be termed 'children's literature'. Since then children's literature has reflected the essence of the period in which it was written, the prevalence of literacy, the relationship of the content of books to the social and cultural ethos, the religious and educational influences at each period, and the governmental and political jurisdiction in the legislative control or promotion of books via publishing, bookselling and libraries (Marshall, 1988:74).

The advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century produced literature to teach, not only the children of the upper class, but also poorer children from towns or the larger villages. Children were taught the basics of reading from primers - small booklets which contained the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, catechisms and collects (Kinnell, 1996:141-142). These books and pamphlets were obviously intended for instruction, and little amusement was to be had from them.

Before book printing made *abecedarias* more readily available, hornbooks were cheap and durable attempts at teaching reading. These fifteenth century hornbooks are strictly speaking not books since they were constructed of a sheet of paper printed on one side glued to a short-handled wooden rectangle covered with translucent horn. Apart from teaching the alphabet, the hornbooks contained lists of syllables that had to be memorized (Jackson, 1989:33).

One of the earliest authors to write a book specifically for children, was Bishop John Comenius who published in 1659 a lavishly illustrated picture encyclopaedia for children, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, intending it to be stimulating and more 'enjoyable' than anything before because he accepted the fact that children require a different and more 'user-friendly' approach (Robinson & Good, 1987:125). From the following excerpt it is clear that Comenius not only endeavoured to teach children about animals through the medium of English, but also Latin while learning the alphabet and the sound each animal makes, making it simultaneously an

abecedaria, a bestiary and a Latin primer.

(picture of cat)	<i>Felis clamat</i> <i>The cat crieth</i>	nau nau	N n
(picture horse-drawn cart and carter)	<i>Auriga clamat</i> <i>The carter crieth</i>	ò ò ò	O o
(picture of a chicken)	<i>Pullus pipit</i> <i>The chicken pippeth</i>	pi pi	P p
(picture of cuckoo)	<i>Cuculus cuculat</i> <i>The cuckow singeth</i>	kuk ku	Q q
(picture of a dog)	<i>Canis ringitur</i> <i>The dog grinneth</i>	err	R r
(picture of a snake)	<i>Serpens sibilat</i> <i>The Snake hisseth</i>	si	S s

(Jackson, 1989:37)

In spite of a disregard of what is now termed ‘the difficulty level’, the popularity of these early books written for a child audience opened a market for primers to teach children the rudiments of reading and writing. Early readers included the popular chapbooks - tiny paperbacks, so called because they were sold by chapmen or pedlars - which were printed for a mass market. Many of these primers managed to combine instruction and moralising with entertainment. In England Puritanism had a didactic, moral and religious effect on books and education, exemplified in James Janeway’s *A Token for Children*, an account of the conversions, the holy and exemplary lives, and joyful deaths of saintly children (Marshall, 1988:75). In the seventeenth century an abecedaria printed for Puritan children adapted biblical verses mixed with moral maxims:



- A In *Adam's* Fall  
We sinned all
- B Thy Life to mend  
This *Book* attend
- C The *Cat* doth play  
And after slay
- D A *Dog* will bite  
A Thief at Night
- E An *Eagle's* Flight  
Is out of Sight.
- F The idle *Fool*  
Is whipt at School

(Jackson, 1989:25)

In the eighteenth century Mrs Trimmer and her Sunday School movement, with its objective of educating the working class, increased literacy and created a religious body of literature to feed the needs of the newly literate adults and children (Marshall, 1988:57; Jackson, 1989:30). The popularity of these groundbreaking books quickly led to a new market with books becoming more child-oriented in tone, language and subject matter (Kinnell, 1996:143; Marshall, 1988:77; Jackson, 1989:54).

As educating the young became increasingly 'scientific' and good schooling became politically important, philosophers and educators were beginning to pay attention to literacy and the pursuit of reading. John Locke recommended a "carefully judged curriculum designed to meet the needs of pupils on the basis that knowledge should be impressed on young and untouched minds: the *tabula rasa* or blank sheet principle" (Kinnell, 1996:147). Subsequently at least fourteen editions of his educational treatise published between 1689 and 1772 provided a focus for writers and publishers in their provision of a literature to feed the demand from schools and parents. Whereas the early abecedaria and hornbooks did not attempt to be diverting and were rather regarded as utilitarian tools with moralistic messages, eighteenth century alphabets became highly entertaining.

One of the products of ‘enlightened’ educational theory is the so-called *graded reader* which came into use almost two hundred years ago. An example of this approach can be seen as early as 1813 in the introduction to *The Universal English Reader*, compiled by Pinnack (quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:61):

These 4 readers are so arranged as to lead on the Pupil by easy and regular graduations, to a complete acquirement of the art of Reading with grace and propriety; every care being taken to adopt them to any capacity, and the system on which they are edited, being found, from experience, to afford peculiar facility of instruction with ease and pleasantness to the instructor.

For almost two centuries basal readers have enjoyed unparalleled popularity with educational authorities, teachers of early reading and publishers alike. Regarding the latter, “the stakes are high as publishers frequently obtain substantial orders as a result of state-policy decisions to employ particular schemes” (Hunter-Carsch, 1995:137). The popular use of basal readers by teachers is defended by the fact that they are

a systematic, co-ordinated, and sequential anthology of stories and related materials designed to teach reading. The basal reader attempts to sequentially and explicitly develop word identification, vocabulary comprehension, content-reading skills and strategies, and to promote recreational reading as well (Blair, 1992:33).

Schools in South Africa and elsewhere use basal reading programmes as early reading texts for the most obvious reasons: basal reading textbooks have been pitched to correspond to school or reading developmental levels, are commercially viable, are supplied and marketed by publishers with accompanying teacher’s manuals, assessment instruments and supplemental materials. When the series is adequate, the reading material has been carefully designed to meet the educational needs of the learners. The material is, moreover, graded to adjust to the learners’ growing vocabulary, fluency and grammatical ability, and covers diverse topics through a variety of genres.

Many basal readers were co-written by researchers - even Piaget co-operated in the writing of a children’s early reader (Tucker, 1996:166). Reading researchers approved of basal readers for

almost two centuries for a variety of reasons. Blair (1994:36), listing the advantages of using a basal reading system to explain why it is still the preferred early reading text for almost all teachers, states that basal readers

- \* provide carefully planned presentation and development of vocabulary, word identification, comprehension, and content-reading skills and strategies;
- \* provide, in teachers' manuals, good suggestions to use in teaching a story;
- \* foster integrated development and reinforcement of reading skills and strategies in whole stories;
- \* expose students to a variety of literary forms;
- \* provide a multitude of materials for a variety of practice and for capitalizing on students' learning styles - these materials include student readers, workbooks, picture and vocabulary cards, reading games, supplemental activities, computer software programmes coordinated with stories, and recreational reading kits.

In spite of their obvious advantages (or precisely because of them), criticism of basal readers has been widespread especially during the last two decades (Farr, 1981; Chambers, 1983; Meek, 1984; Robinson & Good, 1987, *et al.*). It is the very exclusivity and inevitability of basal series that are potentially harmful. In spite of the *raison d'être* behind basal readers, researchers deplore the fact that they have become necessary in the first place.

Reading series were born, I suppose, out of the same necessity that has led to computer-run teaching programmes. Teachers have to teach far too many children at once, a situation getting worse, not better. In the Utopian circumstances of one teacher to three or four pupils, reading schemes would seem like weapons of torment to be left alone by civilized people. But faced with thirty or forty or more pupils - all, we have been led to think, needing to be *taught* by the teacher - the book-machines become essential (Chambers, 1979:43).

However, overly simplistic basal readers can do great harm and actually be the cause of reluctant reading later because "narrow, specialized teaching buries natural response to print" (Meek, 1984: 84). Meek also feels that the disadvantages of basal readers outstrip their usefulness.

One of the most harmful aspects of early reading experiences is the irrelevance and naiveté of the texts given to pupils. Most of these texts are “so shallow in substance that little of significance can be gained from them”, and therefore, “the acquisition of skills, including the ability to read, becomes devalued when what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one’s life” (Bettelheim, 1976:4).

The objection to the lack of cognitive demand in basal readers is endorsed by many reading researchers (for example, the *Elementary School Journal*, January 1987; Baum, 1990; Hunt, 1996). Chambers (1979:43) complains that

many teachers imaginatively take pains to prepare their pupils for what used to be known in the trade as ‘reading readiness’. Then, having raised their children’s expectations high, they put before them the most bland, pointless, ill-written prose they can find. For this is the literary judgement one is forced to reach about the content of many reading series.

Baum (1990:138) is concerned about the adverse influence of inane texts on the scholastic achievement of gifted children, but her reservations are as valid for the ‘ordinary’ child:

Many of our brightest children are first noticed by their advanced vocabulary. Some even begin to read on their own at home. However, what we ask them to read as they begin the reading programme often doesn’t match the way they think or speak. As a matter of fact, for many, learning to read much below their intellectual level. This is especially true when approaches based on phonics and linguistics are used. What bright child can be intrigued for long by the *man can fan*?

Farr (1981:4-10) supports this opinion, citing the uninteresting and meaningless material presented in school as actually (albeit indirectly) harmful since it causes a disinterestedness in learners that ultimately becomes “the single greatest cause of failure to learn”. Thus boring texts become counterproductive and cause learning problems.

These factors may be considered *iatrogenic* problems. The term, ‘iatrogenic’ is most commonly used by the medical profession as it means ‘induced inadvertently by a physician or his treatment’. It can be applied to the field of education when children have failed to learn to read as an indirect result of instructional procedures used in the schools, not because of problems inherent in the children (Farr, 1981:5).

The reasons for the dullness of basal readers are many, and some can easily be avoided (such as the ignorance of publishing houses and their eagerness to churn out popular but ill-advised profit-making series with accompanying teachers' manuals). Other causes of a more complex nature depend on the current early reading theories and are as difficult to change for the better as shifting any other educational paradigm.

A basic premise of basal readers is the conviction that pupils' reading follows a predetermined developmental course. This is often perfectly acceptable when applied in a more informal manner, but is certainly not the norm with all children. Piaget (see 1.4.1) and his concrete operations theory expounded the maturation assumption so well that it is still fashionable with most teaching administrations. Basal readers, therefore, cater to a 'common denominator' and attempt to educate as many learners as possible; at worst they manage to involve as few as possible.

Another reason for the dullness of basal readers can be found in the restricted use of vocabulary. Modern series use fewer words than did primers written for children a hundred years ago. Bettelheim and Zelan (quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:13) point out that

first-grade readers published in the 1920s contained an average of 645 new words. In the 1930s this had dropped to about 460 words. In the 1940s and the 1950s the vocabulary demand declined even further to about 350 words. More recently, several series have dropped below 200 words. These authors note that in the 1920s few children went to kindergarten. Most children had little opportunity for preschool reading instruction and were not able to see print on television. Nevertheless, these students' first readers contained 645 new words.

A comparison between recent basal readers and earlier ones can be found when a story from an 1879 early reader - complete with moral - is compared with one published almost a hundred years later for the same developmental level, i.e. beginning readers:

1. A boy was once sent from home to take a basket of things to his grandmother.
2. The basket was so full that it was very heavy. So his little brother went with him, to help carry the load.
3. They put a pole under the handle of the basket, and each then took hold of an end of the pole. In this way they could carry the basket very nicely.
4. Now the older boy thought, “My brother Tom does not know about this pole.
5. “If I slip the basket near him, his side will be heavy, and mine light; but if the basket is in the middle of the pole, it will be as heavy for me as it is for him.
6. “Tom does not know this as I do. But I will not do it. It would be wrong, and I will not do what is wrong.”
7. Then he slipped that basket quite near his own end of the pole. His load was now heavier than that of his little brother.
8. Yet he was happy; for he felt that he had done right. Had he deceived his brother, he would not have felt at all happy.

(From the McGuffey’s Reader, 1879:38-39, quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:62).

Almost seventy years later, the following material is offered in a basal reader for the same developmental level:

“Here, Tags!” said Jim

“Come here, Tags!”

“Look, Judy!” said Jim.

“Look at Tags!”

(From O’Donnell’s reader, 1947, quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:62).

Dubow (1993:237) also speaks out against current basal “texts that are banal, devoid of content, form, meaning, emotion, narrative, excitement or humour” and quotes from the *Happy Venture* series, in which, “under five sequential pages of featureless illustration, we read:

Dick.

Here, Dick.

Here, here.

Nip.

Nip, Nip.

Here, Nip.

Here is Dick.

Here is Nip.

Here, Nip, here.

Such word-starved simplicity is obviously harmful and unnecessary. Even simple stories can be well-written and stimulating. The material in basal readers need not

fall below the standards of the best I Can Read stories, like *Frog and Toad are Friends* (Harper). What looks, and is, linguistically simple in such books is also immediately and lastingly entertaining and possesses beneath the surface meaning of the text deeper meanings on which the imagination can dwell (Chambers, 1979:43).

Basal readers are criticized for more reasons than uninteresting content consisting of short words with well-known sounds. Robinson and Good (1987:75-76) criticize basal readers because

- \* teachers' manuals require too many activities and limit teachers' creativity (which is expected of them according to Curriculum 2005; cf. Chisholm, 2000);
- \* basal readers are too rigid, forcing the teacher to accept a particular philosophy or approach to reading;
- \* the basal reader requires the teacher to group activities in a predetermined organizational pattern;
- \* the concepts of basal readers are both racist and sexist and do not reflect how young people live today;
- \* basal readers severely limit children's reading.

From an educator's point of view (Blair, 1992:33-34), a child's reading development can ultimately be impeded because basal readers

- \* are based on a graded system of instruction and may encourage a lock-step progression throughout the grades;
- \* if viewed as the total reading programme, may limit a child's exposure to fine literary material;
- \* through teachers' manuals, may foster an inflexible attitude towards reading development;
- \* come with teachers' manuals that may be unbalanced with respect to reading skill development, or may not provide sufficient direct or explicit explanations of comprehension skills and strategies for building background which may direct the teacher to ask too many comprehension questions following the reading of a story;
- \* use workbook material that focuses on isolated skills development with little opportunity for integrating reading skills or applying comprehension-monitoring strategies;
- \* the programme of most basal readers is so restricted that it jeopardizes natural language usage and reading ultimately becomes reduced to word recognition.

Obviously, not all basal readers are equal. Much good can actually come from basal readers if teachers are critical of the basal series forced upon them and use the books as aids instead of bibles. According to Chambers (1979:43), four protective defences can shield the child reader from the danger of their abuse. Firstly, children should be provided with the best possible series from the literary point of view. Secondly, they should be weaned onto 'proper' books with all possible speed. Thirdly, the teaching of reading should not be restricted to a single series or teaching method, but a variety should be used which take into account the different ways people read (for instance some children 'hear' the words as they read rather than 'see' them, and vice versa). Finally, the reading series and the teaching done with them are part of a reader-friendly environment where the emphasis falls on books and on having as many of them as possible available to the children at all times, whether they can read or not.

Sulzby (1993:41) also deplores the use of basal series, above all for the fact that they are "unrealistically short." She adds her voice to the criticism of the "use of contrived texts and also narrow ideals of how readers respond to texts". Sulzby offers a solution to the problem of basal readers and joins the growing move away from their use in favour of literary texts: "Now



research, theory, and practice are increasingly addressed to the nature of literature, both as a focus of comprehension and for its long-term effects on the reader/writer.” The new approach is a much-needed change from the neglect of content in reading material. “The content of courses of professional studies always seems to me to be over concerned with *how* - to the detriment, sometimes even the exclusion, of those much more important ‘serving men’, *why* and *what*” (Moss,1985:66).

Class readers should create an interest in reading, and the enrichment of reading interests should be a top priority. “Progress in reading ability is likely to remain slow if the only reading a child does is in his textbooks. The most carefully planned reading lessons may bring disappointing results unless the teacher ignites a spark of interest in reading and then nurtures it carefully into a clear flame of enthusiasm for reading. Spectacular gains in reading ability can result when children voluntarily read a book or two a week” (Harris & Sipay, 1990:673).

Basal readers are notorious for their lack of creating enthusiastic readership and this is one of the reasons that gave rise to the *literature-based* approach which is a co-ordinated programme using all types of literature as a catalyst in teaching children to read. Children are guided to an understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of literature. Literature should supplement the basal reader and language experience approaches, or can actually be the primary source in teaching reading. The advantages of a literature-based approach are obvious since it

- \* allows for the development and practice of language processes and strategies in quality literary material as opposed to sterile workbooks and other commercial kits and activities;
- \* promotes a joy of reading, and an appreciation of all types of literature;
- \* uses literature as a means to improve reading vocabulary (Blair, 1992:34).

A literature-based approach may also have distinct disadvantages if it is used exclusively as the core reading programme since

- \* the difficulty levels of some literature books may be problematic because of the wide range of reading ability within any grade level;

- \* the teacher will need to supplement literary material with additional materials for practice of reading skills and strategies;
- \* it has no planned, sequential, and explicit development of reading skills and strategies;
- \* basic skills as assessed on mandatory accountability tests may not be covered (Blair, 1992:34).

Since the early 1980s the *whole language* movement in America has moved reading instruction away from a fragmented subskills approach and now has most educators following an elementary reading curriculum that keeps language learning “whole”. Irvin (1998:7) quotes Baumann who explains that “whole language literacy instruction is the simultaneous, integrated teaching of reading, writing, speaking, and listening within a context that is meaningful to the language learner”. Irvin summarizes the basic tenets of the whole language approach:

- \* language should not be taught in a fragmented manner;
- \* reading, writing, speaking, and listening should be based on similar principles and processes;
- \* working on one aspect of language (e.g. reading) automatically helps other aspects such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other language skills;
- \* language is a meaning-centred activity and, above all, is meant to make *sense*;
- \* language is learned through use - a person learns to read by reading, to write by writing, and to speak by speaking.

The *whole language* approach encourages teachers to employ authentic environments with relevant, challenging texts that can engage the young reader intellectually, psychologically and linguistically. “Good reading depends on rich sources of information” (Meek, 1984: 84). *Whole language* teachers use a combination of models so as not to produce an imbalance in the learner’s language system which is “the very root of his strength” (Meek, 1984:84). Teachers should not insist that the learners get every word right, sound out letter by letter, or remember faultlessly. Reading should not become a performance of rituals, or a mere carrying out of instructions. When this happens, the task narrows until it becomes meaningless.

The *whole language* movement has been severely criticised by researchers who believe the approach

to have been sustained by remarkably little real knowledge and a great deal in the way of charismatic platform performance. Even the ‘theories’ (speculations) and ‘linguists’ (the non-experiential variety) date from the late 1960s and early 1970s. These look, in the aftermath of a damaging debacle, distinctly irrelevant against a background of authentic and non-charismatic research endeavour, especially in the cognitive neuroscience. The centrality of phonological processing for both good and poor readers is recognized, as are, increasingly, the taught nature of spoken language, the nature and importance of differentiable component skills in literacy, phonological mediation in comprehension, the interlinked nature of reading and writing (spelling) processes and the importance of print experience in isolation from pictures (Turner, 1995:89).

In spite of valid criticism, the whole language approach, at least, has been instrumental in restoring the importance of the text and moved away from mindless drill, and it is valuable if it is used as a facet of teaching, and not the whole process itself. Like all other models, it should not be an end in itself. At present still more models of reading are being devised, even

looking at machines for this purpose, comparing one cheap horrible reading scheme with another expensive horrible reading scheme, all with the purpose of helping young children to become fluent readers fast. Only the exceptional course will come to reading by the route that asks first “Why should children learn to read?” That is not as simple a question as it sounds. But having exhausted it at the level at which it deserves to be considered (functional literacy is only the beginning, though many believe it to be, so to speak, the ‘end’) the course will naturally proceed from “why” to “what”. *What* books, real books, should teachers have around the classroom so that reading is seen to be such a pleasure that no-one in his right mind will want to be precluded from joining in? (Moss, 1985:66).

### 2.3 LEARNING TO READ

It would have simplified matters if learning to read were as natural and automatic as learning to talk, and if children learnt to read from authentic texts and great works of literature. This is hardly the case, as multitudes of researchers have pointed out. Also, unfortunately, children do not become effective readers by merely growing older (Blair, 1992:3). Although real life experiences are crucial to language growth, a caring and knowledgeable teacher is needed to direct, guide, and facilitate a child's development in the use of written communication. Competent teachers *can* teach children to become good and enthusiastic readers. "How teachers teach reading and attend to student differences will have lasting effects on each child in their classroom. Teachers have an awesome responsibility: they hold the keys to helping children find a place for reading in their lives." (Blair, 1992:4).

However, if the reading process itself is still considered by many researchers to be an enigma, it is understandable that little consensus has been reached about the teaching of reading. Broadly speaking, reading instruction twenty, thirty years ago focussed almost exclusively on the development of skills and the creation of a collection of subskills that could be learned and measured. Traditional methods included the *phonic* and *Look and Say* approaches and somewhat later, the *whole language* approach. At the moment, reading skills are considered holistically as part of a larger framework of learning strategies that incorporate reading and writing skills and especially prior knowledge together with word recognition. Overall, "at least five ways to read words can be distinguished: by sight, by sounding out and blending letters, by analogizing to known words, by pronouncing common spelling patterns, and by using context cues" (Owen & Pumfrey, 1995:13). As readers attain skill, they learn to read words in all five ways.

Current methods for the teaching of beginning reading depend, as they have always done in the past, on prevailing theories on the process of reading. The profusion of theories surrounding emergent literacy exacerbates the task of the bewildered teacher who has little time to keep abreast of the latest research and current methodologies.

Perhaps more models are required to explain the reading experience since almost all recent

models display some weakness or other (William, quoted by Harris & Sipay, 1990), and they are especially flawed in their emphasis on the *cognitive* aspects to the exclusion of the *affective* domain. Meaning is derived not only on the cognitive level, but emotions and attitudes influence reading greatly (as any teacher can tell who has tried to get an unhappy, hungry, anxious, weeping child to read).

Despite the profusion of reading models (and their fallibility), and the teaching approaches they spawn, they must be studied, if only in broad terms, for the influence they have on educators who instruct reading. For instance, followers of a 'bottom-up model' (see 1.3) would place early and heavy instructional emphasis on decoding and word-recognition skills. Comprehension would not be ignored, but fast, accurate word recognition would be emphasised because such reading behaviour is believed necessary for reading comprehension to take place. Accordingly, teacher-centred direct instruction would be emphasized (Harris & Sipay, 1990:16). In contrast, 'top-down' advocates would stress comprehension, and would keep decoding and word-recognition instruction to a minimum. Deviations from the printed words would not necessarily be seen as disruptive to reading comprehension. The role of the teacher would be to guide and facilitate learning, thereby making instruction more child-centred.

The more formalized approaches emphasise the role of the teacher. One of these is the *initial teaching alphabet (ita)* that was devised by Sir James Pitman in the 1960s (Meek, 1984:73). He invented an alphabet which consists of 44 letters - with no capitals - to match the sounds of modern English so that children learning to read could 'sound out' the words and not be confused by the vagaries of English spelling. *Daughter* would be written as **daθ\_θ**. To use this unique writing system, converts at the time studied the teaching of reading with renewed enthusiasm and there were reports of early success for the novel system. However, in spite of the early support at mostly private schools, the experiment quickly faded because ordinary books are not written in *ita* and the readers must, after all, make the transition sooner or later to learning to read in the standard print, and this proves as difficult as learning to read from the beginning.

Already in the mid-1960s and later in the 1970s, Chall (quoted by Harris & Sipay, 1990:87) spoke against the teaching of reading through methods that spend weeks drilling letters and

words while ignoring meaning. “In their enthusiasm, many authors, publishers, and teachers may be extending the decoding practice too far, and students may be spending too much time on it. This may be so both for the highly programmed decoding materials and for teacher-made exercises. Thus, stories and books, the true vehicles for reading for meaning, may be neglected in the zeal for mastery of decoding. Moderation here, as in all of life, should be valued” (Chall, in Harris & Sipay, 1990:87).

One of the less structured methods of teaching reading is the *apprenticeship approach to reading* (Dubow, 1993:239) that offers a theoretical and practical base for learning to read through encouraging and motivating the child. This approach teaches the child to learn to read by behaving ‘like a reader’ and by reading actively. Since children learn to speak by imitation, experimentation, by selection and learning from their own mistakes, they can do the same with reading. The child is encouraged and supported by the adult in a kind of apprentice/ craftsman relationship; the child learns to read by observing and practising the necessary skills until he or she will take over as the text becomes more practised and more meaningful.

Such a mentorship teaching of reading may be successful enough under ideal circumstances, i.e. knowledgeable, enthusiastic reading adults teaching by example and by the sharing of exciting and relevant texts. Ideal circumstances, unfortunately, are harder to come by than ever before. This method is also fraught with difficulties since

one of the greatest problems for the beginner is that he cannot tell by watching them what readers are actually doing. He depends a great deal on what he is told to do and this may confuse him because, at first, he has to read aloud, something that skilled readers rarely do. Whereas the child learning to speak enters directly into dialogue with those who encourage him to learn, the beginning reader has two teachers: the one who tells him what to do and hears him read, and the writer whose text he has to understand (Meek, 1984:20).

Present teachers (and *their* teachers) probably learnt to read through one of the more traditional methods, such as *phonics*, *Look and Say* and the *whole language* approach. The phonics approach is frowned upon by many teachers and other reading educators at present since children

often master the sounds of letters but are still unable to figure out unfamiliar words. However, a large body of ‘older’ teachers are still ‘phonics firsters’ although research has pointed out that an unacceptably large number of children who receive direct phonics instruction do not learn to read fluently (Sweet & Anderson, 1993:20).

*Look and Say* relies on the child’s visual memory. It appears that learners can recognize words they have seen only once before, especially if they recur in the same place. However, the chief problem with *Look and Say* arises when the teacher uses flash cards and it is always the quickest child whose responses are repeated mindlessly by the others (Meek, 1984:75).

Following in the wake of theories that advocated formalized, skills-based, fragmentary teaching of reading, came the *whole language* approach. In the 1990s whole language was “a crusade at high tide. Defining whole language is difficult, because advocates insist that it is a philosophy, not a method. Of course, one of the central ideas is that learning to read should be addressed holistically, specifically that reading should not be broken down into component skills that are taught one at a time” (Sweet & Anderson, 1993:20).

*Whole language* adherents also believe that learning to read should be natural and acquired through reading authentic texts, which are to be distinguished from made-for-school, ‘educational’ texts. Whereas great prominence has hitherto been given to the teacher, researchers are now “beginning to understand the teaching role of the text and its writer” (Meek, 1984: 20). Since the harm that can come from feeble basal readers has been discussed earlier (see 2.2.2), it suffices to say here that so-called ‘commercial’ texts and irrelevant, unnecessary, unrealistic, unnatural, superficial and unexciting materials do not afford the stimulus beginning readers require.

Apart from the importance of texts, the role of the teacher is crucial, also and especially as a model of a successful reader.

We are apt to worry about what teachers *do* when they begin to teach reading. I always want to ask: does the teacher want to read with the children, and does she enjoy reading at her own level? The child’s first teacher is an important model in his life. The first

thing a teacher teaches is herself, and her attitude to reading, her pleasure in it, will come across to the child even before his first reading lesson (Meek, 1984:64).

For reading instruction to be successful, the teachers' input must be based on a solid understanding of the reading process itself so that their approach promotes rather than thwarts the acquisition of good reading strategies (Weaver, 1988:137).

For the more formalist approach, it is necessary that teachers of older children gain some insight into the process of learning to read and the skills that should have been mastered by their pupils before their present developmental level. Chall (1990:237) supplies a diagrammatical presentation of the stages of reading development. The delineations are, of course, superficial and approximate. Children from book-friendly homes would sooner 'master' a level than a child who comes from an illiterate, disenfranchised or book-starved home. Chall (quoted by Harris & Sipay, 1990:238) explains that the *prereading stage*, during which understandings about reading are unsystematically accumulated over many years, takes place preschool and during kindergarten.

In the first stage, when initial reading or decoding skills are acquired, learners acquire knowledge about reading, such as how to know that *bun* is not *bug* and how to recognize when comprehension has been disrupted. By the end of this stage, learners experience a qualitative change as they develop insight into the nature of the alphabetic writing system and become able to decode printed words that they do not recognize immediately.

The second stage must confirm what the reader already knows and is a refining of the decoding skills. The child also gains competence in using context and consequently improves in fluency and rate. Although children are usually still taught through basal readers, the range of possible recreational material should increase markedly. Teaching children to *read to learn*, instead of *learning to read*, is the essence of the third stage (Harris & Sipay, 1990: 92). Around the beginning of stage three, reading begins to compete with other means of acquiring knowledge. Readers now bring their knowledge and experience to their reading to acquire facts, concepts, and understanding.



Stage four brings the ability to hold multiple viewpoints. High school teachers must develop the reader's skill to glean from study material not only information, but new concepts and points of view. Reading ultimately should help the learner to connect and reconstruct his own world view. High school teachers and university lecturers should not only expect this level of reading, but also contribute to its acquisition. At this stage the learner should be an effective and efficient reader.

<b>Emergent reading</b>		
Stage 0 Prereading	Preschool Ages 0-6 years	Child 'pretends' to read, retells a story when looking at pages of a book previously read to him or her; names the letters of the alphabet; recognizes some signs; prints his or her own name; plays with books, pencils, and paper.
<b>Beginning reading</b>		
Stage 1 Sounds: Initial reading and decoding	Grade 1 and beginning Grade 2 Age 6 - 7	Child learns relation between letters and between printed and spoken words; child is able to read simple text containing high frequency words and phonically regular words; uses skill and insight to 'sound out' new one syllable words.
<b>Reading for consolidation</b>		
Stage 2 Confirmation and fluency	Grades 2 - 3 Ages 7 - 8	Child reads simple, familiar stories and selections with increasing fluency. This is done by consolidating the basic decoding elements, sight vocabulary, and meaning context in the reading of familiar stories and selections.
<b>Reading to learn the new</b>		
Stage 3 Reading for learning the new	Grades 4 - 8 Ages 9 - 13	Reading is used to learn new ideas, to gain new knowledge, to experience new feelings, to learn new attitudes; generally from one viewpoint.

<b>Reading for independence</b>		
Stage 4 Multiple view points	High School Grades 10-12 Ages 15-17	Reading widely from a broad range of complex materials, both expository and narrative, with a variety of viewpoints.
<b>Mature reading</b>		
Stage 5 Connection and reconstruction	College and beyond Age 18 +	Reading is used for one's own needs and purposes (professional and personal); reading serves to integrate one's knowledge with that of others, to synthesize it and to create new knowledge. It is rapid and efficient.

By understanding the different developmental stages of learning to read, teachers are more responsive to their pupils' needs. Reading instruction is ultimately guidance through a "sequential process developing from lower reading or decoding skills through intermediate or language related skills to higher or comprehension-based skills, the latter being seen as characteristics of the skilled adult reader" (Clark, 1976:88). However, the teacher concerned with beginning reading must not direct her attention exclusively to the 'lower' decoding skills; she must have greater appreciation of the effects that her initial approach to the reading situation may have on the children's later progress, on their motivation and appreciation of reading as a language-based activity. In the past teachers of younger children have been too little aware of the complexity and range of skills that even the beginning reader brings to the reading situation. The printed word must, right from the beginning, whether listened to or 'read' alone or together with adults, create a high expectancy of interesting experiences (Clark, 1976:89). If teachers do not "capitalize sufficiently" on their language of instruction or the material they use, teachers may be the very cause of the failure which they attribute to the learner. The optimizing of learners' reading attainment depends crucially on educators' understanding of child development and the conditions that facilitate reading as a thinking process. "In this there are reciprocal relationships between advances in theory, research and practice" (Owen & Pumfrey, 1995:2).

Children need a variety of approaches to help them to learn to read: they must *want* to learn to read, the reading programme needs to be structured so that word-recognition skills are developed systematically, and finally and especially, there must be a lot of stimulating written

material available that not only entices them to want to learn to read, but also encourages them to remain lifelong readers.

After studying the results of projects concerning the early teaching of reading, such as the Sheffield Project ( a six-month case study undertaken in a disadvantaged district of Sheffield), the Rome Project (an experimental study involving 218 children), the Palencia Project, the Brighton Project and the Paris Project (which was conducted in a very disadvantaged district), Dombey emphasizes the fact that young learners have an enormous potential for literacy learning - a potential not yet fully realized in educational systems. Dombey (1995:102) offers the following advice to teachers:

- \* The immediate participants in literacy learning - children, parents and teachers - need to feel ownership of the activities involved. They need to make their own materials, write their own stories and take published texts into their possession through relating them to their own lives.
- \* New technology can be a powerful tool in literacy learning, provided it is used in a context which has other positive features.
- \* Children learn best when they are provided with texts of significance to them, whether these are notices of practical use or stories that engage their imagination. These should include complex texts capable of yielding more meaning and of teaching more lessons on each encounter.

Almost as much research has been done on remedial reading, 'rescue' reading, and problem readers as on the acquisition of literacy. With a few exceptions, however, researchers have ignored early fluent readers and this is a remarkable oversight. One of the reasons for the oversight can be that educators are ill-at-ease around children who can dispense with actively being taught to read. After all, children who learn to read mostly by their own or their parents' efforts, do away with much theory. Another reason may be that pathology has always been easier to research than 'normalcy' or success.

Studying early fluent readers, however, can help to understand the process whereby children acquire literacy. For instance, according to studies conducted in Glasgow by Durkin and others in the early 1970s, *all* early fluent readers had been read to regularly by their parents, other adults,

or their siblings (Clark, 1976:49). In addition, the majority of the parents of children who could read before they entered school were avid readers themselves and led by example. Such children did not read only books but package labels, comics, street signs, billboards. In most of these homes a wide variety of printed material as well as paper and other writing materials was also readily available. As Durkin (in Clark, 1976:41) explains: “Almost without exception, the starting point of curiosity about written language was an interest in scribbling and drawing. From this developed an interest in copying objects and letters of the alphabet.” The people in the child’s home further stimulated the child’s interest in reading and writing by answering endless questions, praising the child’s efforts at reading and writing, taking the child to the library frequently, buying books, writing stories that the child dictated, and displaying his or her paperwork in a prominent place in the home.

However, educators do not encourage parents to teach their children to read. Clark says that one factor that emerged clearly during the interviews she had with the parents of young fluent readers, was

the bewilderment and even embarrassment on the part of some of the parents at having a child who started school already reading fluently - a task which they saw as the prerogative of the school. Several described attempts to discourage the child at first until, as one mother described it, she realized it was impossible, and that the child gave every appearance of being sufficiently fluent by the time she started school so that being able to read would not present a problem. Another mother described the adverse comments of neighbours who assumed she must have coached the child at the expense of other aspects of development (Clark, 1976:49).

Contrary to the predictions of some researchers, later reports from the schools of these early fluent readers indicated that they continued to show impressive attainment in reading, spelling and in written work. The children also appeared well adjusted to school and were seen as generally acceptable to their classmates (Clark, 1976:50).

The case for early reading is endorsed by most researchers of the more informal school, such as Clark (1976), Trelease (1982) and Meek (1984), but whether or not parents should encourage or even teach their children to read before entering school, is not the domain of this study. What is

important, however, is the ease with which early fluent readers learn to read in an informal manner, the success they experience at school and the enthusiasm for reading they develop and maintain later in their lives.

## 2.4 TEACHING READING IN THE FUTURE

Without the benefit of a crystal ball, one can only envision future teaching practices based on developments in the present and past. That literacy *per se* will be influenced by the innovations in computer-based educational transformation is obvious. Since access to the Internet will empower more learners earlier in their lives, it is clear that the gap between developed and developing communities will widen. Children in more affluent communities, entering school with some level of computer literacy, not only have a clear advantage over their less fortunate peers, they sometimes even have greater skill than their teachers in their knowledge of software applications.

With regard to reading instruction, Murphy (1996:119) describes a scenario for the teaching of reading somewhere in the future (although many of the attributes of the online services that she describes - such as voice recognition and interactive stories - are already available at present):

A child is sitting at a terminal in school. She has finished a lesson with her reading teacher and it is time now to read independently. The student asks the computer to find the book that the teacher recommended and, very soon, the title of the story appears on the screen. The student begins to read, stopping to ask the computer to pronounce a word she does not know, sometimes pressing the dictionary key if she can read the word but does not understand it. She experiences the multimedia storm in which the boat capsizes; the student chooses to end the story by having the storm blow over and the boat return safely to harbour. A list of study words are printed out before the student leaves the terminal. That night, she reviews the words before accessing the same story from her home computer. The student reads the book again, chooses a different ending (the boat is lost at sea), and then decides to browse through the database to look for another title on the same subject. She finds several books and prints a version that she will share tomorrow at school during the reading lesson.

The future of readership clearly lies in embracing rather than fighting technological advances. Many software programmes for beginner readers - such as CD-ROM picture books, for example - are both exciting and meaningful, enhancing the reader's understanding by having characters speak, by music that sets a mood and by additional sound effects. "Words and phrases are highlighted to synchronize with the story-telling; clicking on the mouse will retrieve pronunciation, definitions, or, in some cases, foreign language translation of vocabulary. Different versions of the story can be selected for individual students' reading needs" (Murphy, 1996: 125). With such obvious advantages, the future of readership may not be as bleak as pessimists predict; however, it is clear that reading will take on new forms, and 'books' will become a flexible concept.



## CHAPTER THREE

### SCHOOL AND THE ADOLESCENT READER

Consider how most adults would react if they were to undergo three years of radical changes in stature, sexual development and interest, and other bodily changes. Add to this list the fact that they will tend to be moody, physically awkward, and have numerous skin blemishes. Under such circumstances, most adults would likely become egocentric and self-conscious just as most adolescents do.

Irvin, 1998

Students who do not have or do not take the time to examine the lives of Anne Frank or Holden Caulfield or Francie Nolan or Randle McMurphy or Scout Finch - are the worse for lost opportunities to measure themselves and the directions of their lives against worthy models. We must give them not only the skills for reading, but also the time to do it - and the will.

Ley, 1979

From a persistent search to find out what makes readers and keeps them reading I can say only that readers and writers are made, in adolescence as in childhood and middle age, in response to a discovery that these activities offer a sanctioned pleasure. Those who read for a lifetime are caught up in the activity as others play musical instruments, sail boats, create gardens, watch football or collect stamps. In all of these things a degree of passion accompanies the doing of them, and enthusiasts seek each other out. Most students who read well say that one of their teachers or another influential adult made them keen by sharing their bookish pleasure with them.

Meek, 1984

“I took a course in speed reading and then read *War and Peace*.  
It was about Russia.”

Student anecdote, Irvin

### 3.1 ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is derived from the Latin verb *adolescere* which means *to grow up*. According to the *International Encyclopaedia of Education* (Husen, 1994), adolescence is defined as the period within the lifespan when most of a person's biological, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is considered childlike to what is considered adult. Adolescence is a period of dramatic challenge, one requiring adjustment to changes in the self, the family, and the peer group. "For both adolescents and their parents, adolescence is a time of excitement and anxiety, of happiness and of troubles, of discovery and of bewilderment, of breaks with the past and yet of continuations of childhood behaviour" (Husen, 1994:83).

The dictionary warns that "adolescence is a double-edged sword". It is a period potentially harbouring a myriad of social problems, but the authors are confident that "there is great resilience among the youth" and in most cases adolescents' growing sense of self or identity will allow them to make responsible decisions and commitments (Husen, 1994:88). The traditional perception of adolescent 'instability' or *sturm und drang* can perhaps be attributed to the fact that with the exception of the period from birth to age three, more physiological and psychological changes occur during early adolescence than at any other time in a person's life (Irvin, 1998:15).

Experienced teachers of adolescents expect learner behaviour that varies from the 'instability' of early adolescence to the more responsible conduct of the young adult. In primary school classes, teachers expect pupils to differ intellectually, emotionally, motivationally and socially from each other and treat their pupils as a heterogeneous group. In secondary school teachers of adolescents have even less reason to expect a class to be homogenous. Not only are there differences between individual learners, but adolescents' 'instability' causes them to react differently from day to day as a result of the fluctuation of hormonal changes in their bodies.

The fundamental physiological, psychological and emotional changes that adolescents undergo are well-documented. The individual's rate of basal metabolism, however, is less obvious and



not often taken into account by teachers. An adolescent may be restless and active one minute and totally lethargic the next.

Students at this age alternate between periods of great physical activity and fatigue. Understanding these different levels of activity may help teachers deal appropriately with the student who seems to fall asleep every afternoon as well as the student who never sits still. Activities in the classroom should be changed periodically: students simply cannot be expected to maintain quiet attention for forty to fifty minutes (Irvin,1998:18).

Adolescents' attention span is at times as short as a primary school child's and their interests vary even more. Adolescents discover the world inside their psyche and outside their family and the community at an exponential rate. A social conscience and moral problems never even acknowledged by the younger child emerge in the adolescent's world. A growing sexual awareness is another major difference between the interests of the primary school child and the adolescent and this distinction is immediately apparent in their reading material.

The American Centre for Early Adolescence (Irvin, 1998:31) has identified seven developmental needs of young adolescents. To develop optimally, adolescents require structure in their lives and clear limits; their identity is dependent on a sense of competence and achievement; adolescents need creative expression of their thoughts and feelings; physical activity is more than a beneficial pastime, it is mandatory; adolescents require positive social interaction with adults and peers; in spite of their protestations, adolescents crave meaningful participation in their families, schools, and communities; they need affirmation in their search for self-definition.

Fenwick and Smith (quoted by Jones, 1999:30-31) divide adolescence into early, middle and late phases, each with distinctive characteristics. The milestones of early adolescence - from approximately eleven to fourteen, indicate that

- \* the adolescent's concern about his or her personal appearance increases;
- \* independence from family becomes more important;
- \* rebellious / defiant behaviours may appear;
- \* the importance of friends increases;
- \* the peer group dominates;
- \* the ego dominates the viewing of all issues.

Middle adolescence (approximately fifteen to sixteen years) is characterized by

- \* becoming less self-absorbed;
- \* the making of own decisions;
- \* experimenting with self-image;
- \* taking risks and seeking new experiences;
- \* developing a sense of values and morality;
- \* beginning to make lasting relationships;
- \* becoming sexually aware;
- \* an increased intellectual awareness;
- \* maturing of interests and skills;
- \* seeking out 'adventures'.

The milestones of late adolescence (seventeen to nineteen) include

- \* an idealistic world view;
- \* a new involvement with the world outside of home and school;
- \* setting long-term goals;
- \* a stabilization of relationships;
- \* seeing adults as 'equals';
- \* seeking to establish independence firmly.

Adolescence is normally a time fraught with risks and problems, but the 'at risk' adolescents - with aggravated problems - are becoming a larger group here and abroad. In their report for The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, the task force of Youth Development and Community Programmes wrote on the perils and opportunities adolescents encounter in the hours after school:

Each day America's 20 million young adolescents decide how they will spend at least five (40 percent) of their waking hours when not in school. For many, these hours harbor both risk and opportunity . . . Time spent alone is not the crucial contribution to high risk. Rather it is what young people do during that time, where they do it, and with whom that lead to positive or negative consequences (Jones, 1999:25).

In the twenty-first century adolescents face vastly different challenges from those encountered fifty, or only twenty years ago. Although simplistic generalisations are unscientific, it is clear that the changes modern youth face are often of an extreme or violent nature. “What is much different today is the severity of those changes, the risk factors with which many young adults live, and the age at which young adults are now making hard decisions - earlier and earlier in each generation” (Jones, 1999:25).

The Carnegie Corporation’s report, *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century* (quoted by Jones, 1999:29), suggests that adults in key positions can help adolescents meet the challenges of adulthood in a changing world that is growing ever more complex. Adults can help adolescents to

- \* find a valued place in a constructive group;
- \* learn how to form close, durable human relationships;
- \* feel a sense of worth as a person;
- \* achieve a reliable basis for making informed choices;
- \* know how to use the support systems available to them;
- \* express constructive curiosity and exploratory behaviour;
- \* find ways of being useful to others;
- \* believe in a promising future with real opportunity;
- \* master social skills, including the ability to manage conflict peacefully;
- \* cultivate the inquiring and problem-solving habits for lifelong learning;
- \* acquire the technical and analytical capabilities to participate in a world class economy;
- \* become an ethical person;
- \* learn the requirement of responsible citizenship;
- \* respect diversity in our pluralistic society.

It is the responsibility of adults in the above-mentioned ‘key positions’ to help adolescents meet the challenges of adulthood and they do so with empathy and fortitude, but they often despair of their task because their adolescents’ ‘instability’ and critical attitude make this task very trying at times. Irvin (1998:23) quotes Steinberg who takes a sociobiological perspective of “intergenerational conflict” (or in layman’s terms: family fighting). He suggests that bickering

and squabbling at puberty is an atavism that ensures that adolescents will spend time away from the family of origin and mate outside the natal group. This has little consolation for the teacher who becomes the target of student frustration, or the embattled parent who is faced with a decade or so in which the adolescent still has to be endured at home. The well-meaning adult should view this kind of disagreement as a vehicle to inform parents about changing self-conceptions and expectations and an opportunity to shed the view that parents can do no wrong. Irvin (1998:23) cautions that this low level conflict must begin with an already strong emotional bond between parents and children. If such a relationship is not strong before puberty - and stepchildren and stepparents have a particularly rough time - this fighting can become destructive. In normal relationships, young adolescents become frustrated because they feel themselves treated like children one minute, and like adults the next. Their ambiguous status in society and their new powers of reasoning cause them frustration that occasionally leads to their lashing out at adults. Teachers of reading will go a long way if they understand the emotional conflicts and frustrations that tug at their adolescent learners and use this 'turbulence' to create a platform for class discussions and extensive reading.

The aim of this chapter is the presentation of extensive reading as an invaluable activity to help adolescents attain optimal development. Few - if any - endeavours can provide the adolescent with the stimulus and support in as many of these developmental needs as extensive recreational reading. Apart from the importance of reading for their emotional, social, moral and intellectual development, it is imperative that adolescents are encouraged to read extensively and intensively because the habits that are laid down now can last a lifetime.

### **3.2 READERSHIP AND THE ADOLESCENT READER**

During their high school years adolescents experiment actively with a variety of possibilities in their search for identity and their experiences with physical and personality changes. Their affiliation with peer groups and their admiration for sport and film stars, musicians and other high-profile figures are well-known. Suitable reading material is, therefore, imperative during this identity crisis since it aids their identification with positive characters from fiction and biography. Books are an ideal place in which to encounter moral and social issues and can be

employed by teachers to stimulate further reading interests. Adolescent reading texts should also answer to adolescents' growing interest in their awakening sexuality.

As learners advance from primary and secondary to tertiary level, they are required to become ever more proficient in reading skills to further their academic and personal development. Adolescents should, therefore, not only read far more books than they did in primary school, they should also read more qualitatively and critically.

In the past twenty years the concept of readership and the need to encourage the reading habit have become issues as great as the provision of Young Adult fiction. Readership promotion first became an universal issue during the International Book Year in 1972 when the UNESCO General Conference approved the promotion of the reading habit as one of four objectives included in a long term project *Books for All* (Staiger & Casey, 1983:8). Since then a number of countries have decided to conduct readership campaigns because their governments have realized that people must read extensively in order to benefit from the advantages that literacy offers.

### **3.2.1 DEVELOPMENT AND READING SKILLS**

Ideally, by the time they reach high school, reading instruction has taken place so successfully that all adolescents have become accomplished readers who read extensively, intensively, analytically and even voraciously. A 'good' adolescent reader is someone who has optimised his or her reading skills and

is confident he can read and expects to understand. He makes guesses about what is not at first obvious or explicit, knowing that if he reads on more will become clear. He has read a fair amount, even a great deal, in bulk and depth, and he changes his reading style to suit the reading matter. (To the inexperienced, a book is just a book.) The confident reader moves beyond the information given to ask 'What does the author mean?' He embarks on long reads, accepting the uncertainty of the first page of a novel, for example, and understanding how the ending helps him to reconstruct events from the beginning. He detects the author's tone of voice, and comes to recognize irony or

sarcasm. The events in the book are matched against the reader's experience; he can recognize jokes, allegories or puzzles as well as authoritative statements backed by evidence. He models his writing on authors he knows well. The most obvious difference between the skilled reader and others seems to be in the diversity of their abilities, the amount they read and the satisfactions that follow (Meek, 1984:194).

Practice, however, falls sadly short of this ideal.

As with early reading, researchers differ greatly in their focus on what they deem the 'basic' reading skills required of the adolescent. National departments of education expect that by the time adolescents reach high school, they will have mastered the *necessary* reading skills and display a *minimal competency* in the decoding and interpretation of text (Chisholm *et al.*, 2000:14). When minimal competency only is required, it is clear that education departments do not even hope that adolescent learners have also become voracious, discriminating readers. To an active reader, much more is required than 'minimal' interpretation of texts: *optimal* reading is what adolescents require to foster personal, academic, and intellectual growth. Such benefits, however, can only accrue maximally if learners choose to read during their free or leisure time (Harris & Sipay, 1990:655).

The average teacher's approach to reading falls tragically short of the ideal. The acquisition of optimal reading is certainly not the norm. In many high schools the main focus of reading education narrows to those students who have trouble attaining the minimal level of competence and this turns attention away from providing education to the gifted and particularly to the broad range of students who can attain the minimal level fairly easily but are not encouraged to go beyond it (Purves & Niles, 1984:8). Most schools are satisfied with "merely bringing students to a level of competency instead of helping them attain a level of *mastery* appropriate to their age, their view of themselves, and their aspirations" (Purves & Niles, 1984:8, quoting from the *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*). Some researchers are even more pessimistic: Harris and Sipay (1990:655) believe that what a narrow focus on a 'basic skills' approach has produced is a nation of 'illiterate literates', i.e. individuals who can, but choose not to, read.

Even with adequate reading skills, adolescents are developmentally at a crossroad: either they become avidly interested in reading, or lose interest in reading as an essential pastime altogether. High school, therefore, provides the last chance for teachers and the school to help students become proficient and active readers. If adolescent learners lose interest in reading, chances are slim indeed that they will develop into lifelong readers at a later stage.

Whereas reading instruction in primary school is primarily the development of a skill, reading at high school becomes a reading *event*. Primary school learners are expected simply to enjoy stories and poems for their own sake and, when inclined to do so, react personally to the texts; adolescents are introduced to the whole literary experience. Karolides (2000:7) describes high school literary study from a reader-response perspective, claiming it to be 'revolutionary' in nature since the reader reacts actively to words and situations and the interplay of one word or situation with another. Before commencing to read, a reader has certain expectations or projections of the text. Later features - words, events, or information - may solidify these impressions or bring about a revision. Clues of context are perceived and integrated. The reader constructs a constantly modified 'scaffold of understandings' attempting to account for the text's many features. If there is a second reading, additional or revised nuances can be revealed. Depending on the text, the reader's involvement and reading maturity, the mature reading process is always reflective and demanding. Since the reader makes conscious and subconscious choices, the concept of *selective attention* comes into play. One semantic nuance may be selected over another; one emotional state may be heightened in the interplay among the text, the individual's emotional attitudes, and the surrounding situation.

Experienced teachers know that developing such high levels of reading and guiding the learners through the processes of appreciating literature is a daunting task, and one that cannot be approached in a *laissez faire* manner.

### 3.2.2 READING INTERESTS

Good teachers have always used young adolescents' intense interest in themselves and their awakening sexuality, their emotional ups and downs, their exploration of newly-defined social roles and a new capacity for analytical thought to help them become more enthusiastic about literature. Whereas some teachers view these turbulent manifestations as interruptions to instruction, responsible teachers recognize them as opportunities to capitalize on student strengths and interests to facilitate learning (Irvin, 1998:6).

Not all educators view adolescents this positively. Jones (1999:69) refers to studies in which librarians actually proclaim their dislike of adolescents in their libraries. Not all librarians suffer from *ephebiphobia* (which is a fear and loathing of youth, according to Jones) and many actually take the trouble to understand adolescent interests and help to bring adolescents and books together.

It can generally be said that children and young adults demonstrate an interest in stories that have characters of their own age. Whereas much younger children identify more readily with fantasy figures such as animals (and talking toothbrushes *et al.*) that participate in childlike experiences, adolescents prefer more realistic portrayals of characters their own age who are involved in exciting adventures. According to Harris and Sipay (1990:658), children's interests expand as they grow older, but narrow again by the last two years of high school. During adolescence, motivation for reading begins to shift from reading for pleasure to reading for self-understanding, and reading interests begin to approximate those of adults. Although a voraciously reading adolescent is something inspired teachers devoutly wish for, it is not enough just to encourage learners to read enthusiastically if they are not guided to read discriminately as well. Reading for the sake of reading, regardless of quality, is a self-defeating exercise:

I believe that it matters what young people read and reject the idea that as long as they are reading something all will be well, but tact and patience are needed. We relinquish whatever hold we have on our children's reading progress if we disparage what they choose . . . Adolescent reading enthusiasts thrive on challenge and encouragement (Meek, 1984:188).



To match book and reader correctly is the basis upon which enthusiastic reading rests. Reading ability, coupled with positive expectations, must match the correct book selection before adolescents will read enthusiastically and extensively. A book that is too simple or too difficult, or about events and characters that the reader finds irrelevant, will eventually do more harm than good. Nell warns that it takes an inordinate expenditure of energy in order to maintain reading a ‘mismatched’ book; he has found that it takes “a concentration effort of 67 percent, or thirteen times more than the effort required for reading a really enjoyable book” (Nell, 1988:260). A poorly chosen book is speedily abandoned and the adolescent reader will immediately settle for another activity instead.

Matching the ‘right’ book to the interested reader can be done by adapting Piaget’s developmental levels to book selection. As children enter the period of Piaget’s ‘concrete operations’ phase (cf. 1.4.1), approximately ages seven to eleven, they have attained sufficient understanding of their own identity to relate to people outside the immediate family circle. Through play and language they seek to understand the physical and social world, making this the time for realistic fiction which will encourage children to interact with story characters who are involved in some sort of conflict resolution. During Piaget’s ‘formal operations’ phase, i.e. the period from eleven to approximately fifteen years, the validity of information is questioned as the ability to compare, perceive and contrast things develops. This period is called ‘early adolescence’ and during this time children like reading about the following:

- \* Animal stories. The enthusiastic reader, it seems, can read 150 to 200 such stories before they tire of this phase. Boys read more about wild animals whereas girls prefer domesticated animals (Geysler, 1986:35).
- \* Adventure stories, especially enjoyed by boys. The characters must use their wits and courage to overcome their problems. Perhaps someone of their own age gets involved in a bank robbery, looking for a lost treasure, or crooks who threaten innocent people. Boys like stories in unusual places like a cave or a dark wood whereas girls prefer more familiar places like a deserted house. The success of series like the *Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew* and teenage horror series like *Goosebumps* bear witness to their craving for adventure.

- \* Stories about the supernatural. Adolescents like to be frightened by stories about ghosts, supernatural beings and misshapen creatures. The cemetery is an ideal setting for such stories.
- \* Sport stories. Boys like stories about rugby, athletics, swimming. Remarkably, early adolescents like to identify with someone who stars in a sport they do not play or are bad in. Girls do not like sport stories to the same extent.
- \* Stories about young people in other countries.
- \* Stories about home and family are mostly liked by girls and not by boys.
- \* Humorous stories. Humour depends on the chronological age but is always popular.
- \* Historical stories. Girls adore this, but history is secondary to the romance - and often just sketchy. In general: boys prefer facts over fiction. Girls enjoy facts and fiction, and as they grow older, they prefer sentimental fiction. Boys like science fiction more than girls do (Geyser, 1986:36).

A 1986 in-depth survey of the reading interests of British children conducted by Davies (cited by Marshall, 1988:214) endorses the above preferences and adds the following: war, science, true stories, views of the future, America, hospitals and football.

Early adolescents should be helped to acquire the skills to know what to read to satisfy their needs. School now has one of the last chances to help learners become independent, confident producers and comprehenders of language. Teachers' choices are even more crucial than before and unfortunately young adolescents dislike many of the titles considered classics by their English teachers and often express their loathing of their prescribed works for this reason. Adolescents especially like books in which the central character's problems are resolved successfully.

During *middle adolescence* (approximately fifteen and sixteen years of age), the adolescent reader begins to acquire a taste for the following:

- \* Non-fictional adventure stories that are more realistic than before. First-hand experiences of mountain climbing, solo yachting, sailing *et al.*
- \* War stories - boys at this age feel the need to test themselves in danger situations.

- \* Historical romances - if historical backgrounds were considered interesting during early adolescence, they are even more so now.
- \* Love stories for girls.
- \* Stories about other adolescents and their problems - especially characters a year or so older, living in more or less the same circumstances and community - thereby testing reactions and solutions to problems (Geyser, 1986:36).

Robert Westall, the author and writer of thrilling tales for adolescents, summarizes what he regards as popular reading for this stage:

These, then, seem to be the vectors in writing for thirteen-year-old boys. Violence; a good plot; humour; love of animals; nature as a potential threat; a sense of quest into mystery or a journey through space or time; undertaken by a gang, and full of appropriate detail, either in reality or fantasy. A searching out into new worlds, real or fantastic, a need to search the minds and lives of others. You may say I am stating the obvious. But when many of these vectors cross, as in Tolkien or Richard Adams, you get a best-seller, for adults as well as boys (1985:25).

Westall's definition goes a long way to explain the popularity of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series written more than a decade later.

During late adolescence, with readers sixteen to twenty years of age, or roughly the period of final school years and early college or university, stories are as various as adults' fiction, but biography becomes more popular at this stage.

A comprehensive study conducted in a Midwestern library in America in 1993 (Fronius, quoted by Jones, 1999:104) reflects the reading interests of adolescents. The following is a summary of popularity of the different genres:

<b>GENRE</b>	<b>6th</b>	<b>8th</b>	<b>10th</b>
Realistic	54%	37%	22%
Mystery	20%	21%	31%
Horror	-	14%	3%
Humour	-	3%	6%
Nonfiction	13%	9%	-
Fantasy	13%	3%	1%
Romance	-	9%	19%
Historical	-	1%	6%
Sci fi		-2%	13%

#### **Breakdown by Gender and Most Popular**

<b>GENRE</b>	<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>BOYS</b>
Realistic	44%	10%
Mystery	18	23
Horror	12	8
Romance	8	-
Nonfiction	7	15
Humour	3	12
Fantasy	3	11
Historical	3	1
Sci fi	1	19

It is a pity that most studies neglect series, 'trade books' or teen magazines since publishers and librarians report on the growing popularity of all kinds of trendy reading material. Boys tend to read series books specially written with their interests in mind, but girls read across these artificial boundaries. An unfortunate limitation of this and other studies is the fact that nonfiction for young adults - an enormous albeit neglected field - is not specified or categorized. Surely most of the respondents read about the lives of rock stars and other famous people, urban

legends, travel, comics, information books, TV guides, instruction manuals, exploring the unknown, how-to books, books about dinosaurs, *The Guinness Book of World Records*, diet books and other material considered 'nonfiction', and yet none of the tenth grade learners acknowledged this in the above study. What is clear from other studies, however, is that young adults do read nonfiction; this interest in nonfiction crosses ability levels, and on the whole, teenage boys tend to read more nonfiction than teenage girls (Carter & Abrahamson, 1990:3). Green (1987:11) deplores the abundance of poor quality books for adolescent girls such as *Heartlines* and *Sweet Valley High*. Teenage girls are enthusiastic readers of adult best-sellers of the romance genre. The popularity of these romantic novels may be explained by the fact that they adopt the formula of many top-rated television programmes.

Marshall (1988:79) identifies the 1970s as the time "at which there was a coming together of certain conditions to produce a new genre of books for young people, the teenage novel." Starting in the 1960s in America, followed by the UK and Sweden, the teenage novel was the result of the following conditions:

- \* the 'baby boomers' had then reached adolescence;
- \* the economic climate provided adolescents and their parents with sufficient money to create a market specifically for teenagers, perhaps, according to Marshall, for the first time in history;
- \* the recognition by writers, educators and publishers that adolescents were a new breed of reader, too old for children's books, not yet emotionally mature enough for many adult books, with a definable set of interests, anxieties and problems

Public libraries had begun to create a teenage section by the middle 1980s - approximately the same time school libraries became media centres - and found themselves inundated with the demand for teenage books. At present there is a wide selection of books for the South African young adult reader, and this is good news for the embattled teacher who knows that "the aim of a school's reading policy must be, however, not only to get all the pupils reading, but also to extend their reading interests" (Foster, 1979:114).

### 3.3 THE ADOLESCENT READER AT SCHOOL

Parents play the primary role in the creation of a desire for reading in their children; teachers become the subsequent agents to initiate the child into the mysteries of the reading process, not only because they decide what a child reads in class, but more importantly because their personal attitudes towards reading are communicated, directly and indirectly, to their pupils (Irving, 1980:9).

School should not only teach children the basic reading skills through formal reading instruction, but also guide them in their choice of reading materials, making school uniquely responsible for encouraging leisure reading. In practice, however, schools and teachers give very little - if any - guidance and encouragement in this regard. A variety of reasons may be cited for this negligence and the decline in the level of high school reading:

Surely changes in technology have changed the role of print; surely changes in society have changed the importance of 'higher literacy'; surely whirlwinds in the curriculum have affected the certainty about what should be taught (Purves & Niles, 1984:7).

A succession of trends in curriculum design can further be blamed for teacher uncertainty and declining high school reading (Chisholm *et al*, 2000:44 & 81). Little encouragement is given to extensive-intensive reading during the 'back-to-basics' movement with war cries of 'basic skills', 'minimum competencies', 'survival skills'. Although public concern about *basic* knowledge and the *basic skills* in education is equally valid, educational elements essential to the attainment of a productive and meaningful life have been neglected in favour of 'simplistic solutions.' Competency, after all, is not mastery. *The Essentials of Education*, a document compiled by a number of educators concerned about this curricular oversimplification, warns against the 'three easy tendencies' of

- \* limiting the essentials to 'the three R's' in a society that is highly technological and complex;
- \* defining the essentials by what is tested at a time when tests are severely limited in what they can measure;

- \* reducing the essentials to a few ‘skills’ when it is obvious that people use a combination of skills, knowledge, and feelings to come to terms with their world (Purves & Niles, 1984:12).

Departments of education should reject these fatally short-term ‘simplistic tendencies’ which concentrate on the training of a few basic skills only. After all, “the overarching goal of education is to develop informed, thinking citizens capable of participating in both domestic and world affairs” (Purves & Niles, 1984:12).

Another central concept of education is the interdependence of skills and content, since skills and abilities do not grow in isolation, but are embedded in content (Purves & Niles, 1984:13). As adolescents undergo experiences that lead to emotional and social maturity, they develop the ability to reason by using language and other symbol systems.

Students master these skills and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking, and writing about science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of our intellectual, social, and cultural heritage. As they learn about their world and its heritage they necessarily deepen their skills in language and reasoning and acquire the basis for emotional, aesthetic, and social growth. They also become aware of the world around them and develop an understanding and appreciation of the interdependence of the many facets of that world (Purves & Niles, 1984:13).

Education policy - cf. Curriculum 2005, specifically the directives for LLC (Language, Literacy, Communication) - aims to develop adolescents’ ability to use language, to think and to communicate effectively, to reason logically and to use abstractions and symbols with power and ease, to express themselves through the arts and to understand the artistic expressions of others, to acquire the capacity to meet unexpected challenges and make informed value judgments. Ultimately, education should help learners to recognize and to use their full learning potential and to prepare to go on learning for a lifetime. The actualisation of the essentials of education is a continuing process, far more demanding and significant than a mere listing of isolated skills assumed to be ‘basic’. In their approach to teaching adolescents, teachers must replace ‘minimal competencies’ with ‘optimal learnings’.

Since all aspects of adolescent reading education, i.e. the teaching of reading skills, the management of the reading event in class, the study of literature, guidance in suitable reading material and the selection of books, are the domain of the teacher, reasons for reluctant reading should be looked for in schools, education departments and teacher training.

### **3.3.1 THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL**

One of the main reasons for the decline in adolescent reading is that school leaves very little - if any - time for voluntary, recreational reading. Reading as an activity is simply no longer a priority. Many schools have good supplies of literary texts but even they do not encourage their pupils to take them out and certainly do not provide the time in class to read literature for the mere sake of pleasure. All too often the only reading that is done - apart from the examining of prescribed books - is for the gathering of information to use in other subjects. The solution seems obvious, but schools simply do not schedule the time necessary for extensive reading, and this ultimately undermines the very *raison d'être* of reading instruction.

If reading is considered a skill, it is right and necessary for such a skill to be practised regularly. In her report to UNESCO, Irving (1980:9) emphasises that one of the most important tasks facing the teacher of adolescents is to increase the amount and range of their voluntary reading since this impacts profoundly on their reading attainment, linguistic and experiential development.

However, not only do schools not live up to the ideal in their encouragement of voluntary reading, they sometimes actually thwart the very desire for reading.

Few if any children come to school with a negative attitude toward reading, but an uncomfortably large number of students do not like to read by the time they reach middle level schools. The numbers are proportionately higher by the time a student has graduated from high school (Barmore & Morse, 1979:75).

There are many reasons for reluctant reading in high school (see 3.4.1), but most of the negative perceptions must be laid at the door of the teaching methods employed at school. Some



traditional *instructional* procedures used to teach reading as a subject may be inherently damaging for the following reasons:

- \* a skill-oriented, word-focused approach that leads children away from the essential understanding that reading is a meaning-getting process;
- \* sufficient background information and the ability to manipulate the concepts from a piece of material often are not adequately developed prior to reading;
- \* materials used may not be interesting or important to individual children and they may therefore see no purpose in performing tasks other than because they are assigned (Farr, 1981:5).

The accusation that learners simply do not find the reading material at school interesting and relevant is levelled by many researchers (Chambers, 1979; Usova, 1979; Irving, 1980; Farr, 1981; Meek, 1984, Geyser, 1986; *et al.*). It is a *Catch 22* situation: if children do not find reading a rewarding, enjoyable, meaningful activity, no force, system or coercion will be strong enough to “make them” read enthusiastically; if high school pupils find reading a boring, irrelevant, unidentifiable experience they will most probably never come to regard reading as essential, neither now nor when they are adult, and they will become part of the millions of ‘illiterate literates’ (Harris & Sipay, 1990:655) or the so-called *aliterates* (Palmer, 1995:20).

Uninteresting and meaningless reading material alone is not responsible for adolescents’ lack of enthusiasm for reading. The necessary shift in focus from primary school can also be blamed since the objectives of high school reading may have become too narrow. Whereas the focus of reading instruction during the first four years of schooling is on the acquisition of reading skills, reading instruction for adolescents shifts the focus to the refining of comprehension, deductive and critical skills. The development from primary to high school reading is often referred to as the shift from ‘learning to read’ to ‘reading to learn’, i.e. from emergent and beginning literacy to expository reading that develops concepts and gleans factual knowledge. A too constricted focus, however, neglects the ‘pleasure principle’ (Meek, 1984).

In some communities the dearth of relevant reading activities can be blamed on the schooling system and poor facilities as well as a culture of non-reading. Many Black South African

adolescents do not read as a result of the high rate of illiteracy: “it is estimated that 47% of black young people are functionally illiterate. Money is a crucial factor: families need bread before books. And books today are very expensive” (Brindley, 1993:221). In disadvantaged communities well-stocked libraries are a rarity. Many schools have no full-time librarian or no librarian at all. Where there is a library or media centre, the resources are usually inadequate and the books tattered and old-fashioned. When learners from such schools are asked what they have read, only their set books can be quoted. In these communities a reading tradition needs to be created virtually from scratch.

The figures for learners who have not yet mastered the skill of independent, discriminating reading by the time they are in high school (see 3.6.3), make it easy to understand why researchers despair of the lack of ‘quality reading’ in the average class (Chisholm *et al.*, 2000:44; 68-69). Sometimes “in-class reading and out-of-class reading assignments become an almost daily battle and struggle between teacher and students. This despairing situation often leads the teacher into abandoning the giving of reading assignments as the results tend to be fruitless and futile” (Usova, 1979:30).

Faced with so little time in high school, teachers feel pressured to adhere strictly to the syllabus ‘to get through the work’ and often neglect their duty to encourage recreational reading when they concentrate solely on prescribed texts. The reading of prescribed books can - and should - be a rewarding experience but it very often is not - as the loathing first year students usually profess to have for their high school books testifies (Lancaster, in D’Ath, 1994:2; pilot study, cf. Chapter 4).

Teachers must help the learner appreciate literature study more fully without damaging the enjoyment of literature. “I am sure every reader can identify at least one book, poem or play that was ruined by over-enthusiastic or misguided ‘analysis’ ” (Irving, 1980:15). In their defence, teachers of adolescents often feel they are victimized by the stringent demands of the syllabus:

Whereas primary-school teachers can discuss and encourage voluntary (freely chosen) reading matter, secondary-school teachers feel constrained by the need to develop concepts and factual knowledge, which usually results in little or no time devoted either

to encouraging voluntary reading or developing more sophisticated reading skills for gathering and processing information (Irving, 1980:11).

Therefore, if fiction is only encountered in class for the traditional study of literature which concentrates more on analysis and criticism than simple enjoyment, it is small wonder that learners derive so little pleasure or relevance from it.

### 3.3.2 TEACHERS

It may be argued that since adolescent learners arriving in secondary school have (or have not) already acquired the habit of reading for pleasure from their parents and primary school, there is little the secondary language teachers can do about it. After all, it is said, *they* are not the primary motivators in the promotion of reading. However, much still remains to be achieved. It is fortunately easier to affect change on the reading habits of children by mobilizing a principal or inspiring senior teachers than by convincing society at large of the importance of recreational reading.

Inspiring principals and senior teachers to stock books worthy of a child's attention that offer immediate as well as lasting rewards, is unfortunately easier said than done. The inadequacy of existing book stocks at schools can usually be attributed to the fact that too many teachers are depressingly ignorant about what is available. Harris and Sipay (1990:670) refer to a study by Mangieri and Corboy that found that teachers know very little about children's literature: only 9% of 571 respondents could name three children's books written in the past five years. They also found that teachers did not know how to promote recreational reading since only 11% could name three or more such activities. Since there is also evidence that teachers lack knowledge of their pupils' interests, it is unlikely that teachers can adequately match children's interests with suitable and relevant material. D'Ath (1994:2) cites a study that found that 30,5% of 210 first year teacher training students who filled in a questionnaire about their own reading experiences at school, said that they have never learnt to like reading. It is an open question how such teachers will be able to encourage the learners in their classes one day.

Teacher training programmes for both junior and senior phase teachers are especially to blame for the lack of adequate preparation in practical teaching in general and children's literature in particular.

Regrettably, research in classrooms has consistently shown that average practice falls considerably short of best practice. Why is this so? The general form of the answer is that teacher education is woefully inadequate and that teachers typically have impoverished opportunities for continuing professional growth and development. A major shortcoming of teacher education is that it depends too much on lectures and textbooks. Preservice teachers, especially, do not have the experience with children or with teaching to make sense of all this abstract talk (Anderson, 1993:35).

Hugo (1999:93) states that the language proficiency of many South African students is not developed sufficiently to give them the ability to use their higher level cognitive abilities when reading, writing or speaking, whether in English or in their first language. One of the main reasons for this restricted proficiency is the language ability of the teachers themselves.

Sometimes teacher training in South Africa does not equip teachers with principles of language acquisition. . . . Many learners in South Africa have a perception that they are being inadequately prepared for their matric examinations by unqualified teachers . . . This problem is exacerbated on the tertiary level, as greater demands are made on students' language skills which include reading comprehension and study reading (Hugo, 1999:93).

D'Ath quotes Lambley (1994:92) who declares that teachers trained in the United States felt that since their initial teacher training was inadequate, they did not enter the profession as properly equipped teachers of reading and after years of practice still felt the need for training in the more crucial areas of the subject. Teacher training programmes specifically are criticised by much of the available research for lack of adequate or continuing preparation in children's literature.

Ideally, when teaching reading, teachers should not only concentrate on the 'mechanics' of reading, but also address one or more of the *purposes* of reading which are, inter alia, to obtain information and respond appropriately, to reflect upon ideas, experiences and opinions, and to

gain imaginative and aesthetic pleasure (Hunter-Carsch, 1995:149). These aspects are neglected or not addressed at all during teacher training.

Teachers of adolescents often rest on the assumption that the actual teaching of reading is done at primary school. High school teachers, however, should also *teach* reading, observe and test (or record) the children's reading development with reference to reading outcomes. Learners should be led to read for information, for enjoyment, to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft, to understand genre and develop further knowledge about language (Hunter-Carsch, 1995:149).

What extensive reading researchers have found lacking in most teaching training curricula, is a course that endeavours to teach the prospective teachers about the quantity and quality of children's literature and the question is asked how teachers will know about children's books if they do not simply become au fait with them by reading voraciously:

The content of courses of professional studies always seems to me to be overly concerned with *how* - to the detriment, sometimes even the exclusion, of those much more important 'serving men', *why* and *what* (Moss, 1985:66).

### **3.3. THE ROLE OF TELEVISION IN THE LIFE OF THE ADOLESCENT**

The influence of television is multifaceted, but researchers agree that one of its most harmful effects is the fact that it is so very time-consuming. In this respect statistics alone paint a bleak picture: the Human Sciences Research Council monitored children's viewing habits in South Africa over a twelve-year period and found - even *before* the advent of satellite television and the resulting bigger choice of enticing programmes - that pupils in grades five to twelve average twenty hours of viewing a week - accounting for up to 40 % of leisure time (Geysler quotes Barker, 1986:22). American children, who have had a greater choice of channels for a long time, also watch increasingly more television each year. The average child watches television about four hours a day

and for children in lower socio-economic families the amount of time thus spent is even greater. In either case, the child spends more time with TV than he or she spends talking to parents, playing with peers, attending school, or reading books. TV time usurps family

time, play time, and the reading time that could promote language development (Purves & Niles, 1984:5).

Trelease (1982:29) states that “no study of reading habits or use of leisure time fails to reflect on the role of television . . . In its short lifetime, television has become the major stumbling block to literacy in America. For all its technological achievement, television’s negative impact on children’s reading habits - and therefore their thinking - is enormous.” He has found that ninety-eight per cent of the homes in America have a television set and nearly one out of every two families has more than one set; the average set is on for six and a quarter hours a day; the television industry estimates that two million children *under* the age of eleven are still watching television at midnight each night; the average six-year-old child has already seen more than 5000 hours of television in his young lifetime - and that is more time than it takes to obtain a bachelor’s degree.

Television’s pernicious influence on children’s thinking is deplored by most researchers (Jones, 1999:57). Suhor (1984:22) states that “the TV generation is at a disadvantage with relation to ‘deep reading’, that is, creating rich images inferentially from printed texts and grasping the propositional content of expository materials”. Suhor also condemns television for other - more subtle - effects than the simple displacement of one activity by another. Suhor (1984:22) cites television’s negative impact on children’s ability to pay attention:

Generally, the capacity to pay attention is enhanced by maturity and heightened by stability and order in the environment. Because this was also true in the past (when children paid attention better), we should look for new elements in modern childhood and examine their effects. Television viewing is the most obvious new and major factor because it is children’s primary waking activity. Television’s most successful techniques - short segments, fast action, quick cuts, fades, dissolves - break time into perceptual bits. Reading requires perceptual continuity to track line after line. Television habituates the mind to short takes, not to the continuity of thought required by reading. The pace and speed of television cause children to be easily distracted; they are inundated with too many messages and cannot stop to make sense of this confusion.

Focusing and paying attention to print becomes an unnatural strain for the conditioned TV viewer.

Even more alarming than the time television consumes is the trivialising and sensationalising of content. Indiscriminate television viewing inures children to the ‘superficiality’ of much of the content of dramas and series, and prevents the reading of more demanding books. Meek considers that one of the worst effects of television is the suggestion that every activity has to be both simple and diverting.

To read to oneself takes far more effort than watching television. Television is fast-moving and action-packed and children, who have grown up never having known a world without television, find that if a book does not plunge them into action at a fast pace, complain that the story is boring and refuse to read further. Many children find reading to be an anti-social activity and do not consider it a pleasure to read. . . . To read takes time and effort; to watch television is easier, for adults too (Meek, 1984:93).

Not only do the demands of reading become too inconvenient, the themes that have interested children in the past are relinquished after too much exposure to the focus of the adult programmes during prime time. Television’s ‘superficialising’ has led to

the suppression of critical functions linked with the oral traditions paralleled in contemporary popular art, in which heroic and demonic prototypes - Superman, Agent 007, Darth Vader, J.R. Ewing - are close to the surface of the work. Moreover, artistic formats, genres, and means of transmission such as the comic strip, the TV sitcom, and the film encourage a quick gloss rather than studied analysis of the work (Suhor, 1984:23).

In spite of attempts at age restrictions, the very themes exploited on television have changed the way many children view the world. It has been argued by a number of authorities that “many children lack the ability to read books which interest them as television has developed interests and appreciation levels above their reading ability levels” (Palmer, 1995:20). Sensational, ‘superficialising’ television may forever have impaired themes that have traditionally belonged

to children - for instance, television is directly responsible for the eroticisation of much young adult fiction.

A UNESCO report on the promotion of readership (Staiger & Casey, 1983:61) cites a variety of negative aspects of television viewing, including the fact that television may reduce the child's ability to think critically and limits the use of language. The authors; however, also refer to a brochure published by the International Reading Association, *You Can Use Television to Stimulate Your Child's Reading Habits*, in which the following rather lame arguments in favour of television viewing are given:

- \* television is relaxing and amusing;
- \* television can help to enlarge the child's vocabulary and background of experiences;
- \* television characters can help the child relate to someone who is making a worthwhile contribution to our world;
- \* careful television watching and listening can sharpen visual powers and strengthen good listening habits;
- \* many television programmes and books contain some common elements: conversation, character development, setting (time and place), plot.

The same report refers to the investigators of a study who were alarmed that the majority of children "accepted television without any critical spirit, without analysis, in silence, and almost total apathy, and they received more or less unconsciously all which was presented to them with a great ultimate confusion of ideas" (Staiger & Casey, 1983:61).

Not only has television had a far-reaching effect on modern children's view of the world, but it has influenced the writing style adopted by modern authors writing for young people. In modern young adult fiction, dialogue enjoys far greater importance than description or reflection, trimming down descriptive passages. Leeson (1985:187) says that one may test the extent of this by taking books written twenty years ago and comparing them for pace and the 'realism' of dialogue with books written recently: apart from the superficiality of the average exchange, clipped sentences, the use of expletives and meaningless slang abound.



Finally, indiscriminate and unrestricted viewing - even on week nights - results in children and adolescents being simply too tired for lack of sleep to pay attention during school hours. The term *bedtime reading* takes on new meaning when a teacher reads a prescribed work to a class full of sleepy adolescents.

### **3.2.4 OTHER ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

Television has long been regarded as a major culprit in the decline in qualitative and quantitative recreational reading, and another of its crimes is the fact that it has brought in its wake a rise in the popularity of other electronic media such as the Internet, computer games and virtual reality programmes. Some educators herald the technologies as a revitalization of education; others despair of their influence:

The game culture is endemic; the superficiality of the media encourages laziness and mediocrity, the information glut breeds lack of discrimination. The computer, however, is not only becoming as pervasive as the television in both home and school, but the union of computer with television and telephone appears to be forcing social change as well as educational upheaval (Murphy, 1996:128).

In the last decade or so, the cost of home computers has made them more readily available to the affluent so that poverty-stricken populations are even more disadvantaged than before, with the resulting gap between the haves and the have-nots growing even wider. However, although access to computers and the Internet is limited to the affluent, even children from impoverished homes come to school now with some experience with technology, including computers (Sulzby, 1993:58).

The electronic media are changing the very nature of education in general and literacy in particular. Littman (quoted by Vandergrift, 1996:170) lists some of the advantages of computer network implementation in school:

Computer networks can promote effective learning, research, and instruction; stimulate user involvement; promote the acquisition, retention, use, and dissemination of new knowledge; and lead to the discovery of imaginative classroom material, thereby

enriching the educational process. As computer networks become widely available in lower schools and middle schools, their capabilities to facilitate information exchange, communication, and instruction will make these networks indispensable resources in the process of providing alternative ways of knowing for children.

Technology can also play an important role in the teaching of reading and writing (Irvin, 1998:60). Educators have researched the use of word processors in the acquisition of reading and language skills for at least fifteen years now but other electronic media have mostly been treated as unrelated to literacy. This is no longer possible, as the term *literacy* has now expanded to become *literacies* and includes visual literacy and computer literacy.

Suhor (1984:22) states that the influence of technology has changed the literate to a multi-literate society. This multi-literate, multi-sensory orientation, brought about by television in particular, (and by radio, films, the telephone, computers, lasers, the Internet *et al*), has profound effects on social organization and on the way people experience the world. Such a multi-sensory orientation is “reminiscent of the organic, holistic perception of preliterate humankind. The linear, eye-oriented bias of print culture has been challenged by electronic media that call for wider, more richly interrelated sensory responses” (Suhor, 1984:22).

Whereas video games contain some traditional literacy (direction, comments by characters in the games, etc.) more important may be ideas that at first seem farfetched as literacy. Videotapes, computer games, and home videotape and videodisc players embody the concept of ‘permanence’ that has often been applied to written literacy. . . Some of the features that have been attributed to complex literature can also be applied to movies on video; viewers can have more and more complex or different understandings with different viewings (Sulzby, 1993:58).

Since relatively little research has so far been done on the influence of computers and the Internet on literacy *per se*, it is impossible to say what the long-term effect of electronic media will be on education in general and reading in particular. What is already clear is that the very permanence of print has changed since the advent of the personal computer. Children and

adolescents who spend a lot of time with computers - whether perusing the Internet or merely playing games - have come to expect another kind of text than the traditional one afforded by books.

We know it takes time to learn to read and to enjoy reading books. Yet today's youth have other activities, such as television, computers, and video games, that compete for their attention. Hypertext has the capability to contribute to a decline in reading time or to provide an incentive to master the reading process. Hypertext may also change the reading process to include interpretations of sound and movement along with printed word (Meyer, quoted by Murphy, 1996:129).

McLuhan (quoted by Purves & Niles, 1984:4) states that in the 1960s television as "a medium differed so radically from print that it called for and stimulated different kinds of perceptual and mental activity on the part of viewers". Sulzby (1993:58) asserts that since electronic texts "activate audio and video enactments, so the boundaries between standard orthography and other forms of representation become blurry." Books with traditional print may be considered 'boring' when compared to interactive, animated electronic texts. Publishers and authors address this problem with books that imitate - or parody - the electronic text; for instance, *Captain Underpants* cartoons attempt to entice a young audience to read by referring to the 'Flip-o-rama' activity of handling paper.

However, not only are technological advances inevitable, their discriminating use can be both necessary and beneficial, just like television. By far the majority of users of the Internet, e-mail and personal computers, after all, employ language to communicate on it, which is why

computers and other technology are beginning to be called *tools*, including *literacy tools*.

As parts of human evolution and endeavour, the term *tool* has held a privileged status. Tools can be very simple and powered by hand or brute force, they can be machines; or they can simply be the tools of a trade or status, the implements people normally use. We frequently speak of books and pencils as being tools in the sense of implements to do things, to manipulate, communicate, or embody thoughts. We are at an era of seeing the rapid development of a set of tools that are changing human lives - just as other tools, including the pencil or printing press, did in the past (Sulzby, 1993:59).

It is impossible to ignore the pace at which the world is moving away from print: ATMs, debit cards or clicking away with a computer's mouse eliminate the necessity of writing a check; libraries have become media centres that provide books and journals on CD-ROM; e-mail can completely dispense with the writing of letters. "Literacy educators, for the first time, are questioning the centrality of books in teaching reading and writing" (Irvin, 1998:59). Nobody disputes the fact that the computer as a tool has enormous value as an information retrieval system. Suhor (1984:27) compares the difficulty of recovering data until a decade or so ago and the ease of access that is possible with computers now, to the difference between the coming of the book in the wake of the scroll. Quick access to specific information was extremely difficult even in Roman and Greek times with the cumbersome technology of the rolling of scrolls. The coming of the "book form around 400 AD. - with its binding, cover and pagination - allowed for indexing and relatively rapid access to desired information." The now almost outdated technology of the movie film, phonograph record, audiotape, and videotape are like scrolls in a sense because they are 'rolled up' in a manner and they present problems of access similar to the scrolling of book rolls. On the other hand, "laser videodiscs are like books in their 'researchability', except that access is much faster than using a printed index and flipping through pages. Through a simple system of directions, a viewer can immediately get to the precise frame(s) desired on a laser disc" (Suhor, 1984:27).

Reinking (quoted by Irvin, 1998: 59-60) argues that there are substantial differences between printed and electronic texts which may eventually alter current conceptions of literacy. He delineates ways in which printed and electronic texts differ:

- \* Interactivity and malleability. Electronic texts can respond to individual readers as they manipulate text to meet their personal needs and these texts can be programmed to monitor what a reader is doing while reading a particular text and to adjust the text presentation accordingly. Reading truly becomes an interactive process.
- \* The ascendancy of nonverbal elements. Nonverbal elements of electronic text such as pictures, icons, movies, animations, and sound are available and can be integrated with student writing. Literacy has traditionally included print and illustrations only, but now these nonverbal elements of electronic text raise the question of what print is exactly.

- \* New textual structures. Hypertexts facilitate reading and writing in a nonlinear fashion and allow interaction with other readers and writers. Some teachers are responding to this new format by requiring learners to write a synthesis of information gathered instead of prescribing the traditional type of report in which the student must 'gather the information and write down the main points from an outline.'
- \* The pragmatics and conventions of literate activity. A letter neatly written on a piece of stationery conveys a message just as using capital letters in an e-mail message 'shouts'. New writing conventions are being formed as users participate in electronic discussions on Internet bulletin boards.

Technological advances have given adolescents access to too much information, not too little. Ominous-sounding terms such as 'information overload', 'technological explosion' and 'terminal shutdown' are used as learners 'cruise the information highways', 'browse' or 'surf the Internet'. Much of what privileged adolescents learn outside of school and a varying amount of what they learn inside school comes through some form of the electronic media. The adolescent in developed countries is inundated with information (albeit usually of a very superficial nature). Unfortunately, the

printed matter that appears on the home monitor seldom contains stunning cognitive challenges. A 40-character, 34-line monitor is a poor medium for intensive reading, even though the user might gain quick access to various parts of a lengthy text. The fact is that lengthy and complex texts - texts requiring concentrated attention and high-level synthetic reasoning - are scarcely found either in the commercial software packages or in the external transmission resources that constitute the popular repertoire for home computer users (Suhor, 1984:35).

The intellectual level of computer-based media is, of course, determined by the user and the choice of programme, field or web site. Since little serious research on the influence of the Internet has yet been conducted, one can only assume that few adolescent readers will resist the superficial attractions in favour of the intellectually challenging.

Adolescents' exposure to the electronic media have forever changed their expectations of the content and themes of fiction. Even the format in which stories are presented have changed and a number of software companies are creating 'storybooks on screen' with added attractions to the story such as audio-graphic features and interactive participation in the events that promise great excitement - although these texts are essentially as superficial and escapist as much of the fare on television.

Through programs such as desktop publishing, text production itself has become a flexible and affordable feature that can be utilized and enjoyed by a greater percentage of the population. Learners can now present assignments and projects in a manner that was only possible for publishers a decade or so ago. As novel typographies are to be had at a flick of the forefinger, the simple 'ordinariness' of black letters on white paper simply does not attract the way it used to in the past. Movies, television and computer graphics have created expectations that will change the face of print possibly forever.

However, not all adolescents who have easy access to computers are regular users; some experience great difficulty with information retrieval or are reluctant readers, whether the print is in a book or on a monitor. Jones (1999:10) quotes from an article, *Three in Five Public Library Users are Youth in Public Libraries* (March/April 1997:107-109) that states that a small but growing body of research indicates that many children and young adults lack the cognitive skills necessary to navigate many of the systems public librarians and their technology vendors take for granted. Whether this is inadequate knowledge of the alphabet, underdeveloped motor skills, an inability to spell . . . or an inadequate hypothetical understanding of database construction, the assumption cannot be made that popularity automatically equals competence.

It is clear, then, that the demands of literacy are not diminished by technological advances, but escalated instead, if only for superficial reading.

### 3.4 PEER GROUP AND READING

Peer influences are notoriously powerful during adolescence and so well-documented they can be accepted as a basic premise. What is less obvious is the influence peer pressure has on extensive reading. In a library study one of the most frequent reasons for selecting a book was stated as being “a recommendation from a personal friend” (Palmer, 1995:90). The fact that interaction with peers is such a powerful motivator for adolescents, can be used by teachers to improve their reading skills. “It is prudent to capitalize on students’ natural inclination toward social interaction to help them become better readers and writers” (Irving, 1980:57).

A library study referred to by Palmer (1995) cites peer influence as one of the reasons for the decline in reading. Peer pressure is decidedly stronger among senior learners who easily consider those who use the school media centre to be ‘nerds.’ Many enthusiastic readers, therefore, prefer to do their browsing and borrowing from the school library when alone after school in the absence of their peers. Paradoxically, however, learners are interested in book talks given by their peers and borrow books from each other (Palmer, 1995:90).

Peer motivation may be one of the reasons why increasingly younger girls are reading love stories to keep up with their older sisters and their peers. The reading of best sellers is certainly motivated by peer influence. Learners may wish to impress their peers or teachers by reading, and especially to be *seen* reading, these books (Geysler, 1986:24).

Although peer influence remains strong until adulthood, older adolescents have other influences that compete in their development system. Remarkably, Childrey (1981 :14) states that parents are still among the most influential adult role models available. Irvin (1998:19) also believes that peer groups usually reinforce rather than contradict the values of parents. She maintains that it is not surprising that young adolescents tend to form friendships similar to the relationships they have with their families, since they “seek out the peer group best suited to meeting their needs for emotional support and exploration or reaffirmation of their values and aspirations . . . Students do not select a crowd as much as they are thrust into one by virtue of their personality, background, interests, and reputation among peers. ”

### 3.5 MOTIVATION

Very little learning and certainly no enthusiastic recreational reading can take place without motivation. Motivation can be defined as “an internal spring of action which generates a human being to satisfy a need” (Windell quotes Child & Maslow, 1993:23).

In order to elucidate the usage of the words *motivation* and *motivate*, the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (1961:1475) supplies examples from school: “The most intrinsic motivation for learning is the child’s spontaneous interests; motivation was at a very high level, and the students did not have to be prodded.; and, the ingenious teacher can ferret out a thousand methods of motivating the child to learn new words.”

Instincts, interests, compulsions, objectives, drives and needs are at the core of motivation. It is also abundantly clear that it is a teacher’s duty to create and amplify motivation if successful recreational reading is to take place. Motivation is thus not only a prerequisite for learning and reading instruction, all further aspects of reading, such as comprehension, word recognition, reading speed and frequency of reading events are dependent on it. However, in spite of the fact that educators know that the teacher’s role in the motivation of pupils is crucial, and the fact that much teaching is done - or attempted - in school without motivation, little - if any - guidance is given during teacher training to teacher motivation in reading instruction.

Senior learners need to perform successfully in all school tasks to maintain social esteem and they are therefore powerfully motivated to select activities in which they achieve well. To create enthusiasm specifically for reading, a learner should be motivated intrinsically and extrinsically to do well in reading *per se*. Extrinsic motivation refers to external rewards, such as receiving stars or sweets for reading done, winning a prize for reading the most books in class, being praised by the principal, being made library prefect, or complimented for reading many books to please the teacher. During the early years at primary school such extrinsic motivation is very important. In high school pupils are still subject to extrinsic reading motivation albeit of another nature: in the form of reading for tests or assignments, receiving book awards, writing book reports and reporting back for marks.



Intrinsic motivation is promoted by the stimulation of individual interests. It is ultimately derived from principles that promote self-determined functioning that capitalizes on intrinsically motivated behaviour, which is behaviour that is organised by interest and the desire to take on new challenges (Britz, 1993:30). Initially the educator uses extrinsic motivation until the child experiences success. The need for external reward is diminished when the child becomes intrinsically motivated (Britz, 1993:30). Motivation that is aroused through the achievement of success reinforces self-esteem and creates new aspirations. Self-determination, after all, is one of the most important goals of education and since “self-selected, explicit purposes for reading tend to be more effective than teacher-dictated purposes”, (Betts, 1979:66) it should be the ultimate objective of reader motivation.

Success breeds success, and nowhere is this more true than in reader motivation. Betts (1979:66) explains that the cyclical nature of reading success begins when learners become interested in the reading material itself and find their need for achievement rewarded through the emotional and intellectual stimulation reading offers them. Achievement motivation is nurtured and reinforced when the child is given immediate help on the application of acquired skills and on the learning of new skills. A greater awareness of success is experienced when the learners actually verbalize their spring of action, when they decide on and persevere to achieve their goals. The stronger the cognitive awareness of success is, the greater is the probability of a rise in the level of *aspiration*. If the learner has no intention to learn, there is no directional motivation. When the learners receive no feedback regarding what they have learned, the result is a meaningless, unproductive litany. “To satisfy the learner’s need for achievement-motivation, *intent* and *awareness of success* are wedded. . . *Interest + personal needs + aspirations + attitudes = motivation*” (Betts, 1979:66).

Aspirations can be defined as hope for future performance which learners wish to attain. A child’s hopes are raised by the successful achievement of realistic goals. Differentiated teaching nurtures positive attitudes or approaches to reading and, thereby, contributes further to motivation. *Intent* is a will to learn that terminates in the satisfaction learners experience when they attain success and this becomes the desired intrinsic reward. Intrinsic rewards are what reading teachers hope their pupils crave when they read extensively (Betts, 1979:66).

Skilled reading is dependent on high motivation. Reading motivation clearly consists of more than reinforcing incentives - expectations, aspirations, attitudes, values, needs, beliefs, a positive self-esteem all combine with the necessary skills to direct behaviour (Geyser, 1986: iv). All that remains to make highly motivated learners voracious readers are suitable books.

### **3.5.1 MOTIVATION AND RECREATIONAL READING**

Since it is the teachers' duty to motivate their pupils to read more functionally, recreationally and - if possible - quantitatively, they will do so with greater success if they have insight into the multifaceted nature of motivation. Once adolescents understand the value of extensive reading, it is easier to motivate them. Researchers emphasize the importance of 'student curiosity' in reading motivation. "Motivation, which adds zest to learning, is only one facet of reading instruction - albeit, a master controller . . . Knowledge begets knowledge, but also begets motivation to learn" (Betts, 1979:63).

Teachers can best motivate their learners by extolling the benefits of extensive reading, explaining that it is crucial to their development since reading

- \* is a tool of invention, relevance, and creativity, as a sort of depth-perception device that gives dimension to firsthand experience (Harris & Sipay, 1990:655);
- \* is instrumental to the acquisition of information and experience, to the understanding of human relationships, to the solution of problems;
- \* supplies support, reinforces personal convictions and develops a philosophy of life - . according to Geyser, (1986:23) whereas most readers look for reinforcement in their reading material, the sophisticated reader consults reading material about other, contrasting points of view;
- \* provides leisure activities such as recreation, escapism, fantasy and pleasure, making reading the ideal and easily acquired recreation;
- \* is aesthetically pleasing and brings with it appreciation of style, intrigues, insight in the author's creative talents;

- \* brings prestige, and since adolescents have a strong desire to impress their peers or teachers, the lustre attached to the reading of interesting texts or a best-seller can serve as motivation.

Many researchers warn against neglecting 'the pleasure principle' (Clark, 1976; Meek, 1984; Nell, 1988; Cilliers, 1993, *et al.*). Adolescent learners are simply not given opportunities to read for fun while at school and this works against reading motivation. Unless pupils are given time to read in class, have sufficient books about their individual interests and are allowed to select what they want to read, teacher efforts at motivation will prove futile (Geysers, 1986:27).

The availability of suitable books remains a problem, and although the obvious solution would be for schools to stock exciting texts, the dearth of ready funds makes this wishful thinking; cheaper alternatives can alleviate the situation (such as co-operative writing projects or the reading of newspapers and magazines). The fact that pupils have so little time to read actively for recreation is cited by many researchers (Thomas & Loring, 1979; Meek; 1984; Chambers, 1983, *et al.*). To read not only extensively, but also intensively, to reflect on what has been written in a demanding text, to discuss new ideas encountered in books, to write down thoughts and reflections about what has been read takes time, and for these processes secondary school and the busy programmes of adolescents leave far too little. However, whereas it is generally acknowledged that modern adolescents have very little leisure time - far too little, in fact, to become voracious readers - statistics reflect that the very same pupils spend many hours in front of the television (and CD player and computer and on the telephone) each day.

Encouraging adolescents to become enthusiastic readers has simply been 'squeezed out' of the school curriculum. Ideally, schools should provide time every day when everybody - children **and** adults - settles down and reads for no other purpose than to engage in the reading of literature for pleasure.

If the school neglects its duty to motivate learners to read actively and for pleasure, the learners who lose most from the loss of reading time are very ones who need it the most, namely the children

whose homes did not prepare them to be readers and do not encourage them to spend time reading out of school; homes without books and without the kind of atmosphere that helps children enjoy reading. For children in these circumstances - at least half of the children in most schools - *only* the school can provide the facilities and the time to read within secure and sympathetically disciplined surroundings (Chambers, 1983:46).

The answer to this problem is for teachers to encourage and motivate their learners in class as much as possible, to guide adolescents' recreational reading, never to smother spontaneous appreciation and to endeavour to remove as many obstacles to fluent reading as possible. Furthermore, teachers must learn how best to counteract the attitude that reading is for school only; that reading is a second-hand, and therefore, an inferior form of experience.

One of the best methods for motivating learners to read is to focus more on activities that allow them to talk about their ideas and emotions, to listen to their class mates, to discuss the motivations of the characters in a book, to offer their own opinions instead of having the teacher's - or a commercial publisher's - rammed down their throats. A simple question starting with *why* already focuses literary debate on the motives and emotions of characters and not on mere events or facts. To ask *why* Holden Caulfield reacts the way he does is surely far more relevant than enumerating his rebellious acts in chronological order in an exam.

### 3.5.2 METACOGNITION

Once children have begun to experience the rewards afforded by reading, guiding them towards skilled reading practices is the next step in making them voracious readers. It is the responsibility of the language teachers at secondary school to help their learners understand some of the cognitive processes that take place when they are reading.

Cognition is broadly defined as "the act or process of knowing" and specifically as "an intellectual process by which knowledge is gained about perceptions or ideas - distinguished from *affection* and *conation* (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1961:440). Metacognition is the awareness and control of one's cognitive processes. In other words, whereas

cognition refers to using the knowledge a learner possesses, metacognition refers to a person's awareness and understanding of that knowledge. Cognition refers to having the skills; metacognition refers to awareness and conscious control over those skills (Britz, 1993:48; Hugo, 1999:46).

If metacognition is the state of being aware of one's thought processes while reading, readers are thus not only alert to their cognitive processes while reading, they also have control over *how* they read. Metacognition enables the reader to regulate thoughts, preferences and strategies. Learners are thus not mere receptacles into which information is poured, but through the process of metacognition they actively exert control over their own thinking and learning activities. The term *metacognition* includes two broad categories of mental activities: self-appraised knowledge about cognition and self-management of one's thinking (Britz, 1993:48). Metacognition is a major factor in all learning as it influences all aspects of cognition. While reading, metacognition manages the reading process in all its facets, from word recognition, through comprehension to memory.

Adolescent learners should be made aware of how they read, and taught that they can and should practice control over their cognitive and reading processes.

Students may thumb through a difficult text while thinking about a school party; *knowing* they are not paying attention to the text is a metacognitive event. Strategic readers would do something - refocus and pay attention, close the book for later, or begin to take notes to organize their thoughts. Good readers who have developed metacognitive awareness do *something*; less proficient readers plow merrily (or not so merrily) along without stopping to assess, question, or correct the condition. Proficient readers monitor their own comprehension and are able to apply strategies to help them understand, such as rereading, reading ahead, or searching their prior knowledge to make sense of text. In other words, they know when what they are reading is making sense, and they know what to do when it is not. Good listeners also know when speech does not make sense to them; they ask questions, take notes, and increase their concentration as they listen. Metacognition develops as a student matures, usually during adolescence, but it can be

taught and strengthened by explicit instruction and practice even at earlier ages (Palincsar & Brown, quoted by Irvin, 1998:9).

Since metacognitive skills are usually not fully developed until late adolescence, teachers can do a great deal to enhance this ability. Before starting to read a new text in class, the teacher must draw the readers' attention to a number of things: using their metacognitive skills, the readers must become aware of the text, their own ability, how to interpret the demands of a task, and the best ways to interact with text to maximize learning.

According to Irvin (1998:173) metacognitive skills include

- \* clarifying the purposes of reading so that the reader understands both the explicit and implicit task demands;
- \* identifying of the important aspects of a message;
- \* focusing attention on major content rather than trivia;
- \* monitoring ongoing activities to determine whether comprehension is taking place;
- \* engaging in self-questioning to determine whether goals are being achieved;
- \* taking corrective action when failures in comprehension are detected.

In other words, readers must use their metacognitive knowledge to monitor the *quality* of their comprehension and to verify that the information makes sense and meets specific purposes. If a reader experiences problems when reading, finding that he or she does not understand a passage or certain word, for instance, corrective strategies must be implemented, such as rereading or self-questioning. What the reader remembers of the text up to that point enables him or her to interpret incoming text in terms of previously processed meanings. Regarding difficult words, readers can consult the lexical knowledge in their "dictionary of words held in memory" (Owen & Pumfrey, 1995:11). With metacognitive activities the reader can, for instance, 'sound out' or use blending processes to decode unfamiliar words, or apply whatever corrective strategy is required. It is the teachers' responsibility to teach their learners to use metacognitive strategies when reading.

### 3.6 RELUCTANT READING

#### 3.6.1 RELUCTANT ADULT READERS

It is deeply ironic that at a time when higher demands are required from everybody's reading ability, research shows that more and more people do not wish to read for pleasure. Alarming statistics are quoted to deplore the enormity of the incidence of reluctant reading:

Many adults in the United States have never read a book in its entirety. Approximately ten percent of the population read roughly eighty percent of the books. Many college graduates do not read one book a year, and many people cannot even think of a book they would like to read (Barmore & Morse, 1979:75).

The authors of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* have found that despite the heavy emphasis on the acquisition of reading skills at school, approximately one in three adult Americans has a serious reading problem. They, too, lament the prohibitive costs of the remedial programmes necessary to make these adults productive in the work force. "For example, the US Army spent 14 million dollars in 1984 to bring its recruits up to a ninth-grade level in reading. This expenditure was necessary even though 90 percent of the recruits were high school graduates" (quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987:5-6).

The British Bullock Report revealed that "approximately a million adults in England had a reading age below nine although to read even the simplest daily newspaper requires a reading age of at least thirteen" (Ingham, 1981:1).

A local study found that the South African climate and culture are not conducive to a reading tradition. South Africans, it appears, are too sport-orientated and the outdoor life too attractive, and this adds to the general lack of enthusiasm for reading.

The lack of motivation to read affects a large percentage of White South Africans. This situation, however, is found particularly among Black people where there is little or no culture of reading as yet, as there is still a high rate of illiteracy and lack of suitable reading material and libraries (Brindley & Donald, quoted by Palmer, 1995:221).

It seems a futile exercise to encourage children to read extensively if the adults they model themselves on are reluctant readers. However, it is fortunately also clear that teachers can play a vital role in the encouragement of extensive reading through their skills and example.

### **3.6.2 RELUCTANT CHILD AND ADOLESCENT READERS**

Whatever reasons adults have for being reluctant readers, the fact remains that for the most part reluctant child readers are created by non-reading adults. For the first four or five years in a child's life, parents reading to their children (and their being seen to read themselves) is the most important influence on children's reading and will remain a major if a more indirect influence for many years to come. "Learning to read in the early stages, like everything else a child has come to know, is an approximation of adult behaviour with a genuine, meaningful function. The child's guarantee that he will be successful is that he has already mastered an even greater task, that of talking and making speech express his meanings" (Meek, 1984:25).

Although Meek agrees with the high incidence of non-readership, she disdains the very concept of 'reluctant reading' since she believes that "children are never reluctant to do something they have mastered and enjoy. Usually they have not yet discovered what's in it for them, either because they don't read well enough or because they have had the wrong kind of books, or too restricted a choice" (Meek, 1984:165). If children have a choice, they either read or they do not. So-called reluctance, according to Meek, is the result of having to read when "you don't want to, a feature of school reading. The young we are now concerned with are those who can read fluently enough, but on the whole, choose to do other things. Our anxiety about them stems from our awareness that to give up reading too soon is to miss its greatest rewards" (Meek, 1984:195). Sadly, research has shown that the numbers of reluctant readers are on the increase (Harris & Sipay, 1990:655).

Donald (quoted by Palmer, 1995:12) divides reluctant child readers into four groups, starting with the most obvious group that consists of children who have some disability in learning to read and who only read when they are compelled to do so. He labels another group of reluctant readers the 'socio-cultural' group because these children fall socially and culturally outside the



mainstream of the world of literature since the values, language, goals, rewards and contents in this literature are different from theirs and thus have little real meaning for them. A third group of children do not read because reading material is simply not accessible to them. The last group is the 'motivational' group who are simply not interested in reading for different reasons but mainly because 'it does not turn them on'.

The first and, unfortunately, an enormous group of reluctant readers, the reading-disabled children, causes a great deal of concern, first at school but especially later in the professional field. Although statistics are not available for South Africa, the figures for the United States clearly demonstrate the seriousness of the problem. Fifteen percent of children in American schools have severe reading disabilities in spite of the fact that they often perform adequately in school work that does not require much reading.

However, as the years of reading failure build up feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with school, these students' overall academic work is severely affected . . . sixth-grade underachievers continue to be underachievers in the ninth grade, with a resulting tendency to drop out. The American Association of Junior Colleges has estimated that from one-third to one-half of their new students have significant reading problems and that 20 % of their new students in the most disadvantaged areas are unable to profit from their present remedial programs, so severe is their handicap (US Office of Education, quoted by Thomas & Loring, 1979, vii).

Reading-disabled learners - even when they do not come from a disenfranchised environment and are 'at-risk' children - display a reading inadequacy that never comes alone, and reluctant reading, if not overt illiteracy then, is often an outward symptom of related learning, psychological and social problems. Most of these disabled readers require *remedial, recovery or rescue* reading aid and the expertise of specialists such as audiologists, speech therapists, orthopedagogics, sociologists, psychologists, ophthalmologists and physiologists who are trained to identify and remedy physical, emotional and physiological barriers to reading.

The second group of children live in countries, areas and communities that simply do not have the infra-structure that makes reading possible. They are sadly so disenfranchised that the

reading of books is a luxury that is preceded by subsistence priorities such a clean water, housing, clothing, food, medical help.

With regard to the third group, financial help from various sources goes a long way to alleviate the problem. In South Africa, the government, departments of education, large publishing houses, the READ organization, commercial enterprises, outreach organizations and charity concerns attempt - with varying degrees of success - to address the problems of this group and help individual schools with book supplies. The money thus raised is welcomed by school boards and concerned headmasters but is also wasted unless trained teachers can utilize the books that are made available through these organizations.

Such reading promotion projects, however, have had great success in America and even the most disenfranchised children, coming from homes that do not value books or learning, have become accomplished readers despite their abject circumstances. Although children from privileged homes have had to overcome reading barriers too, “the incidence of slow progress and outright failure is highest among poor children, children from homes low in literacy, ethnic minority children, and children who have limited proficiency in English” (Barmore & Morse, 1979:75). It is fortunately also true that children from a deprived background who learn to read fluently can use their literacy as a ‘springboard’ to rise above the disenfranchised conditions in which their parents live.

Numerous research projects conducted in America and elsewhere (for instance the British Bradford ‘book flood’ experiment, 1981; Clark in Glasgow, 1976; the New Zealand Book Flood of Elley, Cowrie & Watson, cited by Palmer, 1995:28) have shown that socio-culturally deprived children can benefit greatly from an extensive reading programme that is part of a greater aid policy geared towards alleviating at least some of their problems. A similar approach to help the socio-culturally deprived would probably be as successful in South Africa if similar funding were available.

The main focus of this study is the fourth group of reluctant readers, namely those children who can read but do not.

### 3.6.3 SCHOOL AND RELUCTANT ADOLESCENT READERS

There are many reasons why children are reluctant readers by the time they can and should read actively and independently. Apart from poor parental example or support, the lack of personal involvement and teachers' lack of interests at school have been blamed more often than most. Meek, both a reading researcher and a teacher of many years' standing, has found that the 'lost adolescent readers'

are not hampered by lack of ability, only by lack of desire, confidence and reward. They just don't know what fluent readers get out of reading books. They have no idea how the author becomes a companion, that writers want them to understand rather than to be perplexed. They know the words, but lack all knowledge of the rules of the game, especially the ones that are not taught in lessons, because they have so rarely been invited to play, and the champions are all around (Meek, 1984:171).

These lost or failed readers have become expert at avoiding tasks that involve reading. They find the fact that many of their peers actually choose to read for pleasure incomprehensible. By the time these children reach secondary school, they fear the act of reading and hate it for the strenuous effort it costs them; they then openly declare that they 'never' read, except, of course in class and with coercion. One of the major problems is the fact that reluctant adolescent readers

"have never felt themselves being fluent . . . They confuse teaching and learning, hoping to have something done to them when, in fact, they have to be the active ones" (Meek, 1984:202). There is, of course, no easy solution to the problem. Many schools attempt to rectify the problem by placing these children in remedial groups, but

the most tragic sight in any special reading class is a group of students doing more and more exercises in what they have failed to accomplish for the past eight years. They are sustained only by the economic reality of 'you can't get a job if you can't read' and this grim threat does not let them enjoy their learning which they think cannot, must not, be fun or give any pleasure (Meek, 1984:203).

Teachers should differentiate between four types of failed adolescent readers in their attempt to remedy reading problems (Gentile, quoted by Britz, 1993:27-29). The first kind of problem

reading is done by tense and rigid readers who are incapacitated by their thoughts and are nervous when reading. Tense readers have learnt that it is easier to avoid new or strange situations that can only cause them great embarrassment or an increased sense of failure. The second kind of reluctant readers stop trying very easily and because they constantly look for positive reinforcement from adults, they lack self-evaluation while reading. Again the very act of reading gets to be very stressful since they try too hard in their efforts to please everybody.

The third kind are the chaotic, impulsive readers who have difficulty devoting their attention to school work, are unwilling to follow instructions and to take part in activities. They make frequent reading mistakes through guesses, elimination of words or sentences, or own additions. The fourth kind of problem reading is found in the discouraged, helpless readers who truly believe that they cannot read. They have a low self-esteem and therefore do not take risks. They do not try hard enough and anticipate failure and, like the anxious reader, are unduly dependent on approval.

These problem readers read for information only when and if they are forced to by parents or teachers and will never, of their own accord, read a book for pleasure. The embarrassment, humiliation, loss of self-respect, ridicule and the impatience of teachers, parents and peers that these learners have come to experience around the act of reading have guaranteed that books are associated with pain.

Responsible schools design projects to encourage reluctant readers to become lifelong enthusiastic recreational readers. These projects will at least not be as costly as the enterprises funded to aid disabled or disenfranchised readers. On the other hand, it may be even more difficult to effect a positive change since teachers have to modify their pupils' bad habits, remove psychological barriers, dispel apathy and create an enthusiastic mind-set - and it is common knowledge that shifting paradigms in well-established systems (whether at school or home) is the hardest work possible. What makes the problems about reluctant reading difficult to solve is the fact that the work of reading educators has to go against the customs instilled even before children arrive at school.

Criticism of schools, unfortunately, continues. As putative causes for the decline of reading and writing performance, Purves and Niles (1984:6) cites a number of ‘modern’ advances, or “radical reforms in education, among them the rise of elective courses, the use of paperbacks, the emphasis on feelings and values, the decline in streaming or tracking, and a myriad other activities”. Although much hard evidence is still lacking, Purves and Niles (1984:6) believe “that misuse of elective courses had a deleterious effect on reading performance”. The increase in workbooks, the emphasis on subskills, the ‘systems’ approach to instruction, an insistence on group work, and the increase of multiple-choice tests, are teaching approaches that work against extensive reading.

Since one of the major factors that inhibits extensive reading is the adolescent’s lack of fluent reading and effective reading skills, secondary school teachers should be made aware of the symptoms of reading failure and, if not able to guide the pupil to fluency themselves, should refer him or her to reading experts. Most secondary school teachers neglect their role in the encouragement and enhancement of extensive reading because they regard the adolescent as already a competent reader, or because they consider reading instruction as the exclusive duty of the primary school teacher. This is a harmful assumption since reading is and should be a continuously developing skill (D’Ath,1994:6).

#### **3.6.4 MOTIVATION AND THE RELUCTANT READER**

Reading failure is a self-perpetuating experience. If children experience failure early on in primary school because they do not read as well as is expected for their chronological age, the feeling of inadequacy will surface naturally in a dislike of reading when they reach high school. Dislike leads to avoidance and instead of developing their reading skills, the reluctant readers will simply dodge reading whenever they can. Any motivation they may have had disappears and the reluctant adolescent readers become the ‘aliterate’ adults who can read but simply do not, at least not for pleasure.

A strategy to motivate the reluctant reader adopted by educators and publishers is the introduction of books written specifically for the ‘reluctant’, ‘backward’ or ‘poor’ reader. In Britain, for instance, in the 1980s a formal reading scheme was taken as their model

and so we had books about family life and working teenagers, a kind of social realism in short sentences that was supposed to match the concerns of the so-called ‘non-readers’. This was a great mistake; only real books make real readers, especially at this stage. You can imagine what it feels like to a slow or inexperienced reader to be given yet another book that proclaims his position. If you want to make a reader, you have to find a book he can enjoy, one that makes him believe you think he can be a reader, and then you must help him to find his way through it (Meek, 1984:169).

Unsuitable reading - whether irrelevant or boring, too difficult or not challenging enough - remains a primary cause of the reluctant adolescent reader’s lack of motivation. Only a programme that readers find creative and appealing, in an open, supportive environment will stimulate and build a general interest in reading (Barmore & Morse, 1979:76).

Replicating the successful reader’s behaviour may also help to develop and motivate the reluctant reader. Irvin (1998:52) suggests that if teachers understand what strategies effective readers use while reading, reluctant readers may be taught to use those strategies to become competent readers. She illustrates the difference between the strategies that effective and reluctant readers display as follows:

<b>EFFECTIVE READING BEHAVIOURS</b>	<b>INEFFECTIVE READING BEHAVIOURS</b>
<i>Before reading</i>	.
<b>Preview</b> text (look at title, pictures, print)	
<b>Build</b> background knowledge on the subject before reading	Start reading without thinking about the subject
<b>Set</b> purpose for reading	Do not know purpose for reading
<b>Focus</b> complete attention on reading	Mind often wanders

<b><i>During reading</i></b>	
<b>Adjust</b> reading for different reasons	Read different texts and for different tasks all the same
<b>Monitor</b> understanding of text and use strategies to understand difficult parts	Do not monitor comprehension
<b>Integrate</b> new information with existing knowledge	
<b><i>After reading</i></b>	
<b>Decide</b> if goal for reading has been achieved	Do not know content or purpose of reading
<b>Evaluate</b> comprehension of what was read and ideas in text	
<b>Summarize</b> the major ideas in a graphic organizer or by retelling	Read passage only once and believe to be finished
<b>Apply</b> information to a new situation	Express readiness for a test without studying

If a teacher encourages and guides the reluctant adolescent reader to employ successful basic reading strategies before, during and after reading, the learner may gain confidence and proficiency and this can in turn boost his or her motivation. Reading motivation is more a matter of enthusiasm and interests than adopting successful strategies.

According to Irvin (1998:49), learners' lack of motivation to read 'school stuff' can be attributed to three factors: attitude, interest, and self-concept. When adolescents have no interest in academic tasks, it is usually caused by developmental factors such as changing beliefs about their ability, an increasing need for control and autonomy, and fears of failure, especially in front of peers that contribute to the decline in motivation.

Whereas young children generally believe that ability can be increased through effort, and hard work effort signifies high ability, older children and adolescents often develop the notion of ability as a capacity, and think of effort and ability as being inversely related. They believe that

high effort, without success, is a sign of low ability (Irvin quotes Urdan, Midgley & Wood, 1995:15). Failure and the fear of failure continue to be constrictive influences and great harm is done to the motivation of the reluctant reader when schools emphasize competition, social comparisons or ability assessments. Instead of harmful competitiveness, teachers should rather encourage all their learners to work for goals they themselves have chosen, performing focussed tasks that value effort and not ability (Irvin, 1998:49).

The general reasons for adolescents' disregard of reading, then, is either because they regard reading as meaningless or boring, or because they lack the motivation, confidence and skill to read actively.

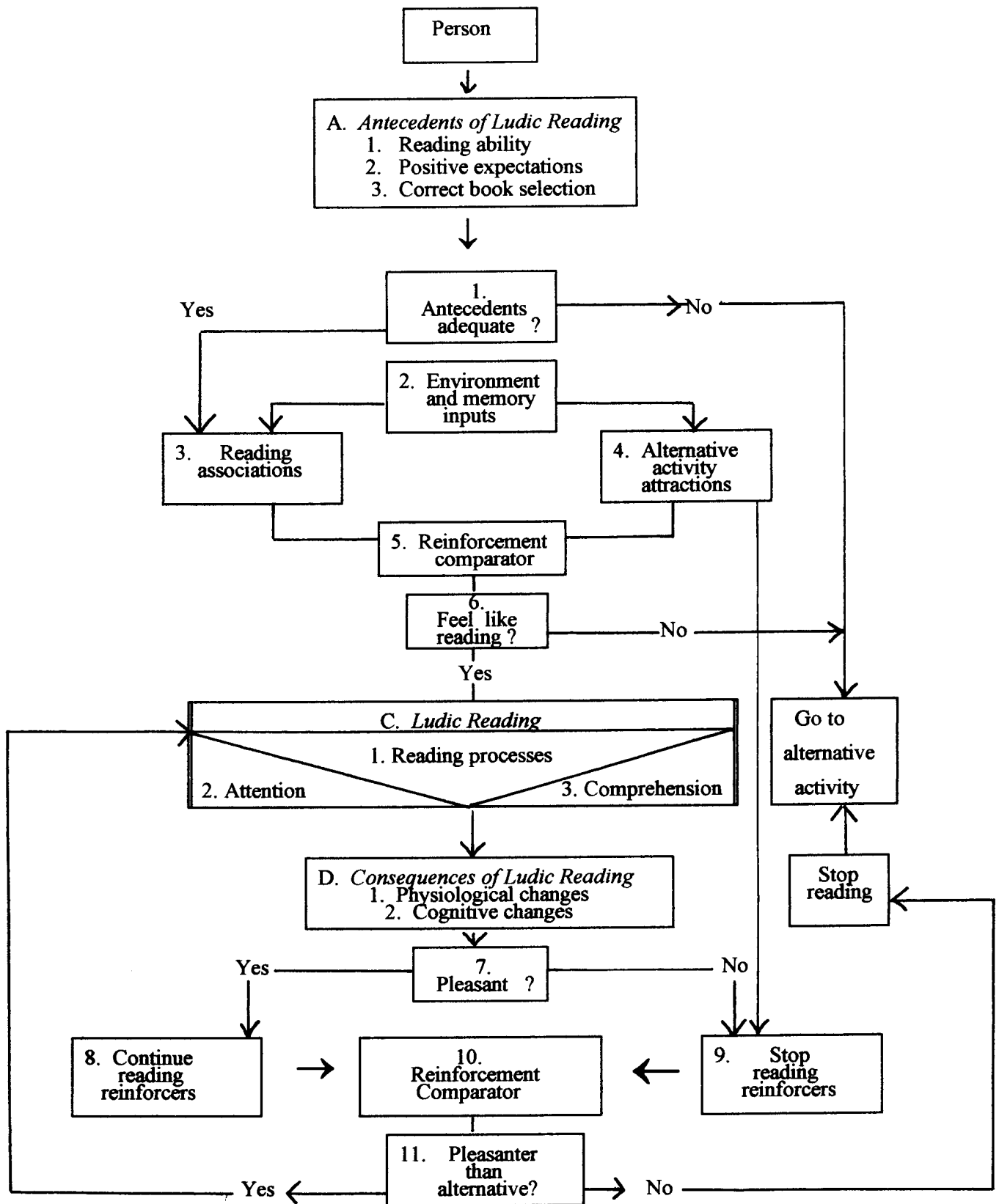
### **3.6.5 STRATEGIES TO MOTIVATE THE RELUCTANT READER**

Experienced teachers, knowing that praise should be sincere or refrained from, must find in the reluctant reader something that can honestly be praised and can then discuss what the learner still needs practice in. Teachers often underestimate their pupils' ambition, their insight into their own condition and their need to be challenged. It is the teacher's task to provide ways for the reluctant reader to gain a positive but realistic self-concept as a learner and as a reader. Several studies have shown that there are students, particularly among the socially disabled, who believe they have the ability to succeed but who view school as irrelevant, threatening, or both. "If instruction in school cannot be assimilated into the world of children, if it cannot be comprehended from their personal vantage points, no learning can take place" (Deeds, 1981:81).

The simplest strategy, of course, involves learners' discovery that reading brings many rewards, especially pleasure. For the committed language teacher strategies to promote reading are part of good teaching practice. Unfortunately, too often inexperience, lack of commitment, daily classroom pressures and limitations of time cause them to be neglected or simply ignored.

Nell (1988:257) devised a flowchart in an attempt to explain the sequence of events and the motivational forces that determine whether a learner finds reading pleasurable enough to read extensively.





From the above it is clear that reading must be deemed pleasurable by the reader or the reading will simply be terminated as other, more appealing activities render gratification. The flowchart also shows that positive associations generate greater enthusiasm, and the act and habit of reading can be reinforced in this way. The opposite is, unfortunately, also true: negative associations create reluctant reading, and an aversion to books becomes a habit too.

High school literature programmes must be personalized if they are to motivate adolescents successfully. Each class must allow for a wide range of reading abilities, for diversity and constantly shifting interests and needs of the adolescent. Motivational programmes must include class time for private reading and supply challenging and relevant follow-up activities. Choice of reading material is crucial since it must be engrossing to the readers. The readers must be encouraged to select materials at their own level which they can enjoy in an orderly class with fellow-readers engaged in similar activities. Feedback activities should be built around personal responses as well as a relevant study of literary elements.

Harris and Sipay (1990:656) suggest the creation of a *planned recreational reading programme* that develops favourable attitudes towards reading, an interest in reading as a voluntary activity, and an awareness of what is considered to be good children's or adolescent literature. The basic purpose of such a programme is to motivate children to read and to help them expand their reading interest and tastes. This is accomplished by promoting the concept that reading can be a pleasurable, rewarding activity; by exposing pupils to various kinds of works, writing styles, topics and authors, and by providing them with abundant, appropriate materials to read and with the time to choose, read, and discuss them. The allocation of time *during* school hours to conduct the programme is a crucial aspect. Unless teachers demonstrate that reading is a worthwhile activity by providing school time, children can not be expected to value reading. Allowing learners to read material of their choice only *after* school assignments are completed does not help to develop a desirable attitude toward reading as a leisure-time activity. In the final chapter strategies of a more practical nature will be offered to help address the problems of reluctant reading.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SURVEY

Our understanding of the history and wider social and literary implications of the field [of children's literature] increases as we reassess complicated aspects of it: changing concepts of childhood, new patterns of familial interaction created by urbanization and emerging modes of labour in an industrialized society, the impact of major intellectual trends on child life, and considerations of religion, class, and politics.

Jackson, 1989

Ideally, however, the suggestion is that each African country south of the Sahara should first of all find out the real reading habits of its people. It is suggested that in drawing up and implementing campaign strategies for the promotion of reading, a simple but important rule that should not be forgotten is that the people must, at least initially, have access to what they wish to read rather than what someone else decides they ought to read.

Paper presented to the Conference on the Promotion of Reading in Africa,  
June 1980, Djoletto of Ghana

No theory can seek to account meaningfully for all the significant aspects of social life. Instead, selective attention must be given to a few aspects of the phenomena to be explained. As a result, theory deals with only a part of the world and takes the rest for granted or, at least, assumes it to be sufficiently unobtrusive so it can be safely ignored while concentrating on the topic of interest.

Bohrnstedt & Knoke, 1988

The value of literature does not lie in its inherent content but in what it can do for the student personally. If we as teachers really want our students to become lifelong readers and learners, we must work with pupils in constructing a program they find creative and appealing. We must provide an attractive, open, supportive environment that will stimulate and build a general interest in reading.

Barmore & Morse, 1979

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The scope of research undertaken in the past two decades in Children's Literature is a clear indication that writers, parents, bibliographers, theorists, teachers, networks, psychologists, educators, educationists, publishers *et al*, consider this to be a crucial field in children's education in general and the advancement of reading in particular. This interest comes at a time when many pessimists have reason to regard reading, if not a dying art, at least a threatened pastime, especially with modern children and adolescents whose books have to compete with a variety of electronic media and extra-mural activities for divided attention during limited hours of leisure. The study endeavoured to examine part of the problem. It investigated the nature and incidence of adolescents' recreational reading in the hope that to read enthusiastically, appreciatively and prolifically is an activity and a habit that can be fostered at secondary school.

#### **4.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

With regard to higher order reading activities, general fears have created a climate of gloom, with the perception that

- \* adolescent learners do not read for recreation;
- \* most adolescents learners do not regard reading as necessary for their intellectual development or later success in the professional world;
- \* secondary school teachers do not serve as models of reading and do very little to encourage extensive recreational reading;
- \* children from affluent homes read more voraciously than children from less privileged backgrounds;
- \* adolescent learners abhor the texts prescribed at school;
- \* access to the Internet and computer-based activities have all but done away with recreational reading;
- \* adolescents read far more enthusiastically when they were at primary school;
- \* if the principal motivators of extensive reading (first parents and family, then primary school teachers) neglected their duty in this regard, there is nothing secondary school teachers can do about a learner's readership.

In its endeavour to evaluate these assertions, the study's main method of research was a literature review supplemented by the results of a survey of the experiences, opinions and preferences of adolescent learners.

### 4.3 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Numerous studies have confirmed the assumption that the incidence of recreational reading has declined sharply in the past two or three decades in all age groups. (Brindley, 1993; Palmer, 1995; Jones, 1999.) Attempts have been made by government and private sector alike to address the issues of readership promotion, but the very fact that an activity that is supremely beneficial in all respects to all concerned, needs to be promoted at all is reason for despair.

The acquisition of literacy is of primary importance in a developing world and every means at a government's disposal should be employed to counter the stranglehold of illiteracy. However, too narrow a focus on the acquisition of basic skills becomes counterproductive if the further exercise of literacy, namely the development of higher order reading skills, is not emphasized too. If the fostering of more advanced reading skills is neglected, literacy campaigns may prove futile and costly exercises in the long run. The assumption that recreational reading deteriorates decisively as children grow older is well documented in research on children's literature. In the light of the incidence of reluctant reading, a great deal of research has been conducted on the reading habits of primary school children (Britz, 1993; Combrink, 1989; D'Ath, 1994; Palmer, 1995 *et al*). Fewer studies have been conducted on the reading habits of the adolescent (*inter alia* Mulder, from the perspective of media services, in Afrikaans, 1975; Geyser, in Afrikaans, 1986; Green, on the socialization of adolescent girls through reading realistic teenage fiction and the role of the school media centre, 1987).

This dissertation has attempted to investigate the reading habits of adolescent readers; within the field the survey was limited to the sub-group of 'middle' adolescents, namely grade eleven learners. The Tshwane South district in Gauteng province was selected mainly for practical reasons and for the fact that it is socio-economically representative of a 'lower middle', 'middle'

and ‘upper middle class’ community. Since the Tshwane South district is urban, the study excluded schools in rural areas and seriously disadvantaged or squatter communities. There are 79 secondary schools in the district, with a total of 4051 grade eleven learners.

The fact that South Africa has such a unique and disparate body of young readers, limited the study even further and excluded readers with learning difficulties, newly literate young adult readers or seriously disadvantaged children who have had no or little exposure to books. The ardent young bookworms - perhaps an endangered species but at least still foraging freely in sparsely populated areas - require no encouragement or serious research, at least not as far as reading promotion is concerned. The subject of the study was, therefore, what is considered the ‘average’ grade eleven learner, who can read, but purportedly only does so when forced, encouraged, cajoled, threatened or bribed by teachers or parents.

The selection of questions for the questionnaire attempted to come to some understanding of the adolescents’ reasons for reading, their choice of leisure activities, their opinion of secondary reading strategies, access to computers, influence of mentors and teachers. Since the conducting of interviews was not allowed, six sectors for specification - or so-called open-ended questions - were attempts to glean a little more information than could be concluded from the marking of options in the appropriate box. The final question required the respondent to supply the titles and authors of the last three books he or she had read and enjoyed in an attempt to gauge the kind of books that created a lasting impression. Obviously a greater number of more relevant questions could have been asked, more options and more detailed specification would have been welcomed by the researcher, but a more unwieldy questionnaire was not allowed by the authorities and would not have met with the approval of school principals and teachers, let alone induced the learners to complete it. Since the study was undertaken in the light of alarming reports of children and young adults’ reluctance to read prolifically and joyfully, and since responsible educators with an undying belief in the power of reading would do anything in their power to promote readership, a certain bias can be observed in the dissertation and the questionnaire from the start.

Although it is untenable to generalize and compartmentalize children's literature and its readership into age groups and so-called developmental levels, the case study had to define parameters for the sake of convenience and viability. Grade eleven learners were selected for a number of reasons: they are representative of 'middle adolescence'; their interests are mostly adolescent in nature and no longer 'childlike', especially in their awakening sexuality; in contrast with most grade twelve learners who focus on the matric exam and their future after completing school, grade eleven learners' experiences are still more centred on activities in and around school; school principals, understandably only too conscious of the limited time at the school's disposal during the learners' final school year, would not be as supportive of a disruptive questionnaire undertaken with matric candidates. The subject of the study was therefore a sample of 'average' adolescents in grade eleven in the Tshwane South district of the Gauteng province. The Tshwane South district was selected for reasons of expedience, as well as for the fact that the sector includes schools from all strata of society and is, therefore, demographically heterogeneous.

#### **4.4 METHOD**

A complex sampling, i.e. a multistage stratified cluster sample, was used to draw a representative sample of the grade eleven learners of the Tshwane South district. Firstly, the 79 secondary schools in the district were divided into eight strata; they were categorized according to locality, whether the schools were formerly model C schools or in a previously disadvantaged community, as well as whether the schools are mostly privately funded or subsidised by the state as this was taken as a rough estimate of the socio-economic status of the parents. These eight groups were, therefore, relatively homogenous. Secondly, proportional allocation was used to determine the number of schools in each stratum included in the sample.

TABLE 1: Composition of the cluster:

<b>Stratum</b>	<b>Number of schools in population</b>	<b>Number of schools in sample</b>	<b>Number of learners in sample</b>
mixed suburban	17	5	159
single-sex	4	2	78
private schools	15	5	81
Atteridgeville	9	3	112
Mamelodi	14	4	148
Laudium	5	2	45
Eersterus	2	1	44
Commercial	13	3	33
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>700</b>

The twenty-five schools selected in the Tshwane South district had a total of 4051 grade eleven learners during the survey. A sample of the population elements (grade eleven learners) was drawn in such a way that every learner had the same probability of being included in the sample, in other words, a self-weighting sample was effected. In each stratum the clusters were selected with equal probability; the same proportion of grade elevens was then drawn from each selected school. The sample of schools was drawn by using pseudo-random numbers generated by a calculator.

A pilot study conducted with 145 first year teacher training students provided a basis for the questionnaire and was an attempt to examine school leavers' attitude towards recreational reading, their reading habits and interests. The pilot study indicated that a respondent required between six and nine minutes to complete the questionnaire; it was, therefore, assumed that even should the respondent spend some time offering suggestions and supplying details in spaces provided by the six open-ended questions, he or she would experience little difficulty completing the questionnaire in ten minutes.



#### **4.5 THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

With the expert help of the University of Pretoria's Department of Statistics, a questionnaire was designed to investigate the reading interests, readership background, frequency of reading, preferred activities and the opinions on recreational reading of a randomly selected group of grade eleven learners (cf. Appendix I). The questionnaire's coding was executed on a statistical package, the SAS program, version 8.

Of the eighteen questions, twelve required the respondents merely to tick the appropriate box to indicate their opinion or preference. Six questions gave the respondents an opportunity to specify in greater detail, describe their opinion more accurately or make suggestions of their own. In its attempt to investigate various aspects of recreational reading, the questionnaire inquired

- \* to what extent there is truth in the statement that adolescents are reluctant readers;
- \* what their motivation is for reading;
- \* what kinds of reading material they select;
- \* whether the learners regard reading as a crucial activity;
- \* whether the learners regard reading as a relevant activity;
- \* how the reading habits of adolescent boys and girls differ;
- \* how the reading habits of privileged and less privileged adolescents differ;
- \* why adolescents read recreationally;
- \* what genres adolescents prefer to read;
- \* whether their parents or older family members, friends or mentors read recreationally;
- \* what their opinions are regarding prescribed works;
- \* whether they read more or fewer books in secondary school than in primary school;
- \* how they spend their leisure time;
- \* to what extent their language and literature teachers promote readership in class;
- \* how and where they obtain the books they read recreationally;
- \* whether and where they have access to a computer;
- \* what practical suggestions they can offer teachers to promote readership in class.

#### **4.6 THE AUTHORITIES**

Permission to conduct the case study was granted by both the Tshwane South district and Head Office of the Gauteng Department of Education. The completion of questionnaires was approved by both offices but personal interviews with learners about their reading habits or with teachers about their strategies to promote readership were not allowed. The study was conducted at 25 schools in the course of September 2001.

Principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, teachers of language, literature and career guidance were, without exception, cooperative and many informally offered suggestions and strategies for the encouragement of recreational reading. The majority of the teachers expressed misgivings about the present state of adolescent readership. After briefing about random selection, the teachers (all except one) at the selected schools preferred to have the questionnaires completed in class time and under their own supervision to ensure the least disruption to their classes. The enthusiastic cooperation and goodwill of principals and teachers is a very positive indication of their desire to promote adolescent readership.

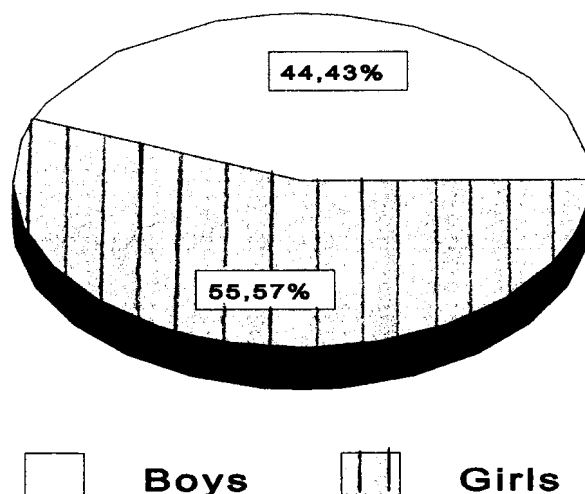
## **4.7 SURVEY RESULTS**

### **4.7.1 THE RESPONDENTS**

Of the 700 questionnaires delivered to 25 randomly selected schools, 659 were completed and returned. This constitutes a 93,86 per cent return, which can be credited to the support of participating principals and language teachers. Another remarkable fact, given that the survey was conducted with adolescents, is that in only two cases were the questionnaires treated as a joke (and perhaps the constant reading of pornography as a preferred genre, drug-taking as an extra-mural activity and the stealing of books as a way of obtaining reading material, as specified in these two questionnaires, are closer to the truth than one would like to think).

The respondents were all grade eleven learners and consisted of 291 boys (44,43 per cent) and 364 girls (55,57 per cent). Four respondents did not indicate gender.

FIGURE 1: *The gender of respondents:*



The questionnaire investigated adolescents' reading habits in the language of their choice, whether first or second language, or in some cases, third language. Thirteen of the 79 secondary schools in the Tshwane South district are predominantly Afrikaans-speaking. The rest are either exclusively English-speaking or use English predominantly with another language or languages. The subject of the study was reading habits *per se*, not only in English but in the respondent's home language, or language of choice. Of the randomly selected group of respondents, 34,35 per cent (225 learners) indicated that Afrikaans is their language of choice, 17,10 per cent (112) indicated English, 14,35 per cent (94) indicated Sepedi, 9,31 per cent (61) Zulu, 9,16 per cent (60) Tswana, 1,22 per cent (8) Xhosa, and 14,50 per cent (95) indicated other languages - this is a total of 655 as four did not indicate home language.

#### 4.7.2 READING HABITS

Question three attempted to determine whether the respondent views her- or himself as a person who likes to read recreationally. An overwhelming majority answered affirmatively. The percentage who stated that they liked to read when they have the time (83,1 per cent), corresponded roughly with the number of responses to the question that inquired whether they read *books* (87,2 per cent). However, this high percentage ceases to be good news when related to the final question that required the titles and authors of the last three books read by the respondent: prescribed works are cited by 59,57 per cent of the respondents, and 66,67 per cent

of *these* learners *only* listed prescribed works. The average of 9,73 books per respondent per year is also less encouraging if the percentage of prescribed works is taken into account.

Magazines are read by a great number of learners: 94,37 per cent indicated that they read magazines, with an average of 3,82 per month. Almost eighty per cent (77,6 per cent) of the respondents regularly read newspapers; 21 per cent of the respondents indicated that they read newspapers daily.

The Internet is perused by 44,02 per cent of the respondents. This corresponds with the statistic for parents or mentors who use the Internet (41,83 per cent). The relatively high incidence of Internet use is validated by the fact that 77,88 per cent declared that they had a computer at home. Of the Internet users, approximately half spent less than three hours per week on the activity; five per cent of the users spent more than three hours per day, seven days per week on the Internet.

Question five attempted to provide an overall profile of the learners' reading motivation. An alarming twenty per cent of the respondents declared that they had a reading problem. More than eighty per cent of the respondents agreed that they read to gain information on school subjects for purposes of homework, tests and assignments. For almost half of the respondents reading was not considered a pleasurable and worthwhile pastime. Almost seventy per cent of the respondents would resort to reading if there was absolutely nothing else to do. Significantly, 80,19 per cent declared that they did *not* consider reading boring - correlating with the 83,1 per cent who stated that they liked reading when they had the time.

The opinion that reading helps the reader to understand the world and other people better was endorsed by 85,60 per cent of the respondents. The statistic for the responses to the question that investigated the popularity of television shows a discrepancy in the cross-check: 33,56 per cent preferred reading to watching television; if the question is phrased negatively later in the cross-check (variable 21), namely "I don't read because I would rather watch TV", 28,19 per cent of the respondents agreed (cf. 4.8). Sport as an activity takes the place of reading according to 30,87 per cent of the respondents. Spending time with friends was considered far more entertaining than reading and was therefore a preferred activity for 62,27 per cent of the respondents.

The question, “Reading helps me to understand the world and other people better”, was affirmed by 85,60 per cent of the respondents; this statistic correlates well with another question in which 77,32 per cent of the respondents maintain that they enjoyed reading about other people, their problems and solutions. Another parallel is found in the percentage of respondents who considered reading to be important (88,42 per cent) and the answer to the question, “Do you think it is important to read books to be successful in one’s work after school?” (86,72 per cent). More than seventy per cent of the respondents regarded reading as a valuable aid to gaining self-knowledge.

The majority of the respondents (82,89 per cent) stated that they did not find it difficult getting books to read; this, however, is disproved to some extent by the last question that required book titles and many learners’ recommendations in question seventeen. Only 15,19 per cent of the respondents read because their parents pressured them to read a lot of books, making it clear that 84,81 per cent of the adolescents effectively countered parental duress. Coercion by parents and mentors is clearly not a successful solution to the problem of reluctant reading; parental influence will have to be far more subtle to be effective with adolescents.

#### **4.7.3 READING AND LEISURE**

More than half of the respondents (53,46 per cent) found sitting still for a protracted time difficult; this question was included in the questionnaire since a number of student teachers in the pilot study attributed their reading reluctance to their aversion to sitting still for any length of time. Almost sixty per cent (59,06 per cent) of the adolescents preferred outdoor activities during leisure time. When the boys’ response to this question is compared to the girls’, it is found that boys are more restless: 60,38 per cent of the boys hate sitting still as opposed to 48,0 per cent of the girls. If irrelevant reading material is forced on adolescents who would rather give vent to their *sturm und drang*, it is clear why many researchers find that reading is not a preferred activity. One is led to wonder, however, why sitting still in front of the television set did not bother 66,44 per cent of the adolescents.

The majority of learners (81,09 per cent) read to obtain information for homework and assignments. It should be reassuring to find that 73,68 per cent of the respondents affirm that they read for information on their hobbies and interests; however, the responses to the final question that required the titles of the last three books read by the respondents reveal that very few books on hobbies and private interests were listed. More encouraging, at least, is the fact that a high percentage (82,89 per cent) declared that they did not experience difficulty finding books to read.

Question six attempted to investigate the kind of books enjoyed by adolescents. In addition to the nine categories originally listed, twelve other categories were indicated by the respondents in the spaces provided for specification. Some of the books specified by the respondents, however, already appeared in the original list of categories, and their duplication under “Other. Please specify”, indicated that the learners did not read the option list properly, that they wished to emphasize certain genres or be even more specific.

TABLE 2: *The choice of genres read by the grade elevens:*

adventure	70,96%
love stories	68,74
thrillers; detective stories	62,79
formula, trade series	61,70
other countries	53,53
animals and nature	46,86
science fiction	45,58
history	43,24
biographies	42,05

inspirational; religion; life skills	23,66
non-fiction	18,32
mystery; fantasy	14,5
sports	10,69
horror	9,92
comics	7,63
humour	2,29
computers; technology	1,35

Question seven attempted to determine if active readers were induced to do so by the presence and example of older readers in the home or the extended family. The literature study has shown that any older person can serve as a model of readership. In this survey almost eighty per cent (78,84 per cent) indicated the presence of a reading mentor in or around the home. According to the respondents, work-related material constituted the overwhelming majority of the older people's reading material (87,15 per cent). Only 49,43 per cent of the adults in and around the home were perceived to be reading fiction; a third of the respondents specified the type of book read by their elders in greater detail, indicating love stories (30,26 per cent) as the most popular leisure reading, followed by inspirational or life-skills books (28,95 per cent), biographies (10,53) and best sellers, excluding love stories (7,89 per cent). Of the adults in the home, 41,83 per cent perused the Internet, correlating significantly with the 44,02 per cent adolescent users of the Internet; this correlation is perhaps due to parental example, or at least the accessibility of computers in these homes. As with adolescents, magazines proved to be the most popular reading material with the adults: 89,41 per cent of the adults were perceived to be regular magazine readers.

When the leisure activities of adolescents are investigated, it is clear why peer influence is such a powerful a motivator - spending time with friends is their favourite pastime in a synoptic survey of leisure activities.

TABLE 3: *Leisure activities of adolescents:*

<b>How do you spend your leisure time?</b>	
I hang out with my friends	85,33%
I watch TV and videos	82,08
I go to the movies	69,84
I read	66,09
I go shopping	64,83
I take part in sport or go to the gym	63,30
I practise my hobbies such as drawing, collecting things	62,08
My family spend a lot of time together	60,29
I work for pocket money	35,83
I surf the Internet	31,62
I listen to music, play a musical instrument	22,00
I go to parties; clubbing	18,0
I take part in church activities	18,0
I work in the house	8,0



A discrepancy is found in the responses for Internet use: 31,62 per cent of the respondents list using the Internet as an option whereas 44,02 per cent answered affirmatively earlier to question four. The inconsistency may be explained by the description of Internet *surfing* as a *leisure time* activity, which may exclude, for some respondents, the use of the Internet as an educational aid. This conclusion is supported, to some extent, by the difference indicated by the respondents who have computers at home and the statistic for those who only have access to computers at school (77,88 per cent as opposed to 51,80 per cent for the latter).

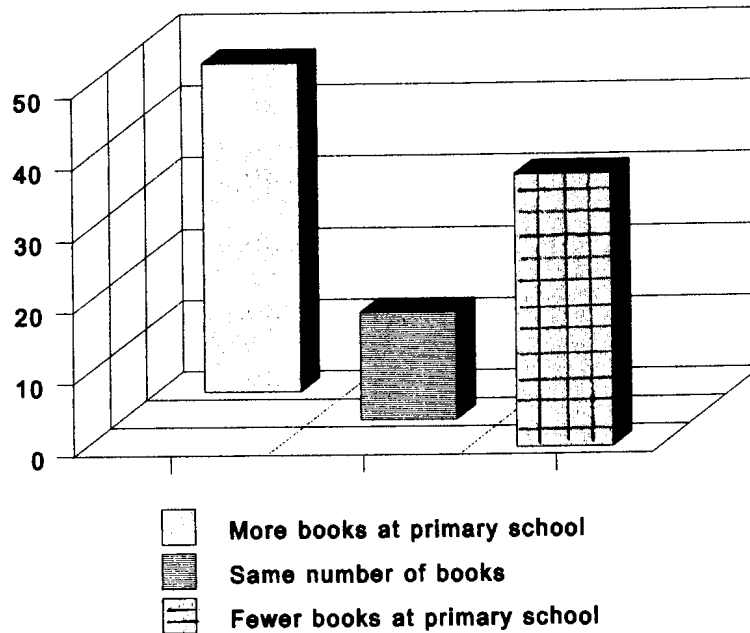
#### 4.7.4 TEACHERS AND SCHOOL

The learners were required to give their opinions on the books prescribed at school in question nine. More than half the respondents (53,04 per cent) indicated that they considered most of the prescribed works boring. Responses to the last question, supplying the titles and authors of the last three books they had read, indicated that 59,57 per cent of these were set works; even more alarming than this is the fact that in most cases *only* prescribed works are listed as the last three books read. It is little wonder, then, that reading is not a very popular activity with so many of the grade eleven learners. The choice of interesting and relevant prescribed works is therefore crucially important in the promotion of readership.

Set works were not considered too difficult: 68,02 per cent of the respondents agreed to this. However, more than half (56,11 per cent) regarded the prescribed books as 'old-fashioned' and they would not want to read them again. Class discussions about prescribed works were considered sufficiently interesting and 73,52 per cent of the respondents indicated that their teachers helped them to appreciate these books. Almost sixty per cent (58,48 per cent) of the learners felt that they could identify with the characters in the prescribed works and their problems, and this response is a much higher percentage than the one reflected by first year teacher trainees in the pilot study. (Perhaps active involvement with a book in grade eleven affords greater pleasure than the memory of a book that was studied for matric exam purposes.)

Question ten compared the grade eleven's reading habits with their recreational reading at primary school.

**FIGURE 2:** *Difference between books read at primary and secondary school:*



While at primary school, 46,45 per cent of the learners read more books; 38,39 per cent of the respondents read more at high school, while 15,17 per cent read the same number of books at high school as at primary school. When asked to give reasons for reading more while at primary schools, eighty per cent of the respondents indicated that they had more time for reading then; the same number of respondents stated that homework took up more time at high school and a busier social life left them with less time to read recreationally. In 61,70 per cent of the cases, extra-mural activities had increased to the detriment of recreational reading; 66,67 per cent of the respondents indicated that primary school teachers encouraged them more actively to read recreationally than secondary teachers.

Question twelve attempted to reflect the respondents' opinion of their language teachers' readership. The responses indicated that teachers had a positive influence as models of reading. As a response to the statement, "They like reading books themselves and they talk about them in class", 71,75 per cent of the learners answered affirmatively; 38,67 per cent thought that teachers were too busy to read books in their spare time and less than half (47,37 per cent) thought they mostly read the prescribed works.

The availability of books was the focus of question thirteen; asked where learners got the books they read recreationally, the role of the school library proved negligible: 29,10 per cent of the respondents found books to read in the school media centre, as opposed to the 67,0 per cent who obtained books from a public library. The fact that less than a third of the learners could find enticing books to read in the school media centre, is an indictment against education authorities: firstly, as many respondents indicated in the penultimate question, many schools in the districts did not have a media centre; secondly, when the school did have a media centre, the established book stock was not considered exciting enough to induce the learners to read voraciously; the third implication may be that the media centre was a prohibitive place that did not entice prospective readers to browse among its shelves. There was, fortunately, no indication that the librarians suffered from *ephebiphobia* (cf. 3.2.2)

Books were given as gifts to fewer than half (44,04 percent) of the respondents; borrowing from friends and family supplied 65,77 per cent of the books read in their spare time; 59,04 per cent bought their own books. A number of respondents (37,5 per cent) specified book clubs and second hand book shops (12,5 per cent) as dispensers of the books they read recreationally.

Questions fourteen and fifteen investigated the accessibility of computers. More than sixty per cent of the grade eleven learners indicated that they had access to a computer; of these respondents, 77,88 per cent had easy access to a computer at home; little more than half of these respondents used the school computers, and 48,73 per cent had access to computers at commercial outlets or friends' houses (cf.4.7.6).

Question sixteen asked whether the respondents considered books crucially important to "be successful in one's work after school" - 86,72 per cent answered affirmatively. This answer is validated by the affirmative response (88,42 per cent) to the cross-check question (question 5, negative) about the importance of reading that was phrased differently.

Question seventeen required respondents to suggest classroom strategies to promote readership. The responses were remarkable, suggesting strategies that many teachers would regard as antiquated (such as book reports) or more suitable for younger children.

TABLE 4: Respondents' suggestions for classroom strategies:

<b>What teachers can do to promote readership:</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
find more relevant, interesting books to read with classes	467	33,12%
emphasize the importance of books for intellectual stimulation and future professional advancement	244	17,30
induce school libraries to provide more relevant, interesting books	194	13,76
suggest suitable books to learners, give personal recommendations of books he or she enjoyed, or serve as a model of reading for pleasure	182	12,91
read with learners in class; read aloud and share reading experiences	144	10,21
nothing can be done to promote readership; readers are born, not made	69	4,89
reward learners with extra marks for books read; having feedback of books read by instituting book reports	57	4,04
do not "analyse the book to death" in classroom discussions but more often read books for the sake of pleasure only	41	2,91
make books more interesting by role play, games and dramatic enactments	12	0,85

A small number of respondents (7) also suggested more reading of non-fiction in class, the allocation of class time for recreational reading (9), scheduling reading time once or twice a week, reading a fascinating book aloud at the end of the school day (5) and the encouragement to write creatively their own stories, plays and poems. Appendix II includes some of these responses as an indication of the variety and the feasibility of the suggestions.

The final question required respondents to supply the titles and authors of the last three books read by the respondent as a reflection of the incidence and quality of their present readership. Nineteen different kinds of books were specified, with the following proving the most popular, or at least, read most often:

TABLE 5 : *Books specified by respondents*

Genre	Percentage of readers
prescribed books	59,57%
adult best-sellers	14,14
horror	10,46
inspirational, life-skills; religion	7,22
biography	3,46
formula, trade, series	1,55
<i>Harry Potter</i> series	1,05
<i>Lord of the Rings</i>	1,01
non-fiction	0,96
sport	0,59

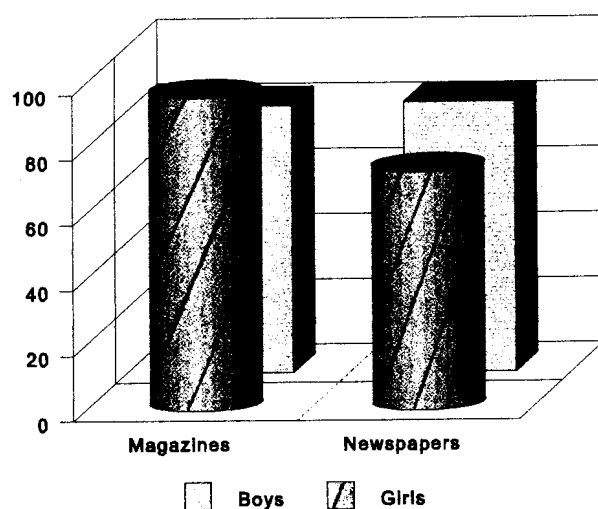
Occasionally some children's classics were cited, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; Enid Blyton, the *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* series were mentioned, but not a single young adult novel that is not prescribed at school. Some authors of adult fiction were specified, for instance Wilbur Smith, Stephen King, Danielle Steele, Jean Auel, Terry Pratchett and John Grisham. The adolescent *Sweet Valley* series was mentioned; the *University* rather than the *High School* books

were read, endorsing research that showed girls preferring to read books about ‘heroines’ a couple of years older than themselves. (Palmer, 1995; Jones, 1999)

#### 4.7.5 GENDER

The literature review indicated that there are decided differences between the reading habits of adolescent boys and girls, in spite of great similarities (cf. 3.1 and Geysler, 1986, Palmer, 1995 and Jones, 1999). In this survey the differences in the reading interests between boys and girls were especially illuminating. When asked if they liked to read when they have the time in question three, 74,05 per cent of the boys answered affirmatively as opposed to 90,33 per cent of the girls. When asked if they read *books*, 79,24 of the boys answered affirmatively, compared to 93,23 per cent of the girls. With regard to the reading of magazines and newspapers, the following became apparent:

FIGURE 3: *Gender differences between boys’ and girls’ reading of magazines and newspapers.*



Magazines proved to be the most popular reading material with both girls and boys, with girls reading slightly more magazines than boys (95,63 per cent as opposed to 92,66 per cent); boys read newspapers more avidly than girls (82,63 per cent as opposed to 73,16 per cent). With regard to reading motivation, there were definite differences, in spite of some similarities.

TABLE 6: *Gender differences in the reading habits of boys and girls.*

<b>Your personal reading habits are best described by the following statements:</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
I read to get information on school subjects for homework, tests and assignments	74,63%	86,25
I don't have time to read	30,8	18,84
I read because it is a fun way to pass the time	45,9	58,73
I read when I have nothing else to do	61,48	75,45
I love reading about other people, their problems and solutions	64,18	87,72
Reading helps me to understand myself better	63,94	75,37
I prefer to spend time out of doors	64,66	55,05
I have a reading problem	25,28	13,80
I don't like sitting still for a long time	60,38	48,0
I read because my parents want me to read a lot of books	17,67	12,73

Boys and girls displayed the same preferences regarding genres, with the exception of love stories (45,81 per cent of the boys confessed to reading love stories, compared to 84,38 per cent of the girls), and books about sport (21,67 per cent boys as opposed to 1,41 per cent of the girls).

Regarding their opinion of prescribed works, more girls found the set books interesting (63,66 per cent of the girls, 32,12 per cent of the boys) and the teachers more helpful (79,76 per cent girls, 65,64 per cent boys) In contrast, slightly more girls found the prescribed works difficult (33,76 per cent of the girls to 29,72 per cent of the boys; however, this statistic is unreliable since it falls outside the probability coefficient).

There were some interesting differences between boys and girls in their responses to leisure time activities.

TABLE 7: *Gender differences with regard to leisure activities:*

How do you spend your leisure time?	Boys	Girls
I read	53,69%	75,08
I go to the movies	66,80	72,31
I hang out with my friends	88,42	83,13
I watch TV and videos	81,50	82,42
I surf the Internet	41,80	23,49
I go shopping	51,26	74,92
I spend a lot of time with my family	54,89	64,35

Since too few respondents specified additional hobbies, the statistics for other leisure activities are not reliable. However, responses indicated that the girls and boys in the sample were more or less equally interested in listening to music, 'clubbing', attending parties and going to church.

While acknowledging the similarities between the reading interests and pastimes of boys and girls (such as their preference for spending time out of doors, not liking to sit still for a long time, and, understandably, their evident refusal to be coerced by their parents to read books), teachers should take note of the marked differences. Notably, in every instance regarding reading habits, girls reported higher percentages than boys - the exception being the experience of reading problems. Confirming reports by other researchers, it was found that far more girls enjoyed recreational reading than boys.

More boys indicated perusal of the Internet than girls - 53,92 per cent (110 boys) as opposed to 35,71 per cent (85 girls). Of the respondents who spent more than fourteen hours a week on the



Internet, fourteen were boys and only two were girls. The three respondents who specified that they played computer games were boys. If the playing of computer games was provided as an option with other leisure activities, the number may have been higher; the fact that no girls indicated computer games and three boys did, is in line with computer use as a whole. Except for girls' overwhelming preference for love stories, and boys' reading of books about sport, there is a great similarity between boys and girls with regard to genres; this is good news for committees regarding the choice of prescribed works.

#### **4.7.6 AFFLUENCE AND READING**

Various surveys have been conducted abroad to investigate the influence of children's socio-economic circumstances on their recreational reading; Clark (1976:100), for instance refers to studies by Durkin and Krippner (1963) and conducted her own case studies of early fluent readers of whom many came from impoverished homes in Glasgow. In South Africa, the influence of adverse socio-economic circumstances on the recreational reading habits of adolescents has not been studied extensively and this survey offered an opportunity to investigate, by means of a two-way comparison - albeit of a limited cluster - the responses of 'more' and 'less' privileged learners in the Tshwane South district. From the cluster of twenty-five schools, three 'more' privileged and three 'less' privileged schools were selected (with regard to the assumed socio-economic status of the parents and the amount of school fees) and a sample was obtained to test responses to a number of questions. This cluster consisted of a total of 169 learners. Although the results cannot be considered conclusive, some of the statistics have been revealing and are discussed for the light they throw on recreational reading from the angle of affluence.

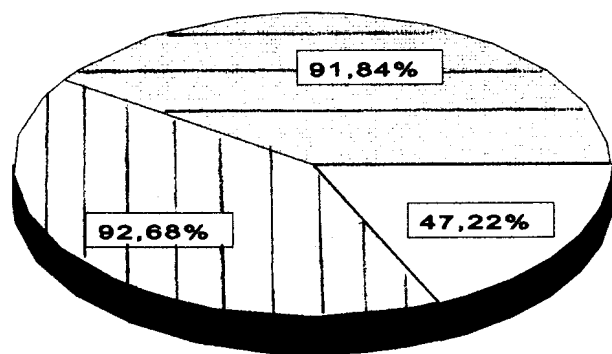
Asked whether they liked to read when they have the time, 82,35 per cent of the more privileged respondents answered affirmatively as opposed to 92,11 per cent of the less privileged, indicating that the latter tested well above the mean of 83 per cent for the whole cluster of 659 respondents. The more privileged learners read slightly more books (93,75 per cent) compared to the less privileged learners (87,10 per cent). Remarkably, magazines and newspapers were read

by approximately the same percentage of respondents from the two groups (lying within two per cent of the mean for the whole cluster, 77,60 per cent).

Perusal of the Internet indicated a substantial difference: 65,96 per cent of the adolescents from affluent homes used the Internet compared to 24,24 per cent from disadvantaged homes; the average for the whole cluster was 44,02 per cent. In the cross-checking question (variable 74), 42,55 per cent of the privileged adolescents indicated that they spent some leisure time on the Internet compared to 19,55 per cent of the disadvantaged respondents; the mean for the whole cluster was 31,62 per cent (cf. 4.7.5). With regard to using computers, the statistics indicate that affluence allows easier access to computers: of the privileged users 94,12 per cent answered affirmatively as opposed to 29,46 per cent of the disadvantaged learners. The following figure represents the responses to the question: "If you do have access to a computer, where is it?"

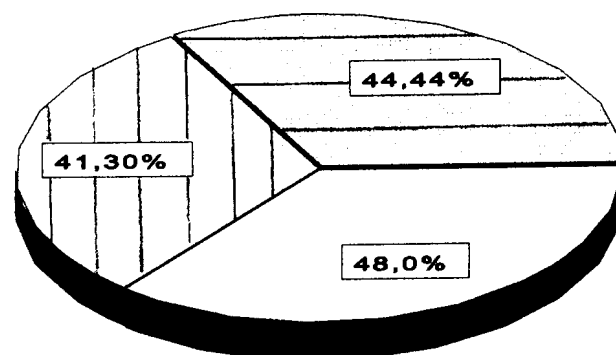
FIGURE 4: *Comparison of computer accessibility between more and less privileged learners.*

**More privileged learners**



 At home       At school  
 Elsewhere

**Less privileged learners**



 At home       At school  
 Elsewhere

It is a pity that the questionnaire did not require the learners to indicate whose computers they used if not one at home or the school's, since it could have assisted in the supplying of teaching aids for the disadvantaged.

A two-way comparison tested the supposition that the incidence of recreational reading is directly proportional to the availability of books. It was surprising to find that neither group experienced difficulty obtaining books to read: 81,25 per cent of the more privileged respondents and 80,0 per cent of the less privileged declared that they easily find books. The responses to the earlier question about the reading of books - 93,75 percent and 87,10 per cent respectively - corroborate the statistic. However, in spite of other similarities - such as the same percentage of respondents who read to get information on school subjects and who consider reading important - notable differences between the two groups' reading motivation are evident from the following table:

TABLE 8: *Differences in reading motivation between more and less privileged learners (percentage indicating affirmative answers):*

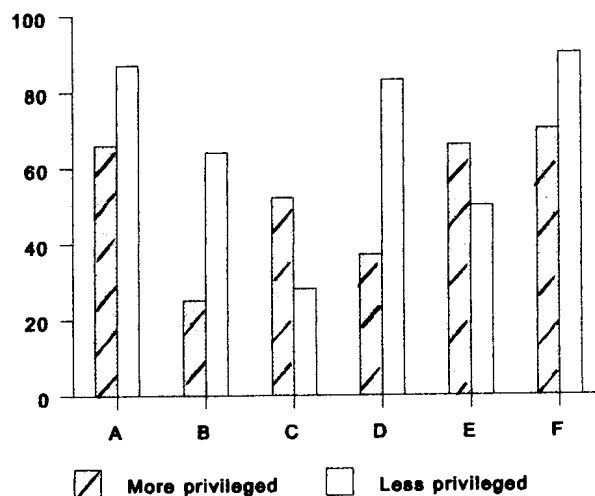
<b>Your personal reading habits are best described by the following statements:</b>	<b>More privileged respondents</b>	<b>Less privileged respondents</b>
I don't have time to read	47,92 %	14,42 %
I prefer reading to watching TV	19,15	58,25
Reading helps me to understand the world and other people better	79,59	95,28
I don't read because I prefer to take part in sports	36,17	16,98
Spending time with my friends is more fun than reading	85,28	28,85
Reading helps me to understand myself better	56,25	91,35

I prefer to spend time out of doors	70,21	34,95
I have a reading problem	8,33	38,10
I read to get information on my hobbies and interests	60,42	90,29
I read because my parents want me to read a lot of books	6,38	26,92

The thirty percent difference between the two groups in the experiencing of a reading problem is a substantial and an unfortunate one. One is led to wonder to what extent remedial facilities at privileged schools were responsible for the low incidence of problem reading, and whether reading problems were addressed at schools for the disadvantaged. However, personal interviews with the learners are required before the incidence of reading problems can be authenticated.

Approximately the same percentage of respondents in each group liked reading adventure stories, historical novels, non-fiction, thrillers and detective stories. However, there are remarkable differences between the two groups' preferences for the following genres:

FIGURE 5: Differences regarding choice of genre between the more and less privileged respondents:



- |          |                        |          |                           |          |                        |
|----------|------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|------------------------|
| <b>A</b> | <b>Love stories</b>    | <b>B</b> | <b>Animals and Nature</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>Science Fiction</b> |
| <b>D</b> | <b>Other countries</b> | <b>E</b> | <b>Popular series</b>     | <b>F</b> | <b>Biographies</b>     |

Another two-way test was done with the responses to the question where the learners get the books they read. The statistics proved unreliable in the case of school libraries, borrowing from friends and family or the buying of own books. However, a notable response was obtained from the option of the public library: 42,22 per cent of the privileged respondents answered affirmatively to 66,33 per cent of the disadvantaged learners (this measured a statistically significant difference on the 95 per cent level of confidence).

The greatest difference of opinion between the two groups centred on the prescribed works. The following table indicates positive responses to the statements about set works:

TABLE 9: *Differences of opinion on prescribed works between privileged and disadvantaged respondents:*

<b>What is your opinion of the books that are prescribed at school?</b>	<b>Privileged</b>	<b>Disadvantaged</b>
Most of them are very boring	53,06 %	27,07 %
Most of them are interesting	42,86	87,85
They are mostly too difficult	22,92	47,06
I can identify with the characters and their problems	47,83	73,47
I will want to read the books again	22,92	76,19
The teachers help us to appreciate the books	66,67	89,91

Exactly the same percentage considered the books “too old-fashioned” (52 per cent) and thought that the set works “are interesting but the discussions about them are boring” (almost 50 percent for both groups). However, the two groups had different views of their language teachers’

reading habits: 84,78 per cent of the teachers for the privileged learners were perceived to like reading books and talking about books in class as opposed to 60,78 per cent of the teachers for the disadvantaged. Only 21,95 per cent of the privileged learners thought that their teachers were too busy to read in their spare time as opposed to 68,48 per cent of the disadvantaged learners; this pattern is repeated in the response to the statement: “I think they mostly only read the prescribed works”, with 39,53 per cent of the privileged respondents agreeing as opposed to 65,59 of the disadvantaged.

Some leisure activities were indicated by approximately the same number of respondents from the two groups, such as watching TV and videos, and going shopping. There are some revealing differences in the other responses to question eleven:

TABLE 10: *Differences in leisure activities between privileged and disadvantaged learners:*

<b>How do you spend your leisure time?</b>	<b>Privileged</b>	<b>Disadvantaged</b>
I read	65,96%	77,67%
I go to the movies	94,0	56,70
I take part in sport or go to the gym	72,34	52,0
I hang out with my friends	92,0	81,0
I work for pocket money	20,0	42,11
I surf the Internet	42,55	19,55
My family spend a lot of time together	47,73	78,22

The two-way comparisons made it clear that affluence may not play a crucial role in the availability of books, but it does influence the leisure activities and perceptions about teachers and the reading motivation. As a response to question seventeen: “What do you think teachers can do to encourage their learners to read more books?”, many disadvantaged respondents

emphasized the importance of literacy and referred to their parents' illiteracy as a crippling factor in their family's life - for instance respondent # 527: "*They must force them to read hard because decades ago they didn't have those books and now other parents they do not have jobs because they didn't read more books so as for us to have better future they have to force us to read*" [sic]. (For other responses see Appendix II).

#### 4.8 DISCREPANCIES AND LIMITATIONS

In most cases, a significant statistical correlation obtains with the cross-checking questions; for instance, the variables for Internet use and computer accessibility, the question about whether the respondents considered books crucially important. There are some discrepancies in the responses to at least three questions: the statistics for television viewing as opposed to reading show a discrepancy when the correlative is phrased negatively in the cross-check: 28,19 per cent of the respondents agreed to the statement "I don't read because I would rather watch TV", whereas 33,56 per cent affirmed that "I prefer reading to watching TV". The statistical discrepancy can only be attributed to the clumsiness of the statement and the confusion between an affirmative and a negative response to the first question.

The average obtained for the answer to the question about the number of books read per year, neither confirms nor refutes assumptions regarding reading habits; a reading average of 9,73 books for each respondent per year affords little insight into adolescent reading habits for a number of reasons:

- \* since 58,2 per cent of books cited were prescribed works (not only literary set works but books for other subjects such as biology, physical science and history), more than half of the almost ten books purportedly read per year were *not* chosen for their recreational value;
- \* the standard deviation of 13,84 per cent (from a minimum of one to a maximum of 99 books per year, with, for instance eleven respondents reading 50 books a year, one reading 80 books and five reading 99 books per year) makes the mean unreliable;
- \* a respondent who claimed to read 99 books per year and could only cite the titles of prescribed works, might have been overzealous, if not downright deceitful.

Although there were possibly two pranksters who treated the study as a joke, it is remarkable that there were only two. Since the respondents were adolescents (and their sense of fun ordinarily rather acute), it is even more remarkable that 659 completed the questionnaire with what appears to be sincerity, if not veracity. The Gauteng Department of Education did not grant permission for the conducting of personal interviews with learners, and it is, therefore, impossible to determine if the seventeen respondents who claimed to read more than fifty books a year, but who, in twelve of these cases, could only cite prescribed works, were truly voracious readers, fibbers, wishful thinkers or readers of pulp fictions not specified in the final question. There were other doubtful answers; for instance, in answer to the question whether there is an older person in the home who reads a great deal, 78,84 per cent answered affirmatively, and yet, to the statement, “They don’t read often”, 94,59 per cent agreed. Since these are mutually exclusive questions, the discrepancy must be attributed to wishful thinking on the part of the respondent, to slipshod reading of the questionnaire, careless marking or bafflement caused by a confusingly formulated statement; it cannot be taken as proof that respondents found it easier to answer affirmatively since, for instance, two questions before, in the case of the older family member’s use of the Internet, almost sixty per cent answered *negatively*.

An alarming finding was the incidence of incorrect grammar and highly erratic spelling in the six open-ended questions that required specification. Although the learners were expected to answer the questions spontaneously and they did not set out to write cautiously or faultlessly, the carelessness of their spelling, the absence of punctuation and incidence of erroneous sentence construction are reasons for concern. The responses to the question, “What do you think teachers can do to encourage their pupils to read more books?” - are illuminating for a number of reasons, as the arbitrarily selected examples testify (cf Appendix II). The respondents are best able to judge which classroom and readership strategies are helpful and their suggestions are very valuable for this reason. Although this study was not concerned with the writing skills of grade eleven learners, the incidence of grammatical errors poses the question to what extent many of them can truly appreciate their prescribed works if their answers to the open-ended questions are anything to judge by. Although only 17,10 per cent (112) of the respondents indicated that English is their home language, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors were not confined to ESL speakers. The misspelling of words that appeared in the questionnaire itself and



could have been copied correctly is an indication of sloppiness or carelessness; the rest can be an indication of ignorance and the extent to which a large part of the learners in the Tshwane South district are not fluent in English.

A conspicuous limitation to the study is the absence of interviews. An oral interview in questionnaire or inventory form would have provided insight into individual reading habits through illuminating responses, if only to the open-ended questions. Carter and Abrahamson (1990:53) describe the interview as “among the most commonly recommended and used techniques in the history of interest research”. An individual interview gives the researcher the opportunity to follow up on a subject’s response with additional, penetrating questions. There are limitations to the oral interview, too, such as the time-consuming nature of the approach, the manipulation of large and varied numbers of responses, interviewer bias and interjections by the interviewer, but the insight afforded by this method outweighs the limitations. In this study, interviews with the disadvantaged respondents could have helped to explain anomalies such as the vast number of books purportedly read, or given an indication of strategies that could help readership promotion with the disadvantaged. Further studies on adolescent readership should include the oral interview for a number of these reasons, but mainly to avoid the lack of specificity and the limiting categorization of the multiple choice inventory.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Avoid compulsion and let early education be a matter of amusement.  
Young children learn by games: compulsory education cannot remain in the soul.  
Advice offered to parents by Plato.

By the time we graduate, we have been painstakingly trained in separating facts from their meaning. We wonder that our classes, with few exceptions, seem irrelevant in our lives. No wonder they're so boring. Boredom is the necessary condition of any education which teaches us to manipulate the facts and suppress their meaning.  
Steven Golin, *New Left Notes*, in Kumar, 1997

Education practices in Africa today are such that they practically do not develop in the individual the habit of reading.  
Djoleto, in Staiger & Casey, 1983.

The problem is that we have concentrated exclusively on teaching the child *how* to read, and we have forgotten to teach him to *want* to read. To want to read. There is the key: desire. It is the prime mover, the magic ingredient. There is no success story written today - in the arts, business, education, athletics - in which desire does not play the leading role.  
Trelease, 1982

When you have more than twenty children in your class, get another teacher.  
The Talmud

## **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The results of the survey show that recreational reading is only a marginal activity for the majority of middle adolescent learners. In spite of the respondents' declaration that they read recreationally, and that they consider it important to read, the titles of books they cited indicate that very few books are read simply because they afford pleasure during leisure time.

Educators believe that an apathy to recreational reading has an adverse influence on children's intellectual, social and emotional development. Such reading reluctance must be overcome with the efforts of committed and highly-motivated teachers.

The respondents were remarkably forthcoming with regard to recommendations to help remedy the problem. Of the 700 respondents, 424 contributed suggestions and classroom strategies - since only 4,72 per cent felt that there was nothing teachers could do to promote recreational reading, the implication is that 95,28 per cent of the grade elevens in the sample considered themselves open to teacher guidance and influence. The survey indicated further that the majority of learners (73,18 per cent) were positive about their language teachers' efforts at bringing them to an understanding and appreciation of the prescribed works. However, the respondents did not think their teachers paid sufficient attention to readership; to what extent this is responsible for the paucity of exciting book titles in the final answer is difficult to determine. The survey indicated that readership promotion is a much-needed activity, at school and home.

## **5.2 PARENTAL INFLUENCE**

It is the basic premise of this study that literary reading is one of the most important cultural and educational activities people of all ages engage in; this is followed by the belief that the primary influence on recreational reading is the parents' example and influence from the child's birth onwards.

In a house where children encounter a variety of books, where they have the freedom and time to peruse these books whenever they wish or to hear them read aloud, literary development usually happens as a matter of course. It is, therefore, recommended that parents read tirelessly to their children, from birth onwards, continuing long after children have become literate. Educators, psychologists and literary figures agree that the sharing of books, whether in the form of bedtime reading with young children or intellectual discussions after shared reading with adolescents, is essential for reading development. Parental involvement in reading activities is crucial for many reasons, *inter alia*

- \* for the purposes of emotional bonding - when parents read to children, they can more easily discuss troubling issues; children who are used to discussing issues openly with their parents, may communicate more freely when they become adolescent;
- \* for the reinforcement of the reading habit;
- \* for linguistic development and the encouragement of critical thinking skills;
- \* for giving a wealth of literacy experiences that enhance his or her life in general and are beneficial to learning at school in particular.

The most important way in which parents can encourage their children to read extensively is by serving as models of reading themselves. If parents are *seen* to be reading for pleasure, making time to read in their busy lives, adolescents will follow suit. Parents should share interesting aspects of a new book, should be seen enjoying their own reading, should offer praise for reading, and read aloud to their child. Through these practices, parents show that they think reading is a worthwhile activity. Although the presence of books in the home does not guarantee the making of active readers, research holds that even a small collection of books can provide an inspiring atmosphere for reading.

School-going children should still be supported by parents in their continued development as readers. Various studies (Chambers, 1979; Trelease, 1984; Meek, 1984; Robinson & Good, 1987; Sweet & Anderson, 1993; Sulzby, 1993) have shown that the parents of ardent readers continue to monitor their children's progress in school, become involved in school activities, take an interest in their homework, buy books, take them to libraries, encourage reading as a

leisure-time activity, and place reasonable limits on activities such as indiscriminate television viewing.

With regard to television viewing, parents are advised to actually bargain for reading time: if the adolescent wants to spend an hour watching TV, he or she first has to read for an hour. In spite of the fact that 53,71 per cent of the respondents declared that they did not like sitting still for any length of time (which should explain why sitting and reading is not an attractive activity), 82,17 per cent regularly sit down to watch television. Expressing disapproval of the hours spent in front of a television, however, has little effect - parental example is, as in all things, the most powerful motivator.

A comfortable socio-economic status is not a prerequisite for the encouragement of active reading (cf 4.7.6). Sweet and Anderson (1993:54) refer to case studies with African-American families of extremely low socioeconomic status in New Jersey that raised successful and avid readers, even during periods of homelessness. The survey shows that the respondents from 'privileged' schools did not read significantly more books than children from the 'less privileged' school. Affluence may make books easier to come by, but reading does not automatically grow out of availability. The 66,33 per cent of the 'less privileged' learners who indicated that they visit the library might make up for the paucity of books at home in this way.

Once children reach secondary school, parental responsibilities for reading activities and the encouragement of recreational reading should continue unabated. Parental influences are at this stage perhaps more indirect and therefore more subtle, but perhaps, because of this, more pervasive. Ideally, as the primary nurturers of lifelong readers, parents should

- \* structure family reading time and read together in the same room during a daily or weekly family 'reading hour' (Childrey, 1981:14);
- \* be *seen* to read in front of their children - whether reading newspapers, books, magazines, work-related papers *et al*, they serve as a model of reading;
- \* create a positive attitude with regard to reading in their children;
- \* create an environment in which reading is regarded as an important activity;
- \* supply a variety of suitable reading material;

- \* read to their adolescents and discuss issues arising from their reading with them;
- \* encourage membership to the library.

However, close contact between parents and children requires the time that is simply not readily available in most two-salaried homes today - such a shared reading activity is one of the first casualties in the life of a busy family. If parents, then, do not find the time to read for and with their children, an essential linguistic developmental stage is never experienced.

Fortunately, research has shown that reading experiences can come to a child, if not through parents, then, through any older person who cares to share books with a child. Clark (1976 :102) found that early fluent readers had “available an interested adult with time to devote to them at the stage when they were interested in reading - either to read to them, talk with them, or answer their questions.” This older person can be a grandparent, a sibling or any member of an extended family. An extended family will do just that: extend the possibilities for reading by sharing reading experiences.

### **5.3 MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

Throughout the years, the pendulum has swung from moral development to moral dilemma, from a preponderance of morality in education, to a freedom from all strictures, and back again through a variety of viewpoints. At the moment, education departments here and elsewhere in the developed world find it ‘safer’ to refrain from tackling ethical prickly pears than face charges of bias, ‘elitism’ and ‘brainwashing’.

This has not always been the case. In America, schools in the earliest days of their republic tackled character education head on - through discipline, the teacher’s example, and the daily school curriculum. Consensus supporting character education began to erode in the early twentieth century and it was not until the 1970s that character education returned in the form of values clarification and Kohlberg’s moral dilemma discussions. Interest in values education decreased until recently when character education and service learning gave impetus to a new interest in the moral development of children (Irvin, 1998:29).

It is interesting to note that the desirability of a moral education has ebbed at the same time that a lack of morality has begun to be deplored by a concerned public; the reluctance to include moral training in the school curriculum coincides with distressing crime reports. In the absence of structured and departmental sanction for moral guidance in classrooms, the study of literature affords teachers a most valuable tool in values education without running the risk of being accused of bias and anathematised -isms. Irvin (1998:29) quotes Leming who states that people interested in character education have long believed that morally inspiring literature should be part of any character education programme.

Young adolescents will acquire a value system with or without the help of parents and teachers. At a stage of development when students are emerging as reflective citizens, educators can still help students to be consciously aware of constructive values, to think logically about consequences, to empathize with others, and to make personal commitments to constructive values and behaviour (Irvin quotes Davis, 1998:29).

While one school of thought would encourage children to read whatever they feel the need to, another wishes to restrict the reading they do to 'wholesome' books. For many parents and teachers the choice of books is a dilemma: should children be allowed to read whatever they wish, including reading matter that is deemed undesirable? Parents in the United Kingdom have often appealed to have a rating for books as for films, with an X certificate for sexually explicit books or reading matter with depictions of violence. "However, as in other cases, censorship increases desire, and a banned book often becomes a best-seller and a must-read for teenagers" (Meek, 1984:190).

Parents, researchers and teachers must take care not to be too judgmental of their adolescents' reading habits, which can be more extensive than they think. Much of the kind of reading adolescents do wins little approval from adult readers and educators, but such reading matter (trade books, magazines about pop music, film stars, fashions, computer games etc.) answers to some craving and affords pleasure. Perhaps the reading of trade or formula books helps to cultivate a reading habit; however, there is no conclusive evidence that this is the case, since the reading of adolescent trade books usually merely leads to a habit of reading adult formula series.

Adults have no control over the literature that is passed around at school, and unfortunately much popular youth fiction is often a bewildering assortment of stories featuring drugs, rape, perversions, alcoholism, maladjustment, dysfunctional families, sexual abuse and violence. While it is true that realism in adolescent fiction is essential, the sensationalist approach of too many of these stories can only be deplored. The authors cited most by the respondents in the survey (excluding the trade books of which the authors were unknown - or irrelevant) were Stephen King, Wilbur Smith, John Grisham, Terry Pratchett, J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling; only the latter two authors would be considered the purveyors of 'higher order' reading.

For parents, an easy solution to the problem of teenage pulp fiction is to adopt the same attitude they have regarding their adolescents' pop music and other fads; parents can always hope that their children soon tire of the second-rate, sensationalist reading matter that feed their morbid curiosity and begin to develop a taste for books that offer intellectual challenge and emotional support.

Apart from hoping that their adolescents acquire a less extreme taste in reading and having confidence in their growing judgment, teachers and parents can play a more active role by gently guiding the learners towards more worthwhile reading matter and by discussing books they themselves have read as children and found rewarding. Not all children, however, will derive pleasure from a book simply because a parent or teacher enjoyed it decades before.

When easy solutions fail to wean adolescents on to books with more substance, parents and teachers can still not relinquish their responsibility regarding their reading; they should take care not to ignore pressing problems simply because they are impossible to solve. It is imperative that parents and teachers discuss genuine concerns with the adolescents and share books that deal with these problems to keep open channels of communication.



## 5.4 MENTORING

Ideally, parents spend enough time reading for and with their children, and are seen by their offspring enjoying their own adult reading matter. In reality, however, even the nuclear family is embattled for time and in single-parent families the idea of a 'daily reading hour' is wishful thinking. Research, however, comes to the rescue when it proves that although the role of the parent is crucial, any other regular, enthusiastic adult influence will suffice to make a child an avid reader. "The mediation of literature to children by a literate, sympathetic adult is the single most important factor in the creation of a desire among children to read and to read adventurously" (Chambers, 1985:46). Not only parents, then, but grandparents, older siblings, uncles, aunts, bookish teachers, caring nannies or unselfish friends have been cited by voracious readers as their mentors.

Adolescents benefit from a mentor's influence as much as younger children do. Childrey (1981:19) suggests that the mentors create a love of reading by

- \* selecting a mutually attractive book to share with an adolescent reader; a book a friend suggests, especially one of controversy, or a classic, or any book the adolescent thinks might be fun to read;
- \* reading aloud to the adolescent, since learners read so many school books on their own that for most it is a reward to have someone read to them;
- \* reading aloud as it facilitates the sharing of thoughts and ideas raised by the book;
- \* calling attention to community figures or famous people who read avidly;
- \* asking "Why?" as it might be the most effective question to stimulate reasoning in a listening situation;
- \* making the adolescent responsible for evaluating the evidence and responding critically and emotionally.

Such a spontaneous sharing of reading between mentor and adolescent - the time, intimacy, reactions, openness and attempt at dialogue - may be difficult to establish at first, but may have a far-reaching effect upon the attitude towards reading in a mutually beneficial way. Reading books with an adolescent in an open-minded manner, especially on taboo topics, helps to

develop a mutual give and take, an examination of opinion that will bring some measure of maturity to the relationship.

One of the most significant findings of the survey was the respondents' desire to share books with their teachers and the fact that they want teachers to personally recommend books that they have enjoyed themselves. The sharing of reading with a mentor is an invaluable experience for an adolescent, both as an inducement to read voraciously and as a development of critical thinking skills. However, in spite of an open-mindedness and spontaneity in the association, it remains a vertical relationship. For a smooth transition to adulthood, adolescents also need to examine their opinions in the company of their peers. Reading is the ideal activity to this end, especially since "unless you find yourself in books you have a harder time finding anybody else" (Chambers, 1985:46).

## **5.5 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND OTHER AUTHORITIES**

Ideally, a government recognizes that developing a national body of literature and nurturing readership deserve its attention and consequently sponsors, launches and sustains co-ordinated campaigns to promote the reading habit. The present government is paying more than lip service to the demands of literacy education in school, especially in the disadvantaged sector. Various literacy campaigns have been launched and directed by the government and the various departments of education, the latest being *Masifunde Sonke*, a project instigated by Kader Asmal, the Minister of Education, to coincide with the international project marking 2001 as the Year of the Reader. Such public recognition of a private skill and statements by top government officials concerning the benefits of the reading habit for the nation and for individuals have more than planted the seed of the future of literacy in this country. Campaigns and publicity can and do aid the acquisition of literacy for all.

However, as has been stated repeatedly, the acquisition of literacy is inconsequential if the newly-literate do not continue reading - they can actually revert back to a state of illiteracy in a matter of months if the skill is not used actively (Staiger & Casey, 1983:8). It is ironic that the promotion of readership that will keep the newly-literate reading enthusiastically has never

enjoyed the same support by the government. There are pockets of enthusiasm in sectors of the government and education departments, but recreational reading has suffered from neglect for a number of reasons:

- \* launching a project is easier - and cheaper - than sustaining it in the long term;
- \* vastly more people, research and resources have been geared towards the championing of literacy than the promotion of readership;
- \* the concept of basic skills has predominated, at the expense of mastery and merit;
- \* literacy is attained when perceivable outcomes are reached - readership is a continuous, diffuse, sophisticated preoccupation with no tangible measurement;
- \* literacy can be pursued as a single goal - readership is a value judgement.

The government and the Ministry of Education must lead the way in the promotion of readership; schools and publishers will follow. Apart from providing the necessary funds for the acquisition of books, government should create a culture of reading by

- \* making reforms in postal regulations “ that favour distribution of reading materials, special tax arrangements for indigenous authors, relaxation of customs charges for the import on raw and partially processed materials for publishing and other such matters are topics for discussion and publicity in the context of a readership campaign” (Staiger & Casey, 1983:38);
- \* “providing time on radio and television stations and space in newspapers, but also by giving advice and co-operating with librarians, publishers and educators in producing programmes about books and reading that will be attractive, dynamic and in keeping with the nature of those media” (Staiger & Casey, 1983:38).
- \* launching a campaign that emphasizes the benefits of extensive reading (cf. respondents’ suggestion that the value of reading be extolled by teachers);
- \* making regulations that will benefit publishing;
- \* stating unequivocally that high-ranking members of the government (and other luminaries) endorse extensive reading, and if possible, bear personal testimony to the benefits of readership;
- \* appealing to parents to promote reading activities and by supplying funds to this end;

- \* by launching drives, designing campaigns and fostering positive attitudes before implementing policies to encourage readership;
- \* making it attractive for the private sector to become involved in readership promotion and help encourage their work force to read more avidly.

The Ministry of Education can do more than just *encourage* the way the government does (through financial help, tax deductions and advertising campaigns) - it can actually *prescribe* strategies for the promotion of readership; for instance, the education department must allocate time during school hours for pleasurable reading activities, or even more importantly, actually *timetable* storytelling, not just leave it to teachers to find the time when and if they feel like it (cf. school policies in 5.7.2):

Teachers, books, and pupils with motivation are the substance of most institutions devoted to education. Teachers and books need money and commitment from central governments. If both are forthcoming, one side of the education equation is formed. Motivation of pupils cannot be guaranteed by money or governments, but motivation is the key to effective learning and is perhaps the teacher's most important task in the classroom (Irving, 1980:9).

The government and other authorities must recognize that the concept of lifelong learning through reading is one that requires the support and attention of all parties who know that the benefits of literacy are not only of an economic nature but also have a significant impact on the quality of the intellectual and spiritual life of all segments of the population.

## **5.6 TEACHER TRAINING**

Many respondents in the survey suggested that teachers should celebrate the benefits of reading since this would help to promote extensive readership. No study has investigated whether teachers refrain from promoting recreational reading because they do not fully understand the necessity for it, or because they are simply too pressed for time by the rigours of a curriculum. At present, it is the exception rather than the rule for teacher training institutions to provide at least

some guidance during teacher training of elementary and secondary teachers, and even in these cases the courses are rudimentary at best.

Robinson and Good (1987:18) have found that prospective teachers only receive a fleeting introduction to the knowledge required for teaching reading *per se* and most teacher training programmes ignore the promotion of recreational reading altogether. Robinson and Good suggest, rather futilely, that teacher education programmes should be lengthened to extend to five years, and the quality and rigour of the instruction increased to allow teachers to acquire an adequate base in the liberal arts and sciences and in pedagogy.

It is clear that all teacher training should include children's literature modules comprising a theoretical framework with practical components. In such a course the following aspects need to be incorporated:

- \* reader motivation;
- \* skills and techniques of reading;
- \* a theory of children's literature, with the focus on development levels, genres, learner needs;
- \* a short history of children's literature;
- \* designing methods, strategies and techniques to promote readership at school as part of curricular and extracurricular activities;
- \* selection of books and use of libraries and data bases;
- \* organizing Readathons and book-clubs;
- \* the availability of reading materials: supply and distribution, cost and ease of access, content and design;
- \* strategies to relate children's literature to other subjects and disciplines;
- \* the use of visual aids (videos, illustrations, posters, bulletin boards), the media (book reviews, the Internet, catalogues) and classroom strategies (role play, little class plays, dramatic enactments of scenes in a book, interviews, debates) to make reading attractive and interactive;
- \* a working knowledge of children's books, obtained by reading a great number of works.

With regard to the latter: as important as the enthusiasm a teacher needs in enormous quantities, is a knowledge of children's books and other reading material; there is, of course, only one sure way to acquire the necessary knowledge, and it is by reading a wide range of children's books - starting to read during teacher training and continuing throughout a teaching career. There is no other way to remain in touch with the available literature than by reading avidly, enthusiastically and critically. It is imperative that student teachers start reading children's literature during their undergraduate years - hopefully the habit of reading (children's books at least, if not all other books for their own edification and pleasure) will be established early in their careers in this way. A comprehensive curriculum should include the reading of as many books as possible, both fiction and nonfiction, modern children's books and classics.

The aim of teacher training should be quality of instruction - this is also a major factor in children's development as readers:

Quality of instruction is a category that includes teachers' ability to motivate children and inspire them to read widely, knowledge and skilful use of best available methods and strategies, command of effective teaching techniques, ability to adapt lessons to take account of the needs of individual children, and skill in managing a classroom so as to make it a pleasant and productive place (Anderson, 1993:34).

As with everything else, the success of a teacher training course and the continued application of its tenets depend on the individual teacher's motivation and receptivity, but at least it is more immediately practicable than the following well-meaning suggestion from the *Recommendations from Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Robinson & Good, 1987:18):

*Schools should attract and hold more able teachers.* The number of able people who choose teaching as a profession has declined in recent years. Reversing this trend requires higher admissions standards for teacher education programmes, stronger standards for teacher certification, improved working conditions, and higher teachers' salaries.

Until the government pays heed to the call for the latter, such a recommendation is an exercise in optimism; for now, the promotion of readership is brought about by including it in the course curriculum and, as far as possible, perfecting it during teacher training.

## 5.7 SCHOOL AND TEACHERS

### 5.7.1 THE TEACHER

Ideally, after a comprehensive and successful period as teacher trainers, expertly trained teachers enter the profession, not only armed with adequate knowledge and practical experience as teachers of reading in general, but also as enthusiastic proponents of recreational reading in particular. In the real world, however, after two, three or four years at university or college and an often eclectic mixture of subjects and fields - usually excluding any guidance on readership - teachers enter the service ill-equipped to teach reading. If all goes well, a young teacher may learn more practical aspects of the teaching of reading from a responsible senior teacher or principal. Unfortunately, expert help is not always forthcoming and after some time and disillusionment, it may only be possible for teachers - who actually seek help - to attend in-service courses. The good news is that an excellent course can guide teachers and suggest strategies to teachers and principals to promote recreational reading.

Unfortunately, “helping children find their way in the morass of books that exists is probably the most demanding task in education today - so demanding that it is often not tackled at all” (Moss, 1985: 60). Palmer (1995:81) endorses the view that learners may feel lost in the “surfeit of books” without some form of guidance and purposeful direction. However, not only do teachers neglect their responsibility because the task is so daunting, but too often they find themselves simply too pressed for time to bother with their learners’ recreational reading at all, let alone acquire even a passing acquaintance with the available book stock.

The solution to this problem, however, is self-evident, but not advocated enthusiastically on a large enough scale: children become readers by reading. Children become lifelong extensive, intensive readers by being encouraged to read a range of materials, quickly and with understanding, for pleasure. “Promotion by allowing children to *read* is in its infancy in schools; more time is being spent on learning *how* to read in the primary school and in analysing books for study in the secondary school” (Marshall, 1988:276). This is a remarkable state of affairs. Although physical training teachers coach their pupils in tennis, music teachers insist on daily

piano practice, or athletic coaches train their athletes on a daily basis, learners are expected to *want* to read simply because they have become literate without any guidance or encouragement.

What can the effective teacher do to promote adolescent readership? A number of strategies have been suggested by the respondents in the survey themselves (cf. Appendix II), and experience has shown other methods to work. Teachers should

- \* read and enjoy books themselves;
- \* be *seen* by their learners to be enjoying books;
- \* maintain classrooms that are both stimulating and disciplined;
- \* create a literate classroom environment in which an adequate amount of time is allocated to reading to sustain the learners' attention;
- \* devote a great deal of time to the development of reading strategies;
- \* let their learners spend more time in independent reading, which includes classics and modern works of fiction and nonfiction;
- \* let their learners spend more time on creative writing or structured writing exercises;
- \* give personal recommendations of books they have read and enjoyed themselves - a surprising number of respondents suggested the importance of this kind of 'booktalk';
- \* use classroom displays, bulletin boards, posters, illustrations and other relevant visual material to enthrall their learners;
- \* endorse a culture of reading, with standards of academic learning, uninterrupted time for reading, and vigorous support by the principal;
- \* devise classroom strategies such as role play, dramatic enactments, book reports (all these 'old-fashioned' techniques suggested by the respondents) to liven up reading activities;
- \* regularly read aloud in class to share with the learners the joy of an intriguing book.

A teacher's efforts may come to nothing if he or she is not supported by the rest of the school; however, a school that has a principal who is committed to the promotion of readership (and there has been a principal or two spending a day on the school roof, for instance, in a challenge to induce learners to read), creates a culture of reading that makes recreational reading a matter of course for learners.



### 5.7.2 THE SCHOOL

Ideally, schools endorse and execute directives from a department of education that has clear injunctions with regard to recreational reading. Such schools create a culture of reading when they

- \* have a book policy that promotes recreational reading;
- \* have well-stocked libraries since interesting and informative books are the keys to successful reading programmes (194 respondents in the survey wished they had a media centre in their school);
- \* not only have an adequate collection of books, but also a librarian who is knowledgeable, encouraging and enthusiastic and has a knack for matching books to individuals;
- \* ensure the continuing professional development of teachers (young ones *and* veterans), endorse in-service training opportunities and are supportive of teachers' efforts with regard to readership promotion;
- \* have programmes, strategies and campaigns - for instance, annual Readathons, book fairs, literary competitions, reading panels that select a Book of the Month, a book forum, book launches with a local author, seasonal exhibitions (when books, for instance on Christmas, or the Olympic Games are introduced during assembly before being displayed in the media centre and read aloud in class);
- \* have at least one teacher who is an expert on children's literature and can advise subject teachers on books for cross-curricular teaching or books related to their fields for reading aloud (an activity suggested by a number of respondents in the survey);
- \* encourage parents to buy books for the school media centre or class libraries on parents' evenings, or as gifts for their children;
- \* have book shops - run like tuck shops, also as a fund-raiser - to encourage learners to acquire their own books or buy books as gifts (making learners used to browsing will also help to alleviate what exclusive book shops term 'threshold fear' with a certain portion of the public);
- \* conduct surveys from time to time - firstly for the insights provided into the learners' opinions, preferences and needs, secondly to let learners' understand that their opinions

are valued and critical assessment of books is necessary (these surveys should not be done by already overburdened teachers but by older pupils, who can also benefit from the experience in various ways);

- \* have school book days - an interesting example is a two-day reading event during which all classes are cancelled for two days and each classroom filled with books, authors and teachers; children travel from room to room, reading books, talking about them in small groups or listening to authors read; posters, films and filmstrips are continuously available for viewing and there are puzzles and competitions throughout both days; the headmaster's room is a quiet reading area with plenty of floor cushions.

## 5.8 READING ALOUD AND STORYTELLING

Much has been written about parents reading aloud to their babies and pre-schoolers; almost as much has been said about the importance of primary school teachers reading to their classes (*inter alia* Meek, 1984; Trelease, 1984; Wolf, 1990; Bearne, 1994). Teachers of secondary learners, however, have not been encouraged to read aloud to their young adults, and even if they read aloud for information, they never do so for sheer pleasure. This is a great pity since being read aloud to by teachers is considered one of the most important conditions that promote readership. Carter and Abrahamson (1990:182) cite thousands of 'reading autobiographies' or descriptions of the reading lives of learners, describing their joy

when a teacher read books aloud. Sometimes they were afraid that school would end before the final chapter had been reached. Teenagers' appreciation of the classics seems to develop from the oral renditions by talented teachers. Even in college classrooms, students recall the pleasure of having a professor read passages aloud from the books under discussion. Oral reading is so successful a technique with most age groups that it can be called one of the "never-fail methods" for the teaching of literature.

Reading aloud to learners is "one of the few activities that is pleasurable for reader and listener, provides research-supported educational benefits, and is selected by young people as one of the most motivating activities a teacher can do to encourage reading" (Carter & Abrahamson, 1990:182).

The importance of reading aloud to learners in class has again become popular in the last two decades as is testified by the popularity of books such as Trelease's *The Read Aloud Handbook* (1984) which has sold over one million copies and appeared in a 1989 revision entitled *The New Read Aloud Handbook*. The joy of sharing books with young people, "the intimate bond it builds between parent and child, the sense of a community of readers it inspires in the classroom, and the educational benefits derived from the experience" (Carter & Abrahamson, 1990:181) should be enough reason already to make it imperative for teachers to read aloud in class. Numerous studies show that if youngsters are read aloud to on a consistent basis for fifteen or twenty minutes a day, they will increase their performance scores on reading tests, enrich their overall vocabularies, improve their reading comprehension, and be aided in their language development. In the survey 144 respondents suggested that teachers should read aloud with their learners for greater understanding and enjoyment. As important as the educational advantages, is the reading *motivation* benefit attached to reading aloud.

In her UNESCO report which attempts to supply guidelines for teacher training courses, Irving (1980:34) writes that the promotion of voluntary reading demands a range of skills in the teacher, but "the crucial skill is that of communication: the teacher must learn to project his own enthusiasm to children." Part of this enthusiasm rests on the teacher's skill for telling stories or reading books aloud in an exciting manner.

Reading aloud is not the exclusive domain of the teacher; the learners are to be coached to read aloud too. The good readers and budding actors will enjoy displaying their prowess, and they should be called upon often to serve as a model of reading. Reading aloud, however, is an exercise for the whole class, but unprepared reading can be a frightening experience for learners who do not have the experience or the fluency. Teachers must allow the reluctant reader to prepare a selection to read to the class, preferably from material that is *not* familiar to the others. Perhaps a test reading with the teacher will help prepare the learners with reading difficulties or lack of confidence. If the book's topic is sufficiently intriguing, the class' interest is usually sustained and, as always, success breeds success, helping the hesitant reader to want to repeat the exercise.

Although truly gifted storytellers are born, not made, most of the techniques of good storytelling can be acquired, and the ideal time for the development of such a skill is during teacher training. Student teachers should be taught how to read aloud fluently, with clear expression, verbal and facial emphasis, to make eye-contact and interpret for a young audience the writer's intention, with characterization and some dramatization, with a responsiveness and flexibility that permit variation in pace, pitch and rhythm. With reading aloud, as with all other things, practice makes perfect.

A teacher who is a born storyteller - or who works hard to master the art of storytelling - is a gifted teacher and will be fondly remembered by his or her learners. The intimacy, communal wonder and sharing of a tale that storytelling creates between the teller and the audience makes it imperative as a device for the promotion of readership. The oral tradition is as old as man itself and it is only right that the new curricula in South Africa accord to it a rightful place especially, but not exclusively, in the lower grades.

## 5.9 THE MEDIA CENTRE

The respondents in the survey verified the assumption made by various researchers that the heart of a literary programme is the personal reading recommendations given by teachers (Harris and Sipay, 1990; Brindley, 1993; Palmer, 1995 *et al.*). If the book suggestions prove relevant and enjoyable, the learners will return for more. However, these suggestions are just early hooks to pull reluctant readers in, and continuing to offer the same fare - however popular it is - will fail to encourage growth and apathy will soon set in. Since adolescence is a period of growing physical, social, emotional and intellectual maturity, the books recommended to an adolescent must also reflect an increasing sophistication - if not, the adolescent may soon consider herself or himself as having 'outgrown' books.

Carter and Abrahamson (1990:201) describe the practice of gradually offering more intricate works from within the same genre as the concept of 'reading ladders':

Teachers and librarians who encounter younger teenagers passing through that 'unconscious delight' stage with such mystery series as *Alfred Hitchcock* and *the Three*

*Investigators, Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*, typically begin recommending more sophisticated works: Joan Lowery Nixon's *The Séance*, Lois Duncan's *Killing Mr Griffin*, Mary Higgins Clark's *Where are the Children?* The progression representing a growing sophistication in plot, theme, and language is neither direct nor swift, but instead takes place over several years, often in combination with other reading ladders representing additional subjects and genres.

A well-stocked school media centre - managed by a committed, knowledgeable and encouraging librarian - is crucially important in the succession of 'reading ladders'.

### **5.9.1 THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN**

Working together, teachers and librarians are a definitive force in helping adolescents develop into lifetime readers. Carter and Abrahamson (1990:14) distinguish two specific actions that characterize these influential professionals: they firstly discover what individual readers profess to like, and help feed those interests through books; secondly, they challenge and entice those same readers by introducing new and different kinds of books and topics. Their efficiency depends on two things: they know their books and they know their learners. Only by reading books enthusiastically, widely and profusely can a teacher or librarian acquire the necessary knowledge of books. Fortunately, a love of books is the reason many teachers and most librarians are drawn to their professions in the first place. However, although a librarian's enthusiasm will serve as a powerful example for adolescents, more is required to turn them into lifelong readers. Forcing books on them will not do, of course. More subtle techniques will have to be found to encourage learners. Some of these are:

- \* 'booktalking', if possible on a one-to-one basis, with a view to matching a reader with a topic and a book, noticing progress, showing genuine interest in the adolescents' opinions;
- \* preparing exciting displays in the media centre - since displays that are merely decorative do not serve a purpose, care should be taken to have challenging, relevant, constantly changing, interactive displays that even the reluctant readers find hard to resist;

- \* organizing book clubs, with responsible learners to help, called media prefects, 'Leaders of Learning', 'Media Moguls', 'Book Barons', 'Mighty Medians', 'Wonder Workers' or whatever an adolescent might find flattering and not 'nerdy';
- \* launching advertising campaigns, again with the help of learners, complete with buttons saying 'Clever me / I read, you see' or 'Have you hugged your book today?' or 'The book rules';
- \* having theme weeks - for instance, when the rugby team is preparing for an important match, the captain selects books that interest him to be displayed with his CV, action photographs and most importantly, his first team rugby jersey, or after the prefects have been appointed, display the president's acceptance speech with books on leadership;
- \* being *au fait* with the latest releases and tendencies - this should not be regarded as a time-consuming burden, but an exciting strategy to promote readership and keep adolescents interested;
- \* serving as a linchpin for the other teachers' knowledge of new books, enthusiasm and strategies for recreational reading and the promotion of readership.

## 5.9.2 INTERACTIVE MEDIA

Books used to be what readership is about:

The book, portable, hideable, repeatable, inexhaustible, a story to have and hold miles from the nearest power point, is still the cheapest way of getting a story when and where you want it, and likely to remain so for some time to come (Leeson, 1985:188).

However, in the twenty-first century books are neither dominant nor exclusive, and if readership is to be promoted, a nodding acquaintance, at least, has to be taken of the reading opportunities offered by other media, and specifically the Internet. Carter and Abrahamson have found that the mere introduction of computer-aided teaching has already been beneficial to reading:

On one particular campus, the socioeconomic level of the students and their families negated the possibility of large numbers of them owning computers. Computers had also not been previously available at the elementary schools feeding into this junior high. Most students were introduced to computers in their content classes, through a new

course in computer literacy, and with an extensive computer laboratory housed within the library. These young adolescents flocked to the library demanding computer books - books on programming, books on artificial intelligence, books on computer crime, and books on the uses of computers in society. That they discovered computers in school remains an educated guess; that they turned to books to feed this interest stands undisputed (1990:10).

As stated before (in 2.4), the future of readership lies in accommodating children's attraction for multimedia rather than fighting it. Interactive story programmes suited to an individual learner's reading needs (Murphy, 1996:125) will possibly encourage the reluctant reader; to what extent it will satisfy the learner who craves higher order reading remains to be seen. However, the cost of these technological advances makes them an idle dream for most South African schools at present. The media centre of the future will probably have a variety of electronic media at the learner's disposal, but at the moment the most viably interactive promoter of reading is the class library.

#### **5.10 THE CLASS LIBRARY**

Apart from the strength of their own example, few things teachers can do are as powerful a witness to the importance of readership as the class library. The class library, however, is not the jumble of carelessly flung books in a departmentally issued book case in a dusty corner of the class, but a careful selection of relevant and exciting books the learners will find difficult to resist.

Most classes in school have their own collection of current textbooks, outdated editions and discarded subject-related books which the teacher will not regret having pinched, but this does not constitute a class library. The class library is an inviting creation, full of relevant books, accessible at all times. The class library does not attempt to usurp the role of the school library - with regard to funding alone, it never will. The role it plays in the promotion of readership at school, however, is crucial.

It is imperative that the language teachers have class libraries with a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction, classics and popular reading. The promotion of readership, however, is not the exclusive domain of the language departments; it is the responsibility of every teacher and all departments. Apart from the typical texts each field of learning requires, the class libraries of subjects other than languages should also include fiction and books read for sheer pleasure. The science class library, for instance, can have best sellers with a scientific background such as *Jurassic Park* or stories about forensic detectives, the geography class has books like *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. The class library of the Life Skills teacher, for instance, can include popular psychology books or best-sellers that are regular features of TV talk shows. The class library is thus a valuable tool for across-the-curriculum teaching, for the enhancement of subject-related work, for spreading the word that recreational reading is an essential part of the examined life.

Ideally, the class library

- \* provides the voracious reader with exciting books;
- \* encourages the learner who suffers from ‘threshold fear’ by making books available in the familiar surroundings of a class;
- \* keeps the fast worker out of trouble since the effective teacher allows learners who have finished their work to enjoy browsing in the class library;
- \* engages the learner who does not have books at home;
- \* supplies supplementary reading to work done in the curriculum;
- \* displays the fact that the teacher regards books as fundamental to learning.

The class library is also indispensably part of outcomes-based teaching since it affords individual stimulation at whatever level the learner happens to be; it allows the voracious reader to read to his heart’s content while being supportive of the slower reader; it is as multi-cultural as the books included in it; there are no right answers or marks given for ‘work’ done at the class library.

Collecting fascinating books for the class library can be considered so prohibitively expensive that the teacher prefers to dispense with the system altogether. Teachers often half-heartedly



accept and store in their classes book donations that have been discarded from parents' homes because they are completely out-dated or not worth keeping anyway. Such pariahs should not find room on a class library shelf since they can only reinforce the reluctant reader's perception that books are irrelevant and boring. There are a number of ways to overcome the financial burden of creating an exciting class library:

- \* On parents' evenings, teachers can assemble suitable books - both fact and fiction - on loan from booksellers and ask parents to donate a book or two to the class library. The enterprising teacher will have a label or *ex libris* ready to paste into the book to acknowledge the donor. This would serve as an added incentive to the reluctant reader, especially since the book donated by the parents would probably reflect their child's interest.
- \* Donations from publishers and book sellers - especially last-of-the-line but still perfectly relevant books - are welcome additions.
- \* Book sales and second hand shops provide suitable books, bought with money raised by Readathons and challenges.

Setting up the class library should not be costly. Creating a book-friendly atmosphere in the classroom is the first step, and this can be done by devising a reading corner with a table, a few chairs, a discarded rug and scatter cushions. Bookshelves can be begged from the factotum of the school or cheaply set up with bricks and planks. The teacher should get help from a reliable class committee who will take care of record keeping; since the records and the classification system are kept simple, this is another valuable outcomes-based learning experience for the learners. With an enthusiastic teacher at the helm, such a *reading interest centre* makes possible a lot of learning and intellectual stimulation without coercion. Of course, the daily class schedule must provide free time for browsing and independent silent reading if the reading corner is to serve its purpose.

## **5.1 COOPERATIVE READING**

Since interaction with peers is a powerful motivator for adolescents, the prudent teacher capitalizes on learners' natural inclination toward social interaction to help them become more

enthusiastic readers. Cooperative activities, i.e. pair and group work, in an outcomes-based classroom are not only crucial for the adolescents' social development, but also go a long way to refine their critical thinking skills. Success in group or pair work helps all students to feel more confident about learning new material, and this in turn heightens their curiosity and motivates them to explore more possibilities. Successful experiences with group work meet the emotional needs especially of socially disabled students as they help them to feel better about themselves as learners.

In classroom discussions, participants should be allowed to put forth multiple points of view and encouraged to change their minds about the matter under discussion. Learners should interact spontaneously with one another as well as with the teacher, and interaction should not be limited to the typical two or three word phrase units in which interaction between individual learners is minimal as the teacher dominates the discussion and the individuals talk only to the teacher.

Irvin (1998:55) considers three types of discussions to be basic to the classroom environment:

- \* *Subject mastery discussions*, which extend students' learning through talk about a topic. Activating prior knowledge and building background information is necessary in facilitating comprehension of any new topic of study.
- \* *Issue-oriented discussions*, which may depend on learner needs and interests.
- \* *Problem-solving discussions*, which may grow out of a textbook assignment, lecture, or previous discussion or assignment.

These discussions are motivated by the following cooperative strategies:

- \* paired retellings of a story, poem, or any learning material, that add all the obvious advantages of social interaction to helping learners to organize their thoughts by capturing the important points;
- \* reading aloud to a class or group;
- \* after seeing the movie with the class, reading the book, since already knowing the story line and characters helps reluctant students to have more success with such books (as several respondents suggested in the survey);
- \* developing an advertising campaign as a group activity;

- \* reading to younger children.

The respondents in the survey vehemently denied the influence of parental coercion on their reading, but stated that they usually read books recommended by their peers; one learner suggested that short reading periods at the beginning of each school day would be ideal for learners to share ideas on books they have read. Reading promotion has been shown to gain ground if it is presented as an outcomes-based group activity (for instance a Readathon, a challenge or campaign) rather than a sole occupation.

## 5.12 PEER TUTORING

Ideally, a reluctant reader is encouraged and guided by an expert reading teacher who joins the subject teacher in class to provide the help that will turn the learner's diffidence into lifelong enthusiasm. In reality, such one-to-one specialized attention is a luxury that the present school system cannot provide - classes are simply too big and teachers weighed down with too many responsibilities to give the one-to-one attention each reader requires. A solution to this problem can be the institution of peer tutoring: successful, avid readers can read to and with their reluctant classmates who can benefit greatly when enjoying a story together and sharing ideas about a book.

The experience of sharing stories is already valuable within the family, and many children read to their younger siblings. Reading aloud is good for both reader and listener and the trend of reading to younger children should continue through primary to secondary school when the more fluent readers first read to *and* then listen to the less fluent reading aloud to them.

A great advantage of this system is that peer tutors are plentiful and available for training at any time. It has also been shown (Merrett, 1994:13) that readers who are making slow progress respond very readily to peer tutors, since to read to another child who has offered to help is totally different from reading to an adult, especially to a teacher. Working together is non-threatening and it engenders feelings of closeness and friendship which is good social training in itself. It is an axiom that instructing someone else will improve one's own skill.

### 5.13 READING - WRITING CONNECTION

A number of respondents in the survey suggested that teachers bid their learners write creatively in order to read more prolifically. This reading-writing connection has been shown to be highly conducive to recreational reading by many researchers. One of the respondents (a proficient writer him- or herself, no doubt) suggested that the best examples of class writing be compiled in a reader to serve as model writing *and* interesting reading material for the class. Further writing exercises that arise from reading:

- \* biographies of characters, opinions on the books, *what happens next?* exercises are essentially part of class and critical reading (the writing of book reports, although many respondents actually suggested this, should be used circumspectly, and not after every book read and never for marks);
- \* letters to the author (and not only local authors, but world famous authors such as Roald Dahl and J.K. Rowling have been known to answer letters written by South African classes);
- \* other genres such as plays, poems, news reports, parodies inspired by the books;
- \* follow-up activities such as advertising campaigns for books, the writing of blurbs, the keeping of reading logs, designing of book covers, drawing up of comprehension questions and memoranda, keeping a book character's diary, etc.

### 5.14 READING STRATEGIES FOR THE DISADVANTAGED AND RELUCTANT READER

In the 1970s, public attention in America was forcefully drawn by empiric evidence that socio-economic status was related to differences in school achievement. In a study conducted with thousands of children throughout America, called *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Snow *et al.*, 1991:3), it was found that not only did learners from low-income families fare significantly worse than those from families of middle and higher incomes, but also that the differences in socio-economic states became greater as learners became older. However, there is hope that committed teaching can alleviate this problem, as more recent studies have also found that learners at certain schools in poor urban areas achieve well above the norm; some factors that

these schools have in common are, for instance, a highly-motivated and ‘strong’ principal, teachers with high expectations of their learners’ achievement, direct teaching and frequent testing, or in other words, quality instruction (Snow *et al.*, 1991:3).

Regarding the promotion of reading in developing areas, Djoletto (quoted in Staiger & Casey, 1983:49) writes that, although it is difficult to generalize solutions to this problem, people in a disadvantaged community “must themselves embrace first as an idea and then be encouraged to implement largely for themselves by themselves from the very simple and modest beginnings with literature that they themselves want to read.”

The disadvantaged reader’s feeling of inadequacy has deep roots: responses in the survey indicated that many learners in the poorer communities come from homes where illiteracy is the norm. In many cases the respondents cite their parents’ illiteracy as the reason for their own reading motivation - for instance, one respondent said that since many members of his family are illiterate and consequently unemployed, his own reading was a top priority; another stated that the only books his parents got to read were his prescribed books and academic set works. In Nigeria, it was found that parents of children from the lower socio-economic group, even though some were literate themselves, viewed reading as an activity carried out by the highly educated and elite of the country, rather than a practice which is open and useful to all (Staiger & Casey, 1983:49). Some of these parents are reluctant to take the responsibility of having their children remove books from the library to read at home for fear of loss or damage.

Socially disabled learners, who believe they have the ability to succeed but who view school as irrelevant, threatening, or both, must be helped to find relevance in the curriculum in general and reading activities in particular. One of the disadvantaged learner’s major causes of social adjustment at school (apart from the myriad of problems that may be brought from the home), is a poor self-concept which is detrimental to, among other things, the learner’s ability to read. “Just as word attack, vocabulary building and recognition skills are basic to successful reading so, too, is a positive self image” (Deeds, 1981:81). One of the most important tenets of outcomes-based education is the prerequisite that school must be assimilated into the world of

the learner; if the learning material is irrelevant and cannot be comprehended from the learner's personal vantage point, no learning can take place.

It is clear that work on isolated skills does not help problem readers become more proficient. The result of reading failure is especially acute in the developing world when children who have learned to read, may actually revert to illiteracy within a few months after completing a basic course if they do not have enough reading material that makes sense to them in the context of their everyday lives (Staiger & Casey, 1983:8).

In the survey, 244 of 659 respondents suggested that teachers start to promote reading by explaining that extensive reading helps them achieve at school and especially later in their adult lives. Meek (1984:202) reports that many teachers do not pay sufficient attention to reading promotion with the disadvantaged. She tells of young people who leave school unable to read who are very bitter about their teachers. "They tell how easy it was to skip lessons, how teachers never had enough time or patience. Looking back, they say: 'She should have *made* me do it.' This is the root of the problem." Meek (1984:203) also refers to the inability of the problem reader to approach reading confidently, saying that

if you watch adolescent non-readers you see them trying to get clues *about reading*, not about the sense of what is written on the page. They sound and blend letters with amazing expertise and arrive at single words, but never the meaning of a sentence or a paragraph. They confuse teaching and learning, hoping to have something done to them when, in fact, they have to be the active ones. They have to be encouraged to risk being successful. The most tragic sight in any special reading class is a group of students doing more and more exercises in what they have failed to accomplish for the past eight years. They are sustained only by the economic reality of 'you can't get a job if you can't read' and this grim threat does not let them enjoy their learning which they think cannot, must not, be fun or give any pleasure.

Various strategies must be adopted and, after building the self-image with positive reinforcement and finding what can honestly be praised, educators must help troubled learners focus their attention on comprehension and acquire strategies for understanding text. A simple but highly

successful strategy is used in some Latin American countries to promote readership *and* dignify the community (as explained in a UNESCO report on readership promotion in the developing world):

The task of writing down grandfather's stories is given to the children of the family who have some schooling. This is often done in the evening when the family is gathered together. These written stories are then shared with other members of the community who delight in reading them. Even though the readers have heard the stories many times, something is added when they are available in written form (Staiger & Casey, 1983:57).

Another effective strategy includes working in a small group with a teacher who helps learners determine for themselves ways of understanding difficult text. Irvin (1998:126) describes the efficacy of reading sessions that resemble natural conversations about text, rather than teacher-determined lessons. The following ten questions (Irvin, quoting Anderson and Roit, 1998:126), identified by learners and used in class discussions, help them to access and use their prior knowledge and apply strategies for figuring out difficult text:

- \* recognizing a problem;
- \* making things real;
- \* knowing what matters;
- \* making sense;
- \* agreeing and disagreeing;
- \* having reasons;
- \* getting ready for what comes next;
- \* getting back on track;
- \* explaining;
- \* wrapping-up exercises.

Irvin (1998:134) suggests that the learners question themselves and each other about the text to help them interpret and experience it as relevant:

- \* for assessing text content, for instance: "What is this about?" "What did you find out that you did not know before?" "What are the most important ideas?" "What surprised you?";

- \* for assessing world knowledge: “What do already know about this?” “What would you like to find out about this?” “Of what does this remind you?”
- \* for assessing strategic knowledge: “What problem are you trying to solve?” “How are you trying to solve the problem?” “How did your attempt work out?” “What else might solve the problem?”
- \* for assessing knowledge about reading in general: “What did you learn about reading?” “How can you use what you learned to read other things?” “How did this help your reading?”

A remarkable aspect to the promotion of readership with the disadvantaged reader, is that, according to the UNESCO report on *The Future of the Book*, the book’s fate in the decades to come depends on whether the disadvantaged or so-called ‘under-consumers’ can be won over to regular and pleasurable reading:

This ‘popular’ readership of books not only guarantees the continued publication of the ‘easy’ and the ‘superficial’, but also guarantees the future of the Literature with a capital L. Indeed, it has already done so. Literature with a limited readership appeal often depends for its life on two subsidies, one from the public, whatever their taste in books, and one from more popular authors on the publisher’s list. A long line of such writers from Blyton onwards has helped indirectly to maintain the ‘quality’ literature even while its authors were privately and publicly disparaging the ‘popular’ authors (Leeson, 1985:187).

There is no easy solution to the problem. The teacher who wishes to help the disadvantaged reader can do little to address the problems of the learner’s background: the funding necessary to uplift the infrastructure is not in the school and the teachers’ hands - the government’s ways are inscrutable. However, the committed teacher does what he or she can to eliminate factors of self-concept and harmful perceptions regarding reading. Meek (1984:203) suggests a number of strategies to help motivate these readers, saying that the teacher should:

try to help him [sic] to believe that he can learn to read in a way that will make it worth the work he will have to put into it. There is no point in shirking the issue: there has to be effort by the learner. But supporting adults can offer help that is constant, firm, directly



related to his needs and based on an understanding of his ability as well as his difficulties.

A solution or agreed plan of action takes time. You both have to get further than his saying ‘Reading just isn’t *me*’. At no stage should you say, ‘Well, never mind.’ He has to realize he will have to get down to reading sometime, yet this must not begin as a threat. Adolescents are relieved when adults don’t make excuses for them; they want real help. They will grumble about having to do the work, but they know when someone cares enough to make demands of them. The young are resilient; they can face the reality of their situation, but they need someone to have confidence in them. This time the non-reader must understand he is not to wait for another set of reading processes to be done to him either at home or at school.

Ideally, a specially appointed expert reading teacher works in a well-stocked school library to deal with the reading problems encountered by the disadvantaged or reluctant reader. This specialist works with the language and subject teachers but is not a remedial teacher - the disadvantaged reader lacks circumstances conducive to reading, not ability. Meek suggests that schools acquire reading rooms, a useful compromise between the remedial department and the ordinary classroom where teachers “go to share reading with pupils who need to read in peace for a stretch of time outside the more strenuous atmosphere of the class. . . the stigma of failure has been removed from the pupils, and the teachers discover what makes reading difficult and how pupils can be given the kind of attention they need” (Meek, 1984:207). This arrangement is endorsed by a number of respondents from ‘less privileged’ schools in the survey.

Another strategy is the donation of unsold newspapers by a friendly press agent. Every learner is required to take home a paper each day to encourage family participation, especially in homes where there is no reading material; reading certain sections for discussions, first at home and then in class, promotes the readership not only of the learners but of their disadvantaged parents, too.

The use of paperback reading is also advocated for the simple reason that a great variety can be had inexpensively. In support of the point of view that the reading of trade books is better than reading nothing at all, paperback reading can help problem readers in a number of ways:

- \* it can help the learners acquire the skills they need to read well and to provide literary experiences - albeit of a superficial nature at first, but later hopefully more challenging - which will increase the learners' appreciation of reading;
- \* it increases a learner's vocabulary;
- \* helping the problem reader to feel more confident about reading, it encourages the learner to look for additional information about specific areas of interest.

Individualizing the reading programme offers the best solution to the problems of the reluctant and disadvantaged reader. The continually shifting focus of an adolescent's needs and interests, the variety of backgrounds and the wide range of reading abilities in a single class necessitate an individualised reading programme which, together with generous amounts of class time for personal reading and appropriate follow-up activities should help each learner to optimize his or her reading development. Problem readers should be allowed to select books from the class library which interest them and read at a pace comfortable to them. In a room that is conducive to extensive reading - which is full of interesting material, peers who are enjoying reading and a teacher who is seen to be enjoying a personal book at the very moment - reading becomes a matter of course.

As part of a reading campaign, Ley (1979:136) suggests that schools set aside a three week period each semester for directed individualized reading (DIR) projects, during which learners are encouraged to read two or three books during each unit. Since personal reading is the centre of all activity in a DIR programme, most of each class period ought to be spent in quiet reading. Learners are encouraged to continue their reading between class periods and taught how to pace themselves through a book. As evidence of their opinion of a book they have just finished reading, learners must complete a record card and submit it to the teacher who can use the information for a one-to-one discussion on the book. Such a learner-teacher discussion is an excellent means of assessing the learner's insight into the work she or he has read and should be informal, conversational and non-threatening.

In conclusion, the study attempted to investigate what role recreational reading plays in a child's development, whether of a linguistic nature (with regard to the enhancement of literacy skills, the refinement of critical thinking and the cultivation of an extensive vocabulary), or on a more sublime level (by engaging the intellectual, emotional, imaginative and moral functions of an individual). It has found that recreational reading does not only offer the extensive reader practical benefits, such as mastery of literacy skills and scholastic achievement, but also edifying experiences, such as intellectual stimulation, a wider perspective on reality, an escape into fantasy, a ripening of social understanding through identification with a book's characters which ultimately leads to a greater insight into oneself. Such benefactions and privileges are available to every individual, and were they the property only of an elitist, select few, wars would have been fought to make them accessible to all. It is, therefore, painfully ironic that the advantages of extensive reading are not enjoyed by all. The reason for this is that reading is simply not chosen as a preferred activity by the majority of people.

Addressing the problem of widespread indifference regarding recreational reading, the answer begins, like charity, at home. A child's reading habits are formed by parents who serve as the primary models of reading; teachers, however, are definitively influential with regard to the promotion of reading at a later stage. Although the younger child may embrace a teacher's efforts more uncritically, the adolescent is as susceptible to the influence of a highly-motivated teacher. The survey showed that teachers' personal recommendations carry great weight with adolescents; the sharing of reading experiences through spontaneous interaction and structured discussions, reading aloud from exciting books, follow-up activities after group reading, are some of the strategies suggested by learners and indicate that much can be done at school to promote reading. The study takes the view that teachers have the last say in the promotion of recreational readership and their example and efforts are, therefore, essential for the creation of a lifelong reading habit in their learners.

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## APPENDIX I

The following is an arbitrary selection of the respondents' suggestions with the spelling and punctuation verbatim (respondent number in brackets).

**Question 17: "What do you think teachers can do to encourage their learners to read more books?"**

- (12) *Nothing, children will do as they please. they won't read no matter what if they don't want to*
- (25) *Book study is boring. Encourage reading by rather enjoying the book and not studying it.*
- (30) *Give them examples of good books and don't teach the books so intensely*
- (31) *Prove to them that reading is actually very cool and is not boring it only depends on what books you read*
- (35) *make reading more fun with subjects that affect us in our age group, not Shakespeare that is pretty much dead, except his poetry.*
- (47) *Set goals for them and reward pupils if they acheive these goals. Tell pupils about certain books they've read or books that they think they'd enjoy*
- (48) *Why read books, meaning literature, when informatve text can enhance ones knowledge and future.*
- (58) *Give more marks for a book. Give book's names that was good. (I like to read but its so hard to get a nice book.)*
- (75) *Tell them what it can do to your knolage, intelegance and time*
- (78) *Our prescribed books are really boring and most of the time it's the only books people read. They then think that it's boring to read. If they can change our prescribed books to more interessting books people will be more encouraged to read.*
- (79) *They can make the children do book reports so that they have to d books to bring up their marks - the more books you can read the higher your grade will be.*
- (82) *Give them titles of interesting + funny books. Many people just don't know what to read.*
- (104) *Tel them it's not important and talk about it in a negative way then children will do it to spite the teachers.*

- (119) *They can get more interesting books to read at school. Then children will see it's fun and they will start reading more. But teenagers of today are very busy and don't have the time to even do their homework.*
- (122) *There isn't much they can do about it. Teenagers are stubborn and will ignore the teacher's requests. But those that read now will keep reading.*
- (137) *They must beg us.*
- (152) *Give the pupils books about sex and how to deal with it. Things that interest them. The books of sex has to come from a chistian point of view though.*
- (154) *Just say no!*
- (159) *make clases more interesting and esier, better understandable . Matriek is nie maklik nie HOOR!*
- (181) *Encourage self study as this would lead to sudents having to read more*
- (191) *up date the curriculum whith more recent books which are interesting and relevant to today*
- (198) *read books and talk about them, like movies - when a teacher has seen a movie they talk about it to the pupils, they should do the same with books*
- (221) *I think teachers should encourage more class discussions on book, try to focus on on-fiction books, eg Animal etc and books which will benefit them. I am a strong believer that non-fiction book can benefit you but till a certain axtent*
- (222) *They should enable us to do more book reviews and discuss our books we read in class*
- (231) *The teacher cannot do anything to make a child read more because ultimately that is the pupil's decision. I feel that if teachers read more books and use the knowledge that they've gained from the books while teaching, the pupil will encouraged. The pupil will read more so that he/she could be as well-spoken as the teacher*
- (252) *To guide us not to threatened us. And take time with us about encouraging us to read not to hang out.*
- (264) *They have to encourage pupils to read because if you can not read you can't have job, you will end up stealing go to jail or you will be killed. So They have to encourage us to read to avoid those things*



- (273) *In my school there was no library. Some teacher came with the idea that they have to make a library for school learners. This days we have the library we always go to the school library during library time it is interesting.*
- (287) *They should tell the people how reading will help them to be succesfull in life. The teachers must or should spend more time on reading in class and makes reading fun and make sure everyone participates.*
- (305) *To encourage us firt and for most. And to let us read more in class in private because sometimes the other kids laugh at us if you read with erors.*
- (311) *I think that primary school teachers should start by teaching children the importance of reading.*
- (333) *I think they should make them fill the same as other children which they can read. Because if they don't make them fill that way, when they read wrong things call them fool they fill different to other children*
- (351) *Provide incentives - like more marks for more reading*
- (363) *They can make us write short stories every day for a week until our stories are compiled into books - that would encourage us into reading more books, to learn the structure of book writing, and also improve writing skills for those who would like to pursue their careers in being authors.*
- (366) *They can specify or point out interesting books that the pupils could read. They could also make the first five minutes of a language lesson reading time.*
- (372) *I think the teacher should have a book review about once a week. I think it'll help us know what we're reading instead of taking out a book because it was a nice title to find out that it actually sucks!!*
- (375) *Read things about life today not yester years history. Interesting things that intrigue your mind to keep us asking for more. Get a book that we won't want to put down. One with things that make ur immagination go wild. Something that takes you to a climax only to anticlimax.*
- (376) *They could have a display of books in the classroom and allow the pupils access to them when they have no classwork or when they have free periods. They could also give pupils assignment or project or book reviews so that they have to read, maybe 2 or more books for the review*

- (411) *I think learners love to read love stories and teenage stories, so I think teachers should read them more often and dont have to finish them them the learner have to finish the story by himself*
- (431) *Set more home readers or put up lists of recommended montly books, each person should have a book a month and should read for homework and then review it for the school magasine or class.*
- (436) *Teachers can show movies and give brief, bubbly and exciting overviews of the story line that makes the pupils want to read the book.*
- (448) *if teachers encourage learners to read stories more like a drama and try to make a story more practical so that learners can get the picture of that story and to have fun. I think it would make reading interesting*
- (452) *They should first start buy trying to know about the opinions from their students about reading and if not, they should know their problems and help them to solve them and no one will hate reading books.*
- (470) *They have to tell them what is happening in life and how important is when reading books. They will get more vocabulary and know them. They will succeed in knowledge.*
- (472) *I think teachers must introduce a new system of reading like to make reading fun how well, they can start by handing out joke, poem books that everyone can read, understand so that they can be able to laugh that way they we improve the standard of learning*
- (490) *I think that our English or venecular teacher can encourage the pupils by telling them to read books every day. And when they came to class they must come with the book and help us how to read or to start a book when you want to read*
- (491) *they should bring interesting stories and they should give us newspaper at school every day. They should introduce more learning activities that go hand in hand with reading.*
- (510) *I think they should make competitions of reading and give the winners very valuable prices so that other pupils who didn't participate could be much encouraged to reading*
- (524) *Teachers can give students a reading period every single school day. Teachers can fetch books from the school library and give them to us, thereafter that period they can return those books back to the library!*
- (527) *They must force them to read hard because decades ago they didn't have those books and now other parents they do not have jobs because they didn't read more books so as for us to have better future they have to force us to read.*





- (541) *I think they should be acting characters and make sure that we understand them*
- (546) *I dont think they can nothing about it. because they teach us and we must do the rest and our parents should be the one's who are watshing us that we read at home or not. the teachers do their best at school.*
- (553) *They should try to bring books that matches our interest. Try to orgranise a school reading campaign. Have a reward for the best reader.*
- (558) *it must be compalsory for every child to take three books a week from a school library. Those children must be asked in class what they read about.*
- (571) *They should stress the importance of reading books. They should tell us about some good books they've read and say that we have to read it because it was brilliant. They should ask us about what books we've read to constantly remind us about reading books.*
- (573) *They must not nag the children to read, but rather, give the children different categories of the books eg: detective stories etc. And then give the names of those books, and some information so that the child can them go and decide on what book to read.*
- (582) *I think teachers should encourage them by making it a habit, In puting posters on the walls of class rooms, posters that can be read and get information, and by encouraging them to get books from schools and public librarises for school or personal more.*
- (597) *The teatcher must go to the library and lend books to distribute them to the student so that often the week or so that can explain them to the all class. And not to talk about Apartheid!*
- (608) *I am uncertain because I dont really enjoy reading but I do read the newspaper. I think we should have one period per week to go up to our school library and read. This would be appreciated as well as educational.*
- (609) *They can take learners to movies which are based on books, There should be a book-club which will take place once a week during English lesson, so that everyone could get a chance to talk about the book.*
- (611) *They should have book reviews in class and should let pupils to talk about books in class and they should have more interesting litterature books.*
- (625) *They can make us read books like in primary school. every month we had to write a paragraph or do a speech about a book we read for marks, and that made us read and we found out reading was fun*



- (630) *They can say that for every book we read, we have to write a little explanation about the book and then we also have to say who is all the characters in the books ect. And after each book we read, we get a prize or - better, - we get extra marks for english and Afrikaans.*
- (638) *Yes, sometimes they speak about other books, authors or people with interesting lives and that makes me curious so I read the book*
- (642) *Give prizes to people who read the most books and give them a little gift - like a chocolate for every 20 books they have read*
- (653) *They should re-introduce the library and Recreational Period. They should also give us more projects that require us to gather information from the Library.*
- (654) *they can make pupils read in class everyday. and give us a chance to read loud in class so that we get used to reading. reading loud is where a students gets to understand better.*



**APPENDIX II**

**READING HABITS**

**FOR OFFICE USE**

Respondent number

V1    1-3

School number

V2   4-5

**Thank you very much for doing the opinionnaire.  
Your answers to the following questions are greatly appreciated  
and completely confidential. Please make a cross - \_ - in the  
appropriate box to indicate your preference or opinion.**

1. **You are**

male	1
------	---

female	2
--------	---

V3  6

2. **Your home language is**

Afrikaans	1
-----------	---

English	2
---------	---

Sepedi	3
--------	---

Tswana	4
--------	---

V4  7

Zulu	5
------	---

Xhosa	6
-------	---

Other	7
-------	---

3. **Do you like to read when you have the time?**

Yes	1
-----	---

No	2
----	---

V5  8

4. **Please indicate if you read any of the following and how often, if you do:**

<b>Books</b>	Yes	1	No	2	If <i>yes</i> , how many books per year ?	
<b>Magazines</b>	Yes	1	No	2	If <i>yes</i> , how many per month?	
<b>Newspapers</b>	Yes	1	No	2	If <i>yes</i> , how many per week?	
<b>Internet</b>	Yes	1	No	2	If <i>yes</i> , how many hours per week?	

V7    9  
V9    12  
V11    15  
V13    20

5. **Your personal reading habits are best described by the following statements:**

	1	2		
I read to get information on school subjects for homework, tests and assignments.	Yes	No	V14	21
I don't have time to read.	Yes	No	V15	22
I read because it is a fun way to pass the time	Yes	No	V16	23
I read when I have nothing else to do	Yes	No	V17	24
I prefer reading to watching TV	Yes	No	V18	25
I don't read because it is boring	Yes	No	V19	26
Reading helps me to understand the world and other people better	Yes	No	V20	27
I don't read because I would rather watch TV	Yes	No	V21	28
I don't read because I prefer to take part in sports	Yes	No	V22	29
Spending time with my friends is more fun than reading	Yes	No	V23	30
I love reading about other people, their problems and solutions	Yes	No	V24	31
I don't think reading is important therefore I read very little	Yes	No	V25	32
Reading helps me to understand myself better	Yes	No	V26	33
I prefer to spend time out of doors	Yes	No	V27	34
I have a reading problem	Yes	No	V28	35
I don't like sitting still for a long time	Yes	No	V29	36
I read to get information on my hobbies and interests	Yes	No	V30	37
I don't get books to read	Yes	No	V31	38
I read because my parents want me to read a lot of books	Yes	No	V32	39



6. **If you often read books in your leisure time, what kind of books do you choose?**

	1	2
Adventure	Yes	No
Love stories	Yes	No
Animals and nature	Yes	No
Science fiction	Yes	No
Other countries	Yes	No
History	Yes	No
Thrillers and detective stories	Yes	No
Popular series	Yes	No
Biographies	Yes	No
Other. Please specify .....		
.....		

V33	<input type="checkbox"/>	40
V34	<input type="checkbox"/>	41
V35	<input type="checkbox"/>	42
V36	<input type="checkbox"/>	43
V37	<input type="checkbox"/>	44
V38	<input type="checkbox"/>	45
V39	<input type="checkbox"/>	46
V40	<input type="checkbox"/>	47
V41	<input type="checkbox"/>	48
V42	<input type="checkbox"/>	49-50

7. **Is there an older person in your home who reads a great deal?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
-----	--------------------------	---

No	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
----	--------------------------	---

V43	<input type="checkbox"/>	51
-----	--------------------------	----

8. **What does he or she usually read?**

	1	2
Books: Facts	Yes	No
Books: Fiction	Yes	No
Books from work	Yes	No
Magazines	Yes	No
The Internet	Yes	No
Newspapers	Yes	No
They don't read often	Yes	
I don't know	Yes	
Other. Please specify .....		
.....		

V44	<input type="checkbox"/>	52
V45	<input type="checkbox"/>	53
V46	<input type="checkbox"/>	54
V47	<input type="checkbox"/>	55
V48	<input type="checkbox"/>	56
V49	<input type="checkbox"/>	57
V50	<input type="checkbox"/>	58
V51	<input type="checkbox"/>	59
V52	<input type="checkbox"/>	60-61

9. What is your opinion of the books that are prescribed at school?

	1	2
Most of them are very boring	Yes	No
Most of them are interesting	Yes	No
They are mostly too difficult	Yes	No
They are too old-fashioned	Yes	No
I can identify with the characters and their problems	Yes	No
The books are interesting but the discussions about them are boring	Yes	No
I will want to read them again	Yes	No
The teachers help us to appreciate the books	Yes	No

V53	<input type="checkbox"/>	62
V54	<input type="checkbox"/>	63
V55	<input type="checkbox"/>	64
V56	<input type="checkbox"/>	65
V57	<input type="checkbox"/>	66
V58	<input type="checkbox"/>	67
V59	<input type="checkbox"/>	68
V60	<input type="checkbox"/>	69

10. How did your reading habits differ when you were at Primary school?

I read more often then	1
I read the same number of books	2
I read fewer books then	3

V61	<input type="checkbox"/>	70
-----	--------------------------	----

10.1 If you answered that you read more books when you were at primary school, what is the reason for it?

	1	2
I had more time for reading in my spare time	Yes	No
Homework is taking up much more time now	Yes	No
I didn't have so many extra-mural activities at primary school	Yes	No
My teachers encouraged us more to read in primary school	Yes	No
My social life is taking up much more time now	Yes	No
Other. Please specify .....		
.....		

V62	<input type="checkbox"/>	71
V63	<input type="checkbox"/>	72
V64	<input type="checkbox"/>	73
V65	<input type="checkbox"/>	74
V66	<input type="checkbox"/>	75
V67	<input type="checkbox"/>	76-77

11. **How do you spend your leisure time?**

	1	2
I read	Yes	No
I go to the movies	Yes	No
I take part in sport or go to the gym	Yes	No
I hang out with my friends	Yes	No
I work for pocket money	Yes	No
I watch TV and videos	Yes	No
I surf the Internet	Yes	No
I go shopping	Yes	No
My family spend a lot of time together	Yes	No
I practise my hobbies, such as music practice, drawing, collecting things	Yes	No
Other. Please specify .....		

V68		78
V69		79
V70		80
V71		81
V72		82
V73		83
V74		84
V75		85
V76		86
V77		87
V78		88-89

12. **How, do you think, do your teachers who teach Language and Literature view reading?**

	1	2
They like reading books themselves and they talk about them in class.	Yes	No
I think most of them are too busy to read books in their spare time	Yes	No
I think they mostly only read the prescribed works.	Yes	No

V79		90
V80		91
V81		92

13. **If you like to read often, where do you get books to read?**

	1	2
School library	Yes	No
Public library	Yes	No
I receive books as gifts	Yes	No
I borrow from my friends	Yes	No
I borrow from my family	Yes	No
I buy my own books	Yes	No
Other. Please specify .....		

V82		93
V83		94
V84		95
V85		96
V86		97
V87		98
V88		99-10



14. Do you have access to a computer?

Yes	1	No	2
-----	---	----	---

V89  101

15. If you do have access to a computer, where is it?

	1	2
At home	Yes	No
At school	Yes	No
Elsewhere	Yes	No

V90  102

V91  103

V92  104

16. Do you think it is important to read books to be successful in one's work after school?

Yes	1	No	2
-----	---	----	---

V93  105

17. What do you think teachers can do to encourage their pupils to read more books?

Please specify .....
.....
.....
.....
.....

V94  106

V95  107

V96  108

18. Please write down the titles and authors of the last three *books* you have read that you enjoyed very much - whether in English or any other language.

Title:	Author:
1.	
2.	
3.	

V97  109

V98  110

V99  111

Thank you very much for your time!



## SUMMARY

This dissertation endeavours to come to an understanding of adolescents' attitudes and perceptions with regard to recreational reading. The scope of research in the discipline of Children's Literature is a clear indication that researchers in various fields consider it to be a crucial learning area in children's education in general and the acquisition of literacy in particular. This development comes at a time when many pessimists have reason to regard reading, if not a dying art, at least a threatened pastime, especially with modern children whose reading has to compete with a variety of electronic media for divided attention during limited hours of leisure. After a literature review of central issues pertaining to recreational reading, a survey attempts to determine the scope and nature of adolescent reading habits. Finally, strategies are recommended to help teachers in their promotion of adolescent readership.

Chapter one takes the view that recreational reading supports all aspects of a learner's development, from the acquisition of literacy to linguistic mastery, from intellectual stimulation to emotional and moral development. The theoretical inquiry studies various factors that contribute to - or detract from - the acquisition of a lifelong reading habit. From parental influence the focus moves to the influence of teachers at school and the role of bibliotherapy.

Chapter two endeavours to give an overview of beginning reading strategies as well as early contact with texts since attitudes on reading are formed through these initial experiences at home and at school. An inspection of some theories on children's reading development leads to an understanding of how to match book with reader as a crucial facet in readership promotion.

Chapter three focuses on adolescent attitudes and perceptions. An understanding of adolescents, their motives and interests are necessary when teachers wish to motivate their learners to read a wide range of material for pleasure. It is clear that the decline in adolescent recreational reading can be attributed to the pressure of time, the lack of adequate models of reading and the poor use of available reading materials.

Chapter four contains the empirical investigation into the reading habits of grade eleven learners

in the Tshwane South district of Gauteng province as representatives of the middle adolescent phase. The results of the survey are described and the implications of adolescent reading habits are discussed.

Chapter five is a comprehensive chapter in which the research findings are applied to design teaching strategies to help promote recreational reading. Encouraging adolescents to choose to read enthusiastically, thereby possibly creating a lifelong reading habit, ultimately requires the combined efforts of governmental and education authorities, principals and teachers, librarians and, of course, parents.

The study is followed by two appendices: the questionnaire and some suggestions for readership promotion by learners in their own words.

The value of the study rests on the testimony of learners that teachers can influence adolescents with regard to recreational reading. Whether serving as models of reading, leading group discussions on books or applying bibliotherapeutic strategies, the influence and guidance of highly-motivated teachers are decisive.

## **AFRIKAANS:**

Die tesis het gepoog om die houding en persepsies van adolessente leerders ten opsigte van ontspanningslees te peil. Die reikwydte van die navorsing in die leerarea van Kinderlektuur dui daarop dat navorsers ontspanningslees as 'n belangrike faset beskou van Kinderopvoeding in die algemeen en die verworwing van geletterheid in die besonder. Hierdie ontwikkeling gebeur op 'n tyd wanneer doemprofete rede het om te glo dat lees, indien nie 'n verloopte kuns, tog 'n bedreigde tydverdryf geword het - veral as lees moet kompeteer met 'n verskeidenheid van elektroniese media in moderne kinders se beperkte vrye tyd. Na 'n literêre oorsig van kernsake rakende ontspanningslees, poog die meningspeiling om die aard en omvang van adolessente leergewoontes te peil. Ten slotte word strategieë voorgestel om onderwysers te help om hulle adolessente leerders aan te moedig om te lewenslank te lees vir ontspanning.

Hoofstuk een gaan van die standpunt uit dat lees alle aspekte van 'n leerder se ontwikkeling positief beïnvloed, van leesverworwing tot optimale taalverwerwing, van intellektuele stimulasie tot emosionele en morele ontwikkeling. Die teoretiese studie ondersoek verskeie faktore wat bydra tot - of skade berokken aan - die ontwikkeling van 'n lewenslange leesgewoonte. Ouers se invloed word bespreek, waarna die lig val op onderwysers se invloed en die rol wat biblioterapie speel.

Hoofstuk twee poog om 'n oorsig te gee van aanvangsleesstrategieë asook leerders se vroeë kontak met tekste aangesien leeshoudings reeds deur hierdie eerste ervarings tuis en op skool gevorm word. 'n Vlugtige oorsig word gegee van leesontwikkeling om uiteindelik te probeer verstaan hoe om leser en boek bymekaar uit te bring aangesien dit 'n kritieke aspek is in leesbevordering.

Die fokus in hoofstuk drie val op adolossente en hul houdings en persepsies. Daar word gepoog om adolossente se motiewe en belangstellings te verstaan sodat onderwysers kan help om hul leerders te motiveer om 'n ryke verskeidenheid van tekste vir plesier te lees. Dit blyk duidelik dat die afname in adolossente se ontspanningslees hoofsaaklik te wyte is aan tydsdruk, die tekort aan inspirerende voorbeelde en die ontoereidende gebruik van leesmateriaal.

Hoofstuk vier bevat die empiriese studie wat die leesgewoontes van graad elf leerders in die Tshwane Suid distrik van die Gauteng provinsie as verteenwoordigend van die middel adolossente fase ondersoek. Die resultate van die meningspeiling word gegee en die implikasies van adolossente se leesgewoontes word beskryf.

Die laaste hoofstuk is 'n omvattende een waarin die navorsingsbevindinge toegepas word om onderwysstrategieë te ontwerp wat sal help by leesbevordering. Om adolossente leerders aan te moedig om vir ontspanning te lees, is dit nodig dat regerings- en onderwysowerhede, hoofde en onderwysers, bibliotekarisse en, natuurlik, ouers, nou saamwerk.

Die studie word afgesluit met twee bylae: die vraelys en 'n aantal voorbeelde van leerders se voorstelle aan onderwysers om lees te bevorder.

Die waarde van die studie is geleë in die getuienis van die respondente dat onderwysers leerders kan aanmoedig om te lees vir ontspanning. Of onderwysers nou as voorbeelde dien van goeie lesers, of hulle groepsbesprekings lei of biblioterapeutiese strategieë aanwend, die invloed en leiding van hoogs-gemotiveerde onderwysers is deurslaggewend.