USING THE READING TO LEARN METHODOLOGY
TO TEACH ISIZULU READING IN A GRADE THREE CLASS:
A TEACHER'S SELF-STUDY

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A thesis submitted to the School of Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Specialisation: Teacher Development Studies

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Date: June 2023

DECLARATION

I, Bongiwe Ntombela declare that

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(ii)   This dissertation/thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Bongiwe Ntombela   30 June 2023

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ABSTRACT

In this self-study research I examined my teaching of isiZulu home language reading in my Grade 3 class using the Reading to Learn methodology (R2L). Undertaking this self-study emanated from the concerns I had about my learners' lack of participation in class, resulting in low reading development. Conducting this research assisted me to uncover my behavioural and emotional traits that created a negative atmosphere for learning. That kind of working environment influenced my daily practice and identity. Throughout the 27 years of my teaching I have been a foundation phase teacher who is very passionate about my work and knew myself as effective in developing learners' knowledge and skills. I was keen to improve my professionalism, and so, after three years in a college of education I decided to pursue further studies. After many years of using the same teaching methods that were used by my teachers when I was a learner, I was introduced to the R2L methodology in 2012. I became one of the trainers training teachers who were keen to use the methodology. I used R2L for six years, perceiving myself as a productive teacher, as the development of my learners' literacy skills was noticeable. I was happy with my teaching strategies until I moved to another school, where I experienced teaching challenges and therefore decided to explore my teaching practice through the self-study methodology. In this research I used multiple methods, one being life history, which allowed me to revisit my past, my attitudes, and my beliefs so that I could examine myself and change. As much as I was at the centre of the study and potentially an agent in the construction of knowledge, I also worked collaboratively with critical friends to demonstrate its validity and trustworthiness. I used the collage as an arts-based method to represent and reflect on my classroom practice. The collage was also used to stimulate reflection with critical friends and to agree on possible solutions to my problems, thereafter explaining my learnings that emerged from our discussions. Doing this self-study and reflecting on my professional practice has revealed the issues about myself that I was not aware of and released me from being confined by my past personal and professional experiences. I used journal entries to collect data by regularly documenting the events that took place during teaching and learning and recording my feelings about what happened. Another data collection method was video recordings that were done in the first three terms in 2021 to capture my teaching practice and my interaction with learners. I also used the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) which I administered as a baseline test at the beginning of 2021 and again towards the end of the same year to determine my learners' reading progress. The findings of

this study indicate that through reflecting on my practice and working with critical friends, my teaching and interaction with learners changed and my learners' achievement demonstrated the significant improvement in reading fluency and comprehension over the year 2021.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude and appreciation go to the following people who have supported me all the way through the journey to the completion of this study:

> ➢ To Professor Bertram, my supervisor, and Dr Kortjass my co-supervisor, for the insightful guidance, constructive critiques, understanding and constant support every step of the way. Without them this study would not have been possible.
>
> ➢ To my friends Deb, Lucky, Nana, Sthe and GT who were involved in my study as my critical friends. Your honest feedback and advice generated success in my professional development and thank you for your generosity and for not being judgemental.
>
> ➢ To the Reading to Learn team for believing in me, and for their support and encouragement.
>
> ➢ To my dearest son Phumelela for staying with me till the late hours while I studied. This was a distinct kind of support.

It is by the grace of God Almighty that I managed to finish this research.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANAs	Annual National Assessments
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
BNR	Becoming a Nation of Readers
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
EFAL	English first additional language
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FAL	First additional language
HOD	Head of Department
IQMS	Integrated quality management system
JPTD	Junior Primary Teachers' Diploma
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of learning and teaching
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NLS	New Literacy Studies
PILO	Programme for Improving Learning Outcomes
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSRIP	Primary school reading improvement programme
R2L	Reading to Learn

SMT	School management team
SPTD	Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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CHAPTER ONE: Stretching my traditional comfort zone

1.1 Introduction

In this study I explored the intersection of my personal and professional self in order to improve my teaching practice. Since my childhood, my passion for teaching has been undeniable. I have been acknowledged by my colleagues, school management and foundation phase subject advisors as a good and dedicated teacher. During the district foundation phase workshops some of the subject advisors afforded me a platform to facilitate and share some ideas and therefore teachers from my school and other schools trusted my knowledge about teaching. So, improving my teaching has various benefits for my colleagues, my learners and other teachers, as I will continue to share my knowledge of improving classroom practice through self-study in the district workshops.

Teachers often have the tendency of losing motivation as they grow older (Campbell, 2017). However, I remain willing and motivated to be in the classroom and also to willingly share with colleagues. In 2012, after 20 years of teaching experience, I was introduced and learnt the Reading to Learn (R2L) methodology. Reading to Learn is a teaching and learning methodology that was developed to create access to learning and meaningful participation for all learners in the classroom to quickly improve reading and writing skills for academic success (Rose, 2015). The development of R2L was an intervention to address social inequalities experienced by learners in the classrooms from non-literate backgrounds. It is characterised by an interactive teaching and learning based on the genre approach. The methodology provides learners with clear guidance and scaffolding through the explicit teaching of the language structure and language patterns of different text types (Acevedo, 2020; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017; Steinke, 2012). Implementing R2L made me even more confident about my teaching. My motivation stemmed from the knowledge I acquired from the R2L training workshops about the significance of teaching learners to read explicitly for meaning and the skills I acquired of how to teach them to learn from what they read. After the training, I implemented the methodology with commitment and the goal of producing good results regardless of learners' backgrounds and abilities.

This chapter starts by outlining the focus and the rationale for conducting this research. It goes on to briefly outline the background context of the study, which is on the teaching of isiZulu

reading in Grade 3. Then it provides an overview of the concept of literacy, which is conceptualised by some authors as a combination of several language skills and demonstrates that reading and writing are intertwined. The chapter moves on to illustrate various definitions of reading, the development of reading in early stages and reading pedagogies in African language orthographies. Thereafter, I explain the methodological approach and present the research questions that guided the collection of data. In conclusion, I describe the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that constitute the study.

1.2 Focus of the study

I conducted this self-study as an initiative to improve my teaching of reading isiZulu home language in my Grade 3 class. The purpose was also to learn about the R2L methodology to improve learners' participation in class and develop their reading comprehension. The desire to improve my teaching in the home language was driven by the fact that the majority of learners in South African schools fail to read for meaning in their home language in Grade 4 (Pretorius, 2014; Spaull, 2016). In the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results of 2006 and 2011, South African Grade 4 learners performed poorly in reading compared to other countries. Regardless of the language of testing, which was African home languages that had been their language of learning and teaching in Grade 3, learners achieved below a centre point, which was lower than learners in other developing countries (Pretorius, 2014). In the 2016 assessment, 78% of Grade 4 learners from South Africa demonstrated poor reading comprehension in any language, which suggests poor progress in their reading development from lower grades (Spaull, Pretorius & Mohohlwane, 2020). Therefore, focusing on improving my practice would also develop my learners' reading skills and allow them to cope with the curriculum demands and the change of text types in the intermediate phase, which has a lasting effect on their lifelong academic achievement (Pretorius, 2014; Sibanda, 2017). Proficiency in the home language acquired in the foundation phase would determine the smooth transition to the intermediate phase, where learners switch to English as a language of learning and teaching (Ntuli & Pretorius, 2009).

1.3 Background context

In South Africa during the apartheid era, English and Afrikaans were the only officially recognised languages. After the first democratic elections in 1994, the new language policy that came with the constitution and the South African Education Act of 1996 aimed at recognising all indigenous African languages, resulting in 11 official languages instead of two (Department of Education, 1996). The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) states that schools in the African language context, use the home language for three years as their language of learning and teaching (LoLT), then the switch occurs in Grade 4, where learners change to English as the LoLT while the home language is retained as a subject and continuously developed (Department of Education, 1996).

My study took place in the province of KwaZulu Natal and was conducted in my classroom with 45 Grade 3 learners. My school is a quintile 3 primary school situated in a residential area in the greater Edendale complex in Pietermaritzburg. Quintiles refer to the ranking of schools in categories from 1-5, based on the economic status of their surrounding communities. Quintile 1 schools are classified as the poorest and quintile 5 as the least poor. The ranking is regulated by the National Department of Basic Education for the annual allocation of financial resources. As my school is ranked within quintile 3, our learners do not pay school fees because they come from a low socioeconomic status community. A large number of children come from child-headed families, others live with unemployed parents and guardians in families that live on the government grant given to elderly people and young children. The government provides a feeding programme for the schools that are within communities of low economic status and the school also benefits from that programme. Some learners come to school hungry and others even declare that they rely fully on the school feeding scheme for a meal.

My school is a full-service school with 60 staff members and an enrolment of 1368 learners with an average class size of 45 learners. A full-service school is a mainstream school or inclusive school that caters for children with special education needs at a moderate level. The school admits learners with minor to moderate learning difficulties that may include vision, hearing, learning and cognition, behavioural problems and weak motor skills due to health reasons.

Children are screened at the beginning of the year guided by the policy on screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) to identify learners who might have challenges and the findings are recorded in the learner profile (Department of Education, 2001). We administer diagnostic tests that cover the work for the previous grades. Learners who perform

below the class average are considered as having learning and cognition barriers. Teachers identify vision, hearing and physical challenges as they interact with learners during teaching and learning. According to the education White Paper 6 (the framework policy document for special needs education), the teacher provides learners with necessary support. When the support given by the teacher proves to be ineffective, the relevant structures in the school become involved for discussion and referral to the relevant colleagues (Department of Education, 2001).

Various challenges affect children's learning in different ways. For example, children with language learning disability suffer a delay in either speech, language, reading, writing or all these skills. It is then the responsibility of the teacher to support the child by adapting the curriculum and assessment to cater the level of learning for the child (Department of Education, 2001). In contrast, Reading to Learn, as the methodology in question for this study, emphasises equality and democracy in the classroom, where learners are not classified according to their learning abilities or socioeconomic difficulties (Acevedo & Rose, 2007; Rose, 2011) They suggest the engagement of all learners in the same activity at the same time while the teacher provides the maximum support to the weaker learners.

Our school is supplied with additional support provision to offer a wider range of support services such as specialised support staff, physical infrastructure and physical resources needed to address higher levels of support needs than a normal mainstream school can offer (Department of Basic Education, 2001). Learners that have been identified for extra support are sent to the support centre. Teachers who work at the support centre do not have a specialised qualification for teaching learners with barriers to learning, but they regularly attend workshops organised by the Department of Education to equip them with knowledge and skills. The support centre has activity rooms where teachers work with learners and a health room for consultation with a nurse. It is also equipped with computers and software that is used for learning and cognition, recording devices to assist learners who require oral tests, and visual support lenses that help those with vision problems.

The inclusive education specialist from the department offices comes regularly to monitor the functioning of the centre. Other support staff include a social worker, a psychologist and an occupational therapist designated as an intervention from the municipality to once a week attend to various needs of the learners.

In the province of KwaZulu Natal, 78% of the population speak isiZulu as their home language and thus the majority of learners are taught in isiZulu for three years in the foundation phase.

The home language refers to the language that learners acquire through exposure from their parents and family at home. Against this background, the national Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document states that children come to school having acquired vocabulary in their home language and can speak it fluently (Department of Basic Education, 2011). That knowledge of vocabulary becomes the foundation to build on learning to read and write in Grade 1. The expectation, according to the LiEP and CAPS, is that by end of Grade 3, learners will have moved from social communicative language to academic language acquisition in both the home language and English as first additional language (EFAL) (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The CAPS assumes that learners have very little, or not have any, knowledge of English when they start school. For the purpose of promoting additive bilingualism, English is learnt as a subject in addition to the learners' home language, thus EFAL builds on the home language literacy learnt from home.

Language development and strong literacy skills predict success at all levels of schooling, contributing to academic achievement and lifelong learning, which is why these skills in the home language should be well developed in Grades R to 3, as this is a critical stage for laying a foundation that equips learners for the transition to Grade 4 English as the LoLT (Hoadley, 2012; Trudell et al., 2012). Contrary to the assumptions of the CAPS and LiEP, as aforementioned, the 2021 PIRLS results show that many learners[1] complete Grade 3 without being able to read and write properly in their home language (Department of Basic Education, 2023). This trend of results prevails when they switch to English in Grade 4, where they demonstrate very little understanding of English as the language of learning and teaching (Bansilal, 2012; Spaull et al., 2016). This confirms that the poor development of literacy in the home language in the early grades in South African schools reveals a crisis in the South African education system (Pretorius, 2015).

To emphasize the crisis, Bansilal (2012) describes the disappointing trend since the 2010 Annual National Assessments[2] (ANAs) in both numeracy and literacy, which indicates that a large number of learners who achieved above 50% were mainly from Grades 1 and 2. Only 20% of Grade 3 learners got above 50%. As the grade levels progress, the percentages drop further, as

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[1] Learners refers to children who are still at school and also to adults who attend adult basic education classes.

[2] Annual National Assessments (ANAs) refer to the Department of Education (DOE) initiative designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning literacy and numeracy in primary schools. These assessment tests collected data in classrooms from 2009 – 2014.

in Grades 4 to 6, less than 20% of learners achieved above 50%. This was also demonstrated in the PIRLS results of 2006, 2016 and 2021, where, regardless of the language of testing which had been their LoLT in Grade 3, Grade 4 learners performed poorly compared to other countries (Department of Basic Education, 2023; Pretorius, 2014). The PIRLS results demonstrate that despite learning in their home language for three years, learners still cannot read with understanding and produce meaningful writing in the home language in Grade 4. Furthermore, this performance suggests poor development of literacy skills during the three years in the foundation phase and of language proficiency necessary for the smooth transition to the intermediate phase. It is maintained that since reading is significant for academic success, learners could perform better if they were guided through to successful reading from the early grades of schooling before the Grade 4 PIRLS assessment (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). Therefore, mitigating this literacy crisis in my class, particularly reading in isiZulu, would be achieved by improving my attitude towards learners, my teaching practice, beliefs, and reading habits, as these are crucial in either constraining or accelerating learners' reading development (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). However, I was aware that developing reading skills would also require the involvement of parents, as Graven (2013) argues for parents and care-givers to assist with homework and engage children in reading activities at home, thus learning would go beyond formal schooling. Therefore, as the school typically invited parents to school quarterly meetings to view their children's progress, I urged them to participate towards their children's learning to read at home.

1.4 Rationale for the study

As an experienced foundation phase teacher, I have a set of personal reasons for conducting this study. In the twenty years of my teaching experience some of my learners were good at decoding words from the story, but they could not answer questions based on what they had been reading about, especially inferential questions. However, after I had started using R2L, I was pleased with the way I taught and my learners' achievement in reading. In 2018 after my resignation from my school, I moved to teach in another school. In that year I observed that the behaviour of my learners was different from my previous school. They were not participating in class, and those who did, demonstrated fear and lack of confidence in speaking and fear of reading aloud. As the year progressed, I observed low performance in reading and comprehension in the isiZulu home language. Then, in 2019, I registered for the doctoral degree and conducted this self-study of my teaching practice. I was eager to introspect by examining the questions that emerged from my observations and to better understand myself, my teaching and the way my learners learn

(Samaras & Freese, 2006). I also wanted to explore whether my beliefs about teaching using the R2L methodology corresponded with my practice with the aim of effecting change in my teaching.

Another rationale for conducting this research stemmed from the well-documented crisis of learners' transition from Grade 3 to 4 when they switch from the foundation phase where their home language is the LoLT, to English as the LoLT in Grade 4 (Sibanda, 2017). The learners' performance in reading suggested challenges with reading the texts in both African languages and English, whereas they should have carried literacy skills through from the foundation phase to Grade 4. This poor academic performance, among other factors, could be linked to teaching and learning approaches (Hoadley, 2012; Ntuli & Pretorius, 2009). Learners who lack these skills do not catch up with the required standard for the intermediate phase, whereas those learners who acquire strong foundational literacy skills are more likely to succeed throughout the years of schooling (Pretorius, 2014; Sibanda, 2017). Therefore, this study was essential for me as a foundation phase teacher to better understand how to build a solid foundation of home language literacy in Grade 3 as an exit Grade from the foundation phase and to ensure that my learners reach the transition stage having developed good literacy skills.

1.5 Research questions

This study was guided by four research questions.

1. What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to teach isiZulu reading by drawing from my own memories?

I asked this question because I had a desire to learn how to improve my teaching of isiZulu literacy. I was concerned that my teaching did not produce learners with high levels of literacy skills.

To address my first research question, I employed the personal history method (Samaras et al., 2004). This was to explore the influence of my personal experiences, culture, history and my learning experiences on teaching isiZulu in Grade 3. Through this method I was able to reflect on teaching by revisiting my past experiences of literacy learning. I also used memory drawings (see Chapter three) to evoke memories of how I was taught to read as a child and a learner.

2. What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' confidence to participate?

I asked this question to understand the reason for my learners' fluctuating participation during the lessons. I had noticed that sometimes the lessons become teacher centred, which hindered progress in teaching and learning.

Here, I used video to record my lessons to reflect on how I teach and how my learners participate in the lesson. I also used journal entries to document the events that had taken place during teaching and learning, and made a collage to represent and understand the challenges in my classroom and to get feedback from my critical friends.

3. What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' reading comprehension?

By asking this question I wanted to learn how to improve my teaching so that I enhance my learners' ability to read for meaning. This question emanated from observing that my learners could decode words from the text but could not answer comprehension questions and they did not learn from what they were reading.

I used the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) pre-tests and post-tests, described in Chapter two, to track my learners' progress in reading. I did a pre-test of oral reading fluency to ascertain learners' reading abilities at the beginning of the year 2021. This data assisted me in receiving feedback from my critical friends about strategies for improving my teaching. Post-tests were administered at the end of the year to track learners' progress in reading.

4. *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn from engaging with critical friends?*

I asked this question because I was eager to work collaboratively with critical friends and be receptive to their constructive criticism and learn from them.

1.6 Key concepts that inform the study

1.6.1 Literacy

There is a range of different perspectives on the concept of literacy. On the one hand, it is defined as the ability to read and understand and to communicate with a range of audiences from various contexts for different purposes through writing. This is an understanding of literacy as an autonomous practice (DEETYA, 1998). On the other hand, another category of definitions

understands literacy as a cultural and social practice in which productive and receptive processes are used to extract and construct the meaning of the text and to systematically respond to and evaluate the multimodal text within a society (Pearson & Tierney, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1978; Smagorinsky, 2001; Zimmerman, 2011).

The first perspective, defined as functional and autonomous literacy, mainly focuses on literacy from a viewpoint of reading and writing and working with a written text as a centre of the activity. This interpretation of literacy was suggested by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1957. Their ultimate goal was to eradicate the levels of illiteracy and consider the equal rights of people and ensure that all people can read and write a meaningful short simple statement about their daily experiences. This was premised on how some groups of people in the United States of America, including people of colour, women and the poor, were denied access to literacy (Luckasson, 2006). To emphasise the view of equal rights, in 1966 during the establishment of the Experimental World Literacy Program, literacy was described as a fundamental human right and that it is "a right not a privilege" (Lumsford et al., 1990, p. 2). Moreover, literacy was regarded as a functional skill required for functioning effectively for real purposes within the community. Being functionally literate means using reading, writing and calculation skills in social activities where these skills are required for one's own development and that of the community (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2008). With this definition, UNESCO highlights that the autonomous perspective view literacy is located with the individual, functioning within the broader context of the community.

The autonomous view establishes that literacy is not connected to any specific context or societal values (Street, 1996). The assumption from the field of education and other developmental programmes is that literacy on its own holds the autonomous power to influence other social practices and cognitive functions. Irrespective of the community's socioeconomic status, level of education or cultural background, when individuals of any age, whether poor or illiterate, are introduced to literacy skills, they can develop their cognitive skills and advance their economic conditions and become better citizens. The belief is that the ability to read and write is not connected to any specific context or societal values, thus literacy is characterised as a neutral and universal skill (Street, 1996).

In contrast to the autonomous view of literacy as neutral, other authors view literacy as a cultural and social practice in which productive and receptive processes are used to extract and construct

the meaning of the text and to systematically respond to and evaluate multimodal texts that include multiple techniques for conveying meaning to readers such as written language, and visual or gestural means (Pearson & Tierney, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1978; Smagorinsky, 2001; Zimmerman, 2011). This conception suggests that there is a connection between language, literacy, the individual's existing knowledge of the world and their social context. Literacy thus goes beyond knowledge and skills and abilities that are acquired and developed by an individual in a formal setting and strongly connect to specific cultural practices. This view explains the particular ways in which societies use language in their everyday life as language and literacy are used in different ways according to cultures (Street, 1984). This conception also considers the interconnectedness of language skills: firstly, reading and understanding, and success with reading requires that one comprehends and be able to interpret the text; secondly, the language processes of oral and written communication express ones' thoughts and feelings; and thirdly, viewing and critical thinking enables one to construct meaning of what is seen (Goodman, 1986).

In agreement with the perception of literacy as a social practice, the ideological view of literacy suggests that it is interpreted and understood according to a set of beliefs and ideas that describe a particular culture and context (Street, 1995). The New Literacy Studies (NLS) state the fact that literacy cannot be decontextualised, as it differs according to contexts and cultures. This implies that literacy practices produce different outcomes in different conditions (Street, 1996). In contrast to the autonomous model, the epistemological view, or the ideological model, is that literacy is socially constructed through collaborative engagement in practical activities rather than technical and neutral skills that demonstrate ability or expertise in completing a particular task (Street, 2014). It emphasises the seeking of knowledge within society, and the beliefs about that knowledge, together with one's identity influencing the reading and writing practices.

While some scholars limit the definition of literacy to the individuals' ability to read and write within an educational context, others expand it to the development of these skills within any context where there is collaborative work of a particular community or society. However, the general agreement for all is that literacy equips children with knowledge and skills that enable them to participate in a society, which is the reason literacy expands beyond the classroom (Spaull & Hoadley, 2017). Moreover, the different views about literacy indicate that there will never be a single and perfect definition of literacy but what is important is to develop a shared set of core principles to define literacy that will encompass the lives of everyone, including those who have long been denied opportunities for literacy instruction (Keefe & Copeland, 2010).

Despite different conceptualisations, there is an agreement that becoming literate involves all the language skills that are developed within the school setting to support subject-based learning (DEETYA, 1998; Louden et al., 2005). This view considers the individual's competency in all components of language including listening, reading and understanding, oral and written communication, as well as viewing and critical thinking. These literacy skills are inseparable in terms of their reciprocal relationship and interactive nature. They are grouped according to their functions. Thus, the speaking and writing skills are referred to as productive or expressive processes, while listening, reading and comprehension skills are receptive processes. The development of these language skills requires the functioning of cognitive processes to enhance the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of concepts in subject areas across the curriculum (DEETYA, 1998; Louden et al., 2005). While recognising the several skills that encompass the concept of literacy, this study is focused on reading development as one aspect of literacy.

1.6.2 Reading

Pretorius (2010) defines reading in both its simple and complex dimensions. Simply, it is the ability to decode, understand, and make meaning of any type of written text, where the construction of meaning is enhanced by the understanding of the specific purpose of reading the particular text. However, its complexity involves a number of processes such as social context from which the exposure to print is afforded to children from early stages, and cognitive-linguistic components such as decoding, comprehension and response (Pretorius, 2010). The process of reading also involves the reader's attitudes and emotions that play a crucial role in hindering or building up learning behaviour, reading and literacy practices and also brain activity, because during reading there is a complex interaction of language with processes and functions that take place in the mind. These processes and functions include the readers' awareness and ability to interpret concepts, knowledge about language and concentration on certain aspects of information. The functioning of these processes enhances reading development from a lower to a higher order of automaticity. The higher development of lower-level skills like word recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding and spelling determines the development of fluency and comprehension skills. Therefore, the overall success in reading is based on and is supported by the development of the components that account for reading, which are comprehension and response to the text (Pretorius, 2010).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), defines reading as the engaging with the text and understanding to achieve the certain goals and reflecting on the text to develop knowledge and ability to participate in society. The PISA supports Pretorius's simple definition of reading, but expands it and emphasises that the reader acquires knowledge through reflecting on the written text. The knowledge that readers learn from the text provides them with the power to contribute and to find their role in a community or society (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). These conceptions about reading support the idea that it is a highly complex system that includes several elements that explain how it works, practised and develops (Pretorius, 2010). Pretorius (2010) explains that the complexity of reading involves the interplay of variables such as the visual symbolic writing systems that represent language and communication and the cognitive and linguistic systems that explain the number of processes that occur in the mind during the act of reading.

In a similar vein, the Becoming a Nation of Readers (BNR) report noted that reading is complex and involves the interaction of multiple interconnected sources of information (Anderson et al., 1985). The BNR is the report from the commission of reading that was established in 1985 in the United States (US). The authors of this report suggested certain principles that should guide the process of successful reading. These are that reading is a constructive process and a continuously developing skill that requires readers' motivation, that it must be fluent and strategic, and that the reader must be able to use a variety of strategies to construct the meaning of the text. The BNR's definition of reading is based on the knowledge and belief that reading is a constructive process during which the reader constructs meaning from the written text. The several conceptions about reading described so far, highlight the number of elements that underpin the reading process. However, the BNR principles do not acknowledge the role of text and social context.

Another perspective of reading from the US, is that "reading is the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 11). This perspective differs from the BNR, as it emphasises the role of text, and the act of reading within a broader sociocultural context through which reading occurs. It contends that, as readers construct the meaning of the text, they undergo a process of change. Their knowledge and skills develop, and their understanding of the text changes as they interpret it to suit their expectations and knowledge of the world.

Although the BNR was at the time considered to be sensible, it was regarded as incomplete, as it ignored other important variables (Pearson & Cervetti, 2015). As a result, its guiding principles of implementing successful reading were challenged thirty years later in the US, owing to the evidence from the continuing interventions in the field of reading. The aim of the challenge was to shift from focusing only on the role of the reader and consider the significant role of the text and the context in the construction of meaning, relating to the aforementioned understanding of literacy as a cultural and social practice. This shift, then, acknowledges the interaction of the reader, the text and the social setting in which reading activity takes place (Pearson & Cervetti, 2015).

Purcell-Gates et al. (2016) later recommended that, as reading takes place where literacy practices are socially and culturally constructed, its definition must be further expanded to acknowledge the social and cultural aspects. This recommendation effected the shift from reading to the concept of literacy. Therefore, the principles that guide successful reading suggested in the BNR report were also extended. In addition to reading as a constructive process, Frankel et al. (2016) defined it as an integrative and critical process situated in a social context. The construction of meaning and comprehension integrates an interchange of the readers' prior knowledge of the world, the information from the text and the context in and through which reading takes place and so literacy develops. From the principle of reading as a continuously developing skill that requires readers' motivation, it was extended to the continuously developing set of practices that entails both motivation and engagement (Frankel et al., 2016). The BNR report states that reading must be fluent and strategic, meaning that the reader must be able to use a variety of strategies to construct the meaning of the text. The modified version defines fluency as the skill that is shaped by language processes and context and literacy is viewed as strategic and disciplinary. This view regards reading as the ability to identify and use specialised reading skills to interpret and analyse a text that is specific to a particular discipline (Frankel et al., 2016). The expanded conceptualisation of reading takes cognisance of many important aspects that are involved in defining what reading is and what is needed to develop reading skills. The extended concept encompasses a range of elements of reading to literacy. Table 1 illustrates the comparison between the principles of reading suggested by Anderson et al. (1985) and the refined principles suggested by Frankel et. al (2016) to extend reading to literacy.

Table 1. Principles of successful reading (Anderson et al., 1985; Frankel et al., 2016)

Principles of successful reading (Anderson et al. 1985)	The revised and extended principles of literacy development (Frankel et al. 2016)
Reading is a constructive process	Literacy is a constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in a social context
Reading must be fluent	Fluent reading is shaped by language processes and contexts
Reading must be strategic	Literacy is strategic and disciplinary
Reading requires motivation	Literacy entails motivation and engagement
Reading is a continuously developing skill	Literacy is a continuously developing set of practices

Thus far I have discussed different conceptions of reading and literacy, as these concepts inform this study. The next section presents the contrasting approaches to teaching reading that are underpinned by various theories.

1.6.3 Approaches to teaching reading

Teaching reading and learning to read are understood from different perspectives. This results in the conflicting theories on the nature of reading and text processing and debates about the most effective method of teaching reading (Pardede, 2008; Verbeek, 2010). One perspective emphasises teaching reading by starting with letters and symbols and proceeding to the whole text with the assumption that comprehension happens automatically. A second perspective tackles reading from the context of the text, learning its structure and making meaning and then moving down to the knowledge of words and letters.

Bottom-up or phonic approach to teaching reading

The bottom-up or phonic approach of teaching reading assumes that reading is merely the knowledge of signs and symbols and the ability to read is influenced by phonological awareness and phonemic awareness (Joubert et al., 2008). Phonological awareness is a broad skill of identifying and working with units of language such as syllables and words in oral language, whereas phonemic awareness is the specific skill of identifying individual sounds or phonemes

in spoken words. The important advantage of the phonic approach is that learners acquire a knowledge of letters and recognise words. The assumption of this approach is that the knowledge of alphabetic and phonic principles, word families, punctuations and spelling patterns help a learner to decode and encode the text (Joubert et al., 2008).

The phonics approach originated from the argument that good readers can read letter names, followed by sounds and then syllable blends, and combine them to form words that they will be able to pronounce and understand (Verbeek, 2010). Learning these skills is crucial in early grades, as it helps learners to master the code and it influences reading accurately with automaticity, which predicts reading competency in upper grades. There are two different dimensions in which reading can be approached starting from the bottom (Adams, 1990; Joubert et al., 2008; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Pearson, 2000). Firstly, the phonic approach can be synthetic, which means teaching and learning of alphabet and sounds and translating them into speech, assuming that fluency and comprehension will be constructed at a later stage. The teacher and learners have their roles in achieving these skills. While the teacher delivers knowledge and reinforces it through drilling, learners receive knowledge and perform the drills and their knowledge gets tested in individual items. The second dimension is the analytical phonics, where learners learn to read through the look and say of the picture or whole word enhanced by the use of word cards. This is similarly described by Verbeek (2010) as a word-bound theory that gives attention to word recognition and sounding-out, but without considering other important factors that influence meaning. This reflects Flesch's standpoint on this approach, that a child who knows letters and sounds, knows how to read, therefore children must be taught letter-by-letter and sound by sound (Flesch, 1955).

This approach has several disadvantages, one being inflexibility, which might make it boring to learners. Another disadvantage is that learners might acquire the knowledge of words and sounds or syllables and the skill to read them, but lack the ability to make meaning as their comprehension skill is not being developed (Verbeek, 2010). The argument is that reading comprehension is a challenge at the early stage because learners cannot handle phonic awareness while focusing on comprehension; they need to focus on one aspect at a time (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

The critics of this approach argue that in this view of learning to read children might say the words and sounds in a text without getting the message about the content, defining this as

"barking at print" (Smith, 1994, p. 73). Furthermore, Castles and Coltheart (2004) attest that among many studies that have repeatedly been conducted, none have linked reading development or spelling acquisition to the learning of phonics in isolation. They argue that phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are part of oral language rather than of the reading system, and thus may not be regarded as a determinant for reading ability. The focus has shifted from whether or not to teach phonics, to how phonics should be taught to improve learners' academic success (Verbeek, 2010).

Top-down or whole language approach

This approach concurs with the cognitive view, which explains the idea of the whole language approach that gives attention to teaching reading with comprehension (Flanagan, 1995). The whole language or top-down approach, involves working with real books and reading text with meaning. Comprehension of the whole text leads to the ability to interpret words and letters and automated word recognition. In this approach, the teacher and the learners engage in discussion about the topic or the text, then the teacher scaffolds learners to manipulate sentences in order to make meaning (Flanagan, 1995; Joubert et al., 2008). This kind of learning to read is described by Flanagan (1995) as reading inclusivity that is comprehension driven. One of the advantages of this approach is that it focuses on meaning making of the whole text and it also addresses the development of speaking, listening, reading and writing skills (Joubert et al., 2008). Learners use their existing knowledge to predict and question the text.

Table 2. Differences between bottom-up phonics alphabet and top-down or whole language approaches to reading (Flanagan, 1995)

Phonics approaches	Whole language approaches
Reading process begins from the smaller units and progresses to the whole (bottom-up). Learners first learn the individual letters of the alphabet, then how sounds are represented by letters, followed by how letter patterns form single words; then word groups that form phrases and sentences; and finally, the meaning of the text.	Reading is a process that progresses from the whole to the parts (top-down). It assumes the learners will understand the written language and how it functions. This understanding enables the reader to make sense of the written word.
Reading is a collaboration of individual skills.	Reading is inclusive. All skills are implemented simultaneously to make sense of the written text.

Reading is text driven. The page brings more information to the reader, than the reader brings to the written page.	Reading is comprehension driven. The reader brings existent knowledge to the text. He or she predicts and questions the text.
The reader must first master the mechanical and technical aspects of written language, before reading comprehension is addressed.	Meaning is most important and is the foundation of reading.
Once the learners have mastered the technical and mechanical skills, they can read.	People continue to learn how to read throughout their lives. There is no end.
Beginning readers are required to read aloud.	Silent reading is essential for meditation and conceptualisation.

1.6.4 The Reading to Learn approach

A number of approaches, including the above-mentioned ones, have been used to teach reading and they have advantages as well as limitations. My study focuses on the R2L methodology, which is a scaffolding cyclical teaching methodology with a return process of reading from the whole text to letter patterns and back to the construction of the new text. It is based on a carefully planned teacher-learner interaction designed to integrate the teaching of the curriculum across all phases and grades of schooling, teaching learners the skills and knowledge needed to read different genres with comprehension and produce meaningful writing (Martin & Rose, 2007; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017; Rose, 2015). The methodology provides support for all learners regardless of social class and academic ability and encourages that both the teacher and the learners have active roles in the teaching and learning process. It is premised on developing quality teaching and providing a highly explicit and supportive teaching process that continuously affirms learners and develops their learning potential.

The teacher interacts with learners within a six-staged cycle (discussed in detail in Chapter four), starting from the level of the whole text where learners make sense of the content and its organisation. The teacher-learner interaction involves revising prior knowledge or linking the text to learners' context and thoughts (Rose, 2015). From the level of the whole text, the cycle goes down to the paragraph or the sentence where learners identify the sequence of words and meaning of word groups, then to the arrangement of letters and how they form the words. Low achieving students receive maximum scaffolding as they develop language and the skills needed for independent reading, comprehension and writing texts (Rose, 2005). As learners become independent, the teacher gradually shifts the learning process over to the learners. This methodology agrees with the cognitive theories (interactive, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic

and linguistic) that focus more on reading comprehension. They believe that learners make meaning of the written text by using familiar patterns as clues, and knowledge of language and the environment (Flanagan, 1995).

The R2L methodology was founded on the perspectives of the direct Instruction teaching method in contrast to the communicative approach which sees the development of reading as a natural development (Mawela, 2018; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). The direct instruction is a teacher-directed approach that promotes explicit reading instruction, where the teacher directs and guides the learning process through encouraging effective and efficient classroom interaction, focusing both on the meaning of the whole text and the word and phonics levels. This approach allows both the teacher and learners to take an active role in the classroom and gives learners the opportunity to learn concepts and a variety of language skills; thus it is said to be content-centred (Mawela, 2018).

Reading to Learn and the bottom-up approach

The difference between R2L and the phonic approach is that the latter approach focuses on developing knowledge of isolated skills and sometimes fails to address comprehension, whereas the R2L approach focuses on teaching all the aspects of language as well as the content from the context of one text. This kind of teaching facilitates knowledge of the type of text, its structure and its purpose. Learners acquire knowledge of phonics and develop vocabulary within the same text. Reading to Learn has its distinctive nature of an interactive learning environment where the teacher provides scaffolding to all learners through all activities and continuously affirms them for every effort they put into learning (Mataka et al., 2020; Rose, 2019; Steinke, 2012). These features of R2L support the idea of the complexity of teaching and learning of reading (Pretorius, 2010). Pretorius attests that reading development involves the learners' context, motivation and attitudes to learning. Reading in the bottom-up approach is text driven, suggesting that the text brings more information to the reader, more than the readers bring to the written text. However, R2L suggests that the reader brings to the text their existing knowledge and relates the text to their everyday life.

Reading to Learn and the whole language approach

The whole language approach fails to address the basic reading skills. Yet the knowledge of letter-sound relationships, vocabulary and grammar of the language in which the text is written and the ability to use this knowledge to decode the written text can facilitate reading for meaning (Snow, 2017; Spaull et al., 2016). Reading to Learn is not a language programme and is most

effective when implemented across the curriculum with any language and at any level (Mataka et al., 2020; Rose & Acevedo, 2006). As it starts from the whole text, the whole language approach assumes that learners will understand the written language and how it functions. Similarly, R2L considers how leaners learn language and how they make meaning in language, thus all the language patterns are recognised and interpreted at the same time within the text (Martin & Rose, 2007). Both approaches are comprehension driven and believe that reading is based on meaning making. Leaners make meaning by bringing their life experiences to the text. However, the whole language approach promotes predicting about the text, whereas R2L emphasises that the teacher provides learners with the background knowledge of the story by summarising before they read. This practice helps learners know the story and how it will unfold before they read (Rose, 2011; Steinke, 2019).

Underpinning theories in Reading to Learn

The R2L methodology is influenced by Vygotsky's theory of social learning. The essential factor in R2L is scaffolding learners to reach their zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the distance between what the learner can do on their own and their ability to achieve after the teacher's assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the ZPD is concerned with guiding the learner through the task to enhance their potential to perform the task independently (Vygotsky, 1978). Learners reach their ZPD through social interaction that teachers promote during teaching and learning. The support and guidance afforded to the child is referred to as scaffolding as a metaphor of a temporary structure erected to support the building during construction (described in Chapters four and five) (Bruner et al., 1976).

In agreement with Vygotsky's ZPD, (Cambourne, 2002) affirms that a learner brings to the learning event their intention and they construct knowledge and meaning in collaboration with others, with the teacher as a knowledgeable adult. Thus, learning becomes successful because it is not separated from the context in which it is learnt. Vygotsky's idea of social learning, shared literacy and shared learning underpins the teaching and learning process of the R2L approach. The idea of the learning event is that learners are engaged in a task while there is a high level of scaffolding from the teacher until they reach their potential. As the learner progresses with the task to the higher level, the teacher models, elaborates and prepares them for the next task. When they reach their level of ability, the scaffolding becomes minimal (Vygotsky, 1978).

The R2L methodology is also grounded in Halliday's language model concerning how people make meaning in language (Halliday, 1994). He argues that both language and learning are social constructs as they are both significant in the sharing of knowledge and in defining one's

identity. This model supports the idea of ZPD of Vygotsky. Both these ideas have an effect in education, as they suggest social learning. The implication for the development of these theories in education is that learning and language requires the teacher, or an adult, to provide scaffolding to advance the learning of all learners.

In Bernstein's later work on pedagogic discourse, he suggests that learning takes place as a teacher-learner dialogue rather than just the transmission of knowledge (Acevedo, 2020). Bernstein analyses the exchange of knowledge in the classroom into instructional discourse and regulative discourse (Acevedo, 2020, p. 50). The instructional discourse is concerned with the distribution of knowledge and skills to learners and the instruction used in the classroom to support learners' achievement of competences. The regulative discourse is about the creation of order in social interaction, control of behaviour, conduct and character in the classroom. Besides being the control over the hierarchical rule, the regulative discourse also directs and produces order in the instructional discourse, both in terms of which knowledge is selected and how it is being transferred (Muller & Hoadley, 2010). Thus, the pedagogic discourse is described as an instructional discourse that is embedded in the regulative discourse, as "There is no instructional discourse which is not regulated by the regulative discourse. If this is so, the whole order within pedagogic discourse is constituted by the regulative discourse" (Muller & Hoadley, 2010, p. 168). The what of the curriculum and how it is transmitted equally to learners in a form of social interaction was also a main concern in the development of the R2L interaction pattern. Thus, Bernstein's work contributed to the development of the R2L methodology (Acevedo, 2020; Rose, 2017).

These three theories suggest that the teacher does not only impart knowledge, but teaching and learning involves a hidden curriculum that communicates order and relations in the classroom resulting in inequalities in the learners' abilities. In order to mitigate this, the R2L scaffolding cycle of steps mediates learning by facilitating explicit teaching that minimises learners' inequalities and support them to reach their higher level of performance without the teacher's assistance (Mataka et al., 2020). Hence, I located this study within the use of scaffolding as an instructional strategy to understand and explain the teaching and learning events in my classroom.

Reading to Learn in South Africa

In South Africa, R2L was introduced in 2007 as teacher professional development and a teaching methodology to address the crisis of literacy by improving teacher classroom practice and learner literacy skills required for educational success (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). Over

the past 14 years, teachers from different levels of schooling in South Africa, mostly in KwaZulu-Natal, have been trained to use the R2L methodology.

There is some evidence that R2L teaching strategies can improve literacy levels in a range of contexts. It has been used with Australian children from diverse literacy backgrounds, some who had poor backgrounds in literacy skills and others who had been given good preparation before attending school (Rose, 2005). In South Africa it has been used to teach Bachelor of Commerce students and undergraduate Social Science courses from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (Millin & Millin, 2014; Steinke, 2012). The results demonstrated improvement in students' reading and academic writing competences. It has also been adopted by primary and secondary schools in the Eastern and Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. A study was conducted in a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal on the role of R2L in improving teachers' attitudes and their understanding of the explicit teaching of reading. The results of the study reveal that in spite of learners' social background, the R2L methodology has an ability to improve teaching practice and provide opportunities for successful learning (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017).

Besides improving teaching quality and improving learners' achievement, R2L has been proven to remediate learners' behavioural problems in school (Mawela, 2018). Mawela conducted the study in a rural area of the Northern Cape, using R2L as an intervention to enhance the classroom practice of four intermediate and four senior phase EFAL teachers. The underlying idea was that when teachers are well equipped with effective teaching approaches, their quality of teaching would improve and so would their learners' academic performance. The study used classroom observations and the findings reveal that EFAL teachers' content knowledge was extended and they acquired new skills of teaching the language. Moreover, they were able to establish positive personal and professional identities. Their improved practice influenced learners' development of reading and writing skills. The learners' improvement in reading created a love for learning and practising reading on their own and this redressed their inappropriate behaviour, which might have been caused by the pressure of learning.

Mawela's study also used writing pre-tests and post-tests in 2016 and 2017 to ascertain learners' progress in writing. The learners' development was demonstrated by their performance that initially improved by 3.1%, and up to 15.9% after teachers had used R2L strategies for the year. In 2017 pre-tests were conducted in January and post-tests in June and the learners' progress had improved from 12.6% up to 34.2% within the two terms of the year. These improvements suggest that teachers had gained confidence in the methodology and that R2L has the potential

to improve learners' reading and writing skills, which is the crucial issue that has placed South Africa's literacy skills below those of other countries.

Apart from the different approaches to teaching reading that have been discussed, authors also distinguish teaching and learning of reading for different South African language orthographies (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). The different norms of written languages impact on how reading should be taught in relation to the particular language. As this study focused on reading development in isiZulu home language, in the next section, the writing system that represents the speech sounds of isiZulu home language are described.

1.6.5. African language orthographies

Different languages possess particular linguistic features with their own complexities of the relationship between spoken language and written symbols. All eleven official languages in South Africa are alphabetic languages, with alphabets that represent specific sounds (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). When the alphabets combine they form the correct spelling of words. The language orthographies of South African languages differ, as every writing system represents the speech sounds of a particular language. Thus, word formation and reading depend on the conventional spelling system of the particular language (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007; Van Rooy & Pretorius, 2013). The norms of written language differ according to the degree of how orthographies represent phonemes and the way they display the features of a particular language in the level of morphemes (parts of words).

Literacy development in South African rural and township schools has been a troublesome issue and the poor reading achievement could result from the teaching approaches used (Perry, 2008; Pretorius et al., 2016; Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). There has been much more research in the field of learning to read in English than learning to read in African languages. However, there is a growing focus on the differences in language types or structures as well as literacy acquisition in the indigenous languages (Rapetsoa & Singh, 2017; Steinke & Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2019; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019).

The CAPS document for African home languages specifies the components of reading to be taught in the foundation phase such as Shared Reading (including Shared Writing), Group Guided Reading, Paired and Independent Reading and Phonics (including Phonemic Awareness). The CAPS provides a common framework for all the official languages, among these, African home languages, drawing from the teaching of English which is based on

communicative approaches. This suggests that the CAPS document for African languages and guidelines for teaching were 'versioned' from English (Perry, 2008; Trudell & Schroeder, 2007; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019, p. 300).

However, this is a problem because African languages and English do not share the same orthography. isiZulu has a 'shallow' or transparent alphabetic orthography that clearly represents the language at a phoneme level (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007, p. 167). This refers to the straightforward, or transparent, relationship between graphemes (letters or syllables) and phonemes (sounds) in the languages. Due to its shallow orthography phonological based strategies are significant for teaching and learning to read. As the letters directly correspond with the sound they represent, it becomes obvious how the letter represents the sound. The phonological based strategy enables the reader to recognise the sounds of written letters in a word and decode the words (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). This differs from the whole word recognition strategy which is recommended for the deep orthographic languages like English, where orthography is not always clear.

Moreover, although the curriculum document specifies the use of a balanced approach to teaching reading, rote learning still continues to dominate in South African classrooms (Pretorius et al., 2016). Many teachers were not trained to use the balanced approach, so learners often focus only on decoding and do not make meaning of what they read. To make meaning of what they read learners also require morphological knowledge (how words are formed) and orthographic knowledge (how words are spelt and written) in the particular language. This knowledge enables them to blend chunks of letters until they recognise the word (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). As African languages such as isiZulu comprise of many complex consonant sounds and multiple syllable words, with many diagraphs (for example, *gq)*, triagraphs (for example, *ncw)*, four-letter words (such as *nqgw)* and even five consonant blends (such as *ntshw)*, Spaull et al. (2020) suggest the use of phonemic instruction. They argue that for successful reading in this language, learners require a deep knowledge of consonants and syllables, the ability to recognise differences in letter shapes and to master their complex combination. This ability is acquired through ongoing practise for readers to create specific knowledge of words and gradually improve their reading speed with automaticity. When automatic reading has been achieved, then the focus shifts to comprehension (Spaull et al., 2020).

It is crucial to understand how knowledge of phonics and vocabulary interact with the repertoire of comprehension and how these support learners' literacy developments even though this is subject to specific language conventions. Spaull et al. (2020) conducted a study on analysing

the nature of alphabetic knowledge, word reading and fluency and the connection between these reading components in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu. The focus of this study was also on how accuracy and speed relate to comprehension. The findings suggest that the ability to convert letters into sounds, or the other way around, forms the basis for accurate word decoding in languages with transparent or shallow orthography. The ability to read 30 words correctly per minute (wcpm) in isiZulu would mean that the learner has reached at least a 60% level of comprehension and below that would indicate risk factors that need immediate intervention. Understanding this complexity should provide the basis for improving teaching strategies and effective support for learners that catch up slowly (Spaull et al., 2020).

The following factors are highlighted as significant in the teaching of reading according to the unique orthographies of African languages (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007, p. 168):

• Encouraging practical auditory processing for the recognition of phonemes.

• Encouraging recognition of syllables.

• Focusing on tone vowel length awareness is important in some languages.

• Focusing on the deep knowledge of consonants and strategies to remember diagraphs and trigraphs, as this supports the ability to decode long words.

• Combining chunks of word particles that are bigger than syllables.

Knowledge of morphemes (parts of words) and phonological rules can be developed at a later stage to teach how the smaller units of language combine to construct words. This stage is necessary to develop vocabulary and good spelling (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). Basically, in all language teaching, regardless of having transparent or opaque orthography, the explicit and systematic phonics instruction that is appropriate for the particular language is significant. This enhances learners' knowledge of letter-sound relationships and develops building blocks for word reading in their language.

Conducting my self-study has provided me with insight into how I teach and how the learners learn to read isiZulu. The findings from this study will contribute to the debate about using R2L to teach isiZulu and supporting learners help them to develop their comprehension of what they are reading about.

1.7 Methodological approach

In this study, I employed self-study as a methodological approach. As discussed in detail in Chapter two, self-study is a reflective process that involves ones' personal and professional stories emanating from past and present experiences, preparing for the future (Samaras & Freese, 2006). I used self-study as a strategy to reflect on my teaching and the areas that I needed to improve through telling stories about my past experiences, present challenges and frustrations, as well as my future developments. Self-study is used by individuals who have observed their behaviour and performance and compared that to their beliefs. According to LaBoskey (2004), they act on their feelings about what they have been observing with the purpose of transformation. I realised that as a teacher, I play an important role in the process of teaching and learning. I might not have the power to change the whole education system and government policies, but I had control in changing my personal and professional being. Therefore, it was my responsibility to improve my teaching practice and my learners' literacy skills. Hence, having a conscious and intentional professional development, I chose self-study research as a tool that would allow me to study myself, understand my beliefs and practice and develop my work performance (Samaras & Freese, 2006; Samaras & Roberts, 2011).

Self-study is also an interactive process that allows for the voice of others as critical participants. Against this background and the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, I worked with my two supervisors, who continuously offered critical reflections and feedback on my research process. As the purpose of the study was to improve my practice while using the R2L methodology in teaching isiZulu literacy, I also worked with colleagues who were implementing the methodology in their classrooms. Their role as critical friends was to provide critical feedback on my own teaching and offer support through the process of my development.

Self-study is situated inquiry and context bound. Motivation for its undertaking emerges from the questions and challenges that are situated in one's own context (Samaras & Freese, 2006). It is also a process whereby the teacher researcher changes their teaching philosophy and shifts from the self-blame for the past mistakes and develops a new perspective on how to improve their practice. Self-study was a relevant approach to use and beneficial, as it involved me and was based on the issues existing in my classroom. During the research process I never expected a specific point of destination for my personal and professional development, but aimed to gradually acquire knowledge, skills and continuous development with the support of critical friends. Samaras and Freese (2006) explain that, as teachers continue to learn, they develop their

understanding of teaching and educational programmes are enriched. However, this does not mean that one has all the solutions to the challenges, but it is necessary to keep up with new developments, because knowledge and understanding change as new knowledge is gained.

The focus of this study was to improve my teaching of reading in isiZulu home language in Grade 3, using the R2L methodology. The purpose was to understand myself, my teaching and my learners' behaviour and their learning. Self-study methodology was deemed suitable for this focus and purpose of my study as a tool to improve my teaching practice while implementing the R2L strategies. Self-study served as a useful lens through which I could reflect on the impact of my background and past experiences on my teaching and my learners' behaviour. It was also the means of enhancing my professional development by positioning me, as a class teacher, to become both a learner and a researcher. The kind of learning I intended was for changing the conditions of my classroom practice. Samaras and Freese (2006) assert that support and shared problem solving is essential for the collaborative construction of new knowledge for classroom improvement. To achieve the goal of improving my learning I had to involve critical collaborative inquiry, which is one of the focus areas that need to be addressed in developing an effective self-study (as discussed in Chapter two) (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020). The collaborative nature of self-study served as a platform to expose the events taking place in my classroom. Being transparent with my colleagues helped me to clarify my data generation and analysis and receive constructive feedback, all of which resulted in collaborative construction of new knowledge (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020).

1.8 Theoretical perspective

The concept of scaffolding was a lens through which I perceived my teaching and the events that took place in my classroom. The term scaffolding is the metaphor developed by Bruner et al. (1976), to describe the strategy that is used by an adult to support children's learning. The development of the term emerged as Bruner et al. (1976) observed the strategies used by adult guardians to support children in performing different activities. According to Hammond and Gibbons (2005), scaffolding is "the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom taken in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring" (p.9).

Scaffolding activities can be applied in any learning environment and at different levels. It can be provided by the teacher at the level of the classroom during a teacher-learner interaction or

by the parent at home as temporary support until children develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As children acquire knowledge, skills and understanding, the teacher or parent gradually withdraws scaffolding and provides further support to new challenging tasks. Scaffolding can also take place at the higher level of developing and designing curriculum and classroom programmes (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) distinguish between two types of scaffolding: planned and interactional scaffolding (discussed in Chapter four).

The R2L methodology also emphasises the principle of scaffolding. It is structured to create an opportunity for all learners to access learning regardless of their abilities and socioeconomic background (Steinke, 2019). Therefore, using the concept of scaffolding as a framework would help me understand the way I interact with my learners and ensure that no learner holds back from participating either because of low self-confidence due to poor learning abilities, or stronger socioeconomic status. As reading is the skill that plays an important role in learning all school subjects, the concept of scaffolding would also enhance my awareness about supporting my learners to perform tasks successfully and develop reading skills so as to learn from what they read. Using scaffolding as a framework would rekindle the love I had always had for teaching and help me create supportive social interaction, incorporating affirmation and elaboration to prepare learners to succeed in all learning activities.

1.9 Conclusion and overview of the thesis

This chapter expanded on the focus and purpose of this research by explaining my experiences as a foundation phase teacher, having been exposed to several curriculum changes and teaching approaches without success in improving learners' achievements in literacy. The rationale was outlined to indicate what inspired me to conduct this research. Thereafter, I discussed the concepts that I learned from my preliminary reading about literacy in South Africa and language orthography in African languages. This was followed by a discussion of scaffolding to explain the reasons my teaching did not support learning.

Chapter two provides a detailed discussion of the methodological approach and the research process. In Chapter three I address my research question 1: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to teach isiZulu reading by drawing from my own memories?* I narrate my past experiences relating to the hardships of my school life as a learner from the first year of

school and how those experiences impacted my whole education journey. I also describe how the way I was taught literacy influenced my personal and professional identity.

Chapter four provides a description of the first cycle of lessons that I taught during the second term of the year 2021. I discuss that I abandoned the lessons due to lack of proper communication with my learners. Then I describe my learning from that lesson and how my teaching improved in the second cycle of lessons, since I had discovered my shortcomings.

Chapter five continues to describe my lesson presentation. I describe the cycle of lessons that I taught in the third term of 2021. I demonstrate even greater improvement in my teaching as my scaffolding strategies improved.

Then, Chapter six provides the discussion with critical friends throughout the research process and my study concludes with Chapter seven in which I present the review of the whole thesis. In this last chapter, I reflect on my learning about exploring my teaching using the self-study methodology and how this research has influenced my personal and professional development. The chapter goes on to discuss my understanding of the concept of scaffolding as the theory that helped me to improve my interaction with learners. I explain how my study will contribute to the knowledge about the importance of exploring one's teaching practice through conducting reflective teaching and collaborative teacher learning. Finally, I explain the desire I had developed to improve my social relationships and professional practice.

CHAPTER TWO: Cultivating my calling to teach, honing my skills

2.1 Introduction

Teachers are at the forefront of the pedagogic process and are essential role players in fostering learners' learning outcomes. Hence, their qualifications and quality of teaching are the central issue in the field of education (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). According to Calvert (2016), the motivation to achieve a high level of competence in teaching and the preparation for the academic achievement for their learners allows a teacher to engage in professional learning and become the agent of their learning process and development. Therefore, it was necessary for me to take responsibility for my professional development to improve my teaching and my learners' achievement in reading. The reason for using the self-study methodology was the desire to gain the knowledge and skills that are consistent with my daily practice and effective to produce immediate change. Self-study methodology allows teachers the opportunity to become agents of change of their behaviour and practice by executing their professional development consciously and intentionally (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). They make decisions in relation to improving their teaching practice and learners' performance (Calvert, 2016). In exploring my own teaching, I involved other teachers who were using R2L in other schools and of course my Grade 3 learners. This study aimed to contribute to the knowledge base about using the R2L methodology to teach isiZulu in Grade 3.

I titled this chapter, "Cultivating my calling to teach, honing my skills", as expressed by the health and physical education teacher Robin Ratliff (Calvert, 2016). She was a member of the Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teaching and Teachers (ECET2) movement for the professional development of teachers. Their programme focused on utilising the power of educator networks to promote effective teachers and teaching in Kentucky, in the US. Participating in the professional development movement collaboratively with fellow teachers, and engaging with the issues they experienced in their teaching practice helped her to cultivate her calling to teach, hone her skills. I related the story of Ratliff to this methodology chapter because it outlines the entire process of my research, and as I began this journey, I pursued my desire from childhood to become a teacher (mentioned in Chapter three), and this study will have refined my skills of becoming effective in my teaching.

This chapter begins by describing the self-study methodology that guided this inquiry. Thereafter, I describe the mixed methods approach that I used to represent and analyse the findings of the study. After that, I present the research questions that guided the collection of data and then the components of self-study are described. Subsequently, I explain the data generation methods, followed by the research setting and sampling. Following this is the discussion of the theoretical framework that underpins the study. The chapter goes on to outline the ways of analysing, coding, and categorising data. This is followed by the discussion of the challenges that I encountered while conducting this research. Lastly, ethical considerations are described, and the chapter concludes with the issues of trustworthiness.

2.2 Self-study methodology

Teachers play a crucial role in improving education and society (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Thus, I decided to use self-study research as a tool to transform my teaching practice and effect educational change. Focusing on my teaching of isiZulu home language emanated from the fact that the majority of learners in the South African rural and township schools who are taught in African languages for three years, fail to cope with the transition to English in Grade 4, which will be their LoLT throughout their academic journey (Spaull, 2016). Moreover, I was concerned with the slow improvement of my learners' reading skills in isiZulu home language which alerted me to the gaps between my philosophy about using Reading to Learn and the reality of what occurs in my classroom (Samaras & Freese, 2006).

Self-study methodology is a reflective practice conducted by the researcher to examine one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the "not self", for continuous learning (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Loughran, 2005). By the "not self", Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998, p.236) refer to the aspects of an individual's life that are different from what they know and understand about themselves. Conducting self-study allows us to understand the interconnection between our personal history and our professional practice and thereby gain new improved knowledge as we reflect on our performance. Thus, self-study uncovers personal beliefs as we tell stories about the past, present experiences and future developments (Samaras & Freese, 2006; Samaras, 2011).

Observing that my learners were lacking confidence and demonstrated a fear of participating in certain activities evoked the possibility that my behaviour towards them could result from my past experiences (narrated in detail in Chapter three). I then used self-study as a stance to

question my personal being and to explore the way I presented myself during teaching and learning engagements. I had to reflect on my lived experiences as a learner from primary to high school and as a student at the college of education I attended, as well as my 28 years of experience as a foundation phase teacher. Taking this initiative was to gain a deeper insight into how my past experiences, beliefs, behaviour and my teaching had influenced my present teaching practice.

LaBoskey (2004, p.842) describes self-study as a "self-initiated" and a "self-focused" practice. However, it is not limited to self, as it also considers the professional context when aiming at teaching improvement. After observing the challenges that I had in teaching reading in isiZulu home language in Grade 3, I decided on doing self-study because it allows the researcher an opportunity to enhance their personal development, professional growth and positive transformation in the classroom, the institution and the programme (LaBoskey, 2004). The focus was on understanding and improving the strategies that I was using, which might result in my learners' achievement. Hence, this study involves personal and professional stories that emanated from the challenges and frustrations I encountered.

Self-study research, as a critical inquiry into one's own professional practice, can be a two-way journey (Samaras and Freese, 2006; Samaras, 2011). Firstly, it provides an opportunity to think deeply and have a better understanding of ones' practice and about areas of improvement. Alternatively, one might observe something that is working well, and the desire to examine the underpinnings of this success. Moreover, self-study benefits all the partners involved in the particular research (Hamilton et al., 2008). Likewise, my study was a two-way journey, as while it was about exploring and improving my practice, it became beneficial to other R2L practitioners who participated in the research (see critical friends' comments, Chapter six), to my learners and to my colleagues at school.

Self-study is an interactive methodology and a collaborative process that requires the social interaction and checking with others during the research process. However, the researcher's voice matters, as the research focuses on the self, aiming to understand and improve ones' teaching (LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras, 2011; Samaras and Freese, 2006). Teaching is also a collaborative practice that benefits a number of individuals and structures such as the teacher as a researcher, learners, the school and the department of education (Schuck & Russell, 2005). Although the term self-study implies that the research is specific to and involves only the individual, building a collaborative interaction is required to allow the voice of others as critical participants. The voice of the critical friends is significant to facilitate continuous reflection on

one's own practice and to gradually develop new perspectives about the teaching profession, changed attitudes and principles that guide teaching. A critical friend is a trustworthy person who honestly critique the researcher's work and poses intriguing questions that provide data to be examined through the different lens and then provides constructive feedback (Schuck & Russell, 2005). The interactive nature of self-study indicates that the researcher focuses on self-reflection, while engaging with critical friends to provide feedback and to provoke ones' thinking and understanding leading to improved teaching practice (Hamilton et al., 2008). Therefore, it is significant that critical friends have a broader understanding of the context of the study and the specific goal that all the participants aim to achieve. In this study, I involved my colleagues who were implementing the Reading to Learn methodology in other schools to constructively critique the processes of my study and suggest other strategies I could use to improve my teaching.

2.3 Components of self-study

Samaras (2011) mentions a number of practices, procedures and guidelines that constitute the self-study methodology. These are methodological components that are necessary to strengthen the quality of self-study research. The following section explains how I used five self-study components in my study.

2.3.1 Personal situated inquiry

This component indicates that the research is based on existing issues and also the people involved in that particular context. It suggests that the research is initiated by the teacher reflecting on personal experiences driven by the desire to improve their own teaching. Thus, the thoughts, ideas and opinions guide the researcher as a helpful resource so that their voice becomes significant (Loughran, 2004). This component considers the researcher as the author of their inquiry, with their personal and professional experiences as a source of knowledge. It affords researchers the power to choose what they want to inquire about, the research context and the self-study methods that align with the inquiry (Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2011). From this background, I began this study by questioning the challenges I observed in my daily teaching and my learners' performance. This questioning was also informed by the idea that self-study research originates from the questions situated in a place where the events take place (Samaras, 2011). Thus, it was conducted in my classroom involving myself and my learners as they were "at the centre of the learning community" (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 50).

2.3.2 Critical collaborative inquiry

This component acknowledges collaborative work with peers to receive effective and constructive feedback (Samaras, 2011). Although self-study involves personal experiences, it is also interactive and interpersonal, as it involves critical friends. The involvement of critical friends provides ongoing support that goes beyond daily classroom practice. They offer honest and constructive feedback rather than being judgemental (Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Samaras, 2011). Collaboration and sharing insights about the research with critical friends help to release anxiety, enhances self-reflection and helps in the construction of new knowledge and deeper learning (Sawhney, 2020).

Samaras argues that "critical friends could be from a grade-level or a discipline-based school team or a group of teachers from diverse disciplines in your school or even across the schools" (Samaras, 2011, p.117). I preferred to work with critical friends from the R2L community because the focus of my study improving my teaching while using R2L. We all attended the same R2L training workshops and started to implement the methodology in the same year in different schools. As mentioned in Chapter one, I was aware that self-study would expose my challenges and therefore I chose colleagues who I trusted to listen and constructively critique the understanding and the insights behind my concerns and challenges about my teaching, stimulate new understanding and support the continuous improvement (Samaras, 2011). Involving R2L colleagues was to build a collective professional development, learning community that confirms the interconnection of personal relationships and the profession (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

Critical friends were also involved in data checking and interpretation as the means to address the challenge of scrutinising myself objectively. The researcher might be in denial or unaware of being the living contradiction and disengage from their personal experiences (Whitehead, 2019). Thus, the significance of working with peers provides thought provoking feedback. For this reason, I was receptive to comments and provocative questions so that I could incorporate their viewpoints and be open to receiving alternative perspectives about my teaching and personal behaviour (Samaras, 2011).

2.3.3 Improved learning

This component is improvement-aimed, focusing on oneself and understanding what work and does not in their teaching. The self-study teacher researcher does not only value self-improvement, but also, for the purpose of improving learning, consciously and intentionally

considers the value of the particular research for other people (LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras, 2011). Thus, this study focused on my teaching and my personal behaviour, also involving the transformation of the whole environment of my classroom, improving my learners' performance and benefitting other teachers in my school. Samaras (2011) states that improved learning involves understanding learners, employing better ways of teaching them and planning strategies for future instruction.

2.3.4 Transparent and systematic research process

Self-study is not a sequential research methodology, but is a developing journey and an "open-ended process in a spiral of questioning, discovery, challenge, framing, reframing and revisiting" (Samaras, 2011, p.81). Teachers' beliefs are shaped and transformed over and over without accounting for previous beliefs and practices. This component of self-study emphasises it as transparent systematic research that clearly describes data sources and data analysis and valid evidence to support claims presented to others. Learning from Samaras and Freese's (2006) assertion that the researcher honestly exposes the research by sharing the procedure, processes and analysis with critical friends and a validation team, I presented my research to my critical friends and explained my reasons for choosing the self-study methodology and the methods that I used. This gave them an insight into my research goals and areas of inquiry. Knowing and understanding my questions of interest was significant for them, as they would be involved in the study processes continuously from the beginning to the final report. Reflection would require their perspectives so as to construct new knowledge (Samaras, 2011; Samaras & Freese, 2006).

2.3.5 Knowledge generation and presentation

Samaras (2011) explains that in self-study, teacher researchers present their work to the public for review and feedback for the shared generation of knowledge. As my teaching development was focused on R2L, I presented my work to the R2L community and worked with them as critical friends so as to gain a deeper insight from their feedback on my implementation of the methodology. Samaras and Freese (2006) claim that a concept of knowledge in the self-study research includes the knowledge of self and professional knowledge and that personal and professional development are understood as connected entities. The existence of knowledge implies that there is a "knower" who is the teacher, without whom there would not be knowledge (Samaras, 2011, p.82). Professional knowledge that teachers possess affords them power, creativity and ownership that enables them to generate knowledge for exploring and developing

a new level of knowledge about teaching. However, new knowledge construction involves interacting with one's own and other's lived experiences, which results in an understanding that is exactly relevant to their professional practice (Samaras, 2011).

The common understanding about self-study is that it addresses personal issues concerning teaching. However, Russell (2002) notes the positive contradiction as the researcher's work is exposed for checking by the audience so that it becomes useful to others.

2.4 Eclectic methods

Self-study usually involves qualitative data but allows a variety of methods. Some researchers also use quantitative data to examine their individual experiences (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Pithouse, 2004; Samaras & Freese, 2006). In this study I employed eclectic methods to collect and analyse data. This is an approach that holds to a variety of methods and draws upon multiples styles and theories (Whitehead, 2010). It combines the research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts and language and uses them in a single study instead of limiting the researcher to one approach of inquiry. The application of diverse methods intensifies the research by providing richer and deeper insight and a trustworthy interpretation of the phenomenon. The application of mixed methods means looking at the world not solely qualitatively or quantitatively, but as an integrated system, employing all available information to get a deeper insight into the situation (Cohen et al., 2018).

Using eclectic methods was suitable for this study to generate both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were generated through testing learners' reading abilities and comprehension skills at the beginning and at the end of the 2021 school year. I generated the qualitative data through journal entries, video recording of my lessons and dialogues with critical friends, which were analysed qualitatively, while the statistical test quantitative method was utilized to analyse numerical data gathered from testing. The research questions that guided my study are provided next section.

2.5 Research questions and related methods

1. What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to teach isiZulu reading by drawing from my own memories?

To address my first research question, I employed the personal history method, as it is used to explore the influence of one's personal learning experiences on the current teaching (Samaras

et al., 2004). I also used memory drawings (see Chapter three) to evoke my memories from childhood of how I was taught reading.

2. What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' confidence to participate?

To answer this question, I used a video to record my lessons in order to later reflect on my teaching and how my learners participated in the lesson. I also created collages to represent and understand the challenges and successful events in my classroom and to get feedback from my critical friends.

3. What can I learn about using to Reading to Learn develop my learners' reading comprehension?

The video recording was used to capture the extent to which I applied scaffolding as one of the RTL principles to develop learners' comprehension. I administered the EGRA pre-test of oral fluency to ascertain learners' reading abilities at the beginning of the year. Post-tests were administered at the end of the year to track learners' progress in reading and comprehension.

4. What can I learn about using Reading to Learn from engaging with critical friends?

One of the critical friends observed my lessons and gave me feedback immediately. I watched the video recordings of my lessons with other critical friends and together we reflected on my teaching.

2.6 Data generation methods

Self-study research does not have a single, right method. It involves a variety of techniques and methods depending on what the researcher is trying to understand and how that method would help to achieve the goals of the research (Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2011). Thus, I employed a variety of methods to examine my teaching. These methods allowed me to understand and interpret the challenges I encountered in my practice: personal history, journal writing, dialogues, reading scores, collage making, memory drawings and video recordings of lessons are shown below in the table

Table 3. Data generation and research questions

Research Question	Method	Data generation activities	Data sources
1.What can I learn about using R2L to teach isiZulu reading, drawing from my own memories?	Personal history Arts-based method	I wrote about my personal history as a learner learning to read and write. I produced drawings to evoke my past experiences.	-Reflective journal -Memory drawings
2. What can I learn about using R2L to develop my learners' confidence to participate?	Observation of my own teaching Arts-based method	I video recorded my lessons to reflect on classroom interaction. I created a collage to represent the challenges and successful events in the classroom.	-Video recordings -Collage -Concept map
3. What can I learn about using R2L to develop my learners' reading comprehension?	Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) Reflection on the R2L interaction cycle	I set reading pre-test and post-tests to track how my teaching improved and impacted my learners' progress in reading. I did the joint reconstruction of the story to prepare learners for their individual writing. I documented the classroom events to express my emotions and feelings about learners' achievement.	-Learners' reading scores -Video recording -Reflective journal writing
4. What can I learn about using R2L from engaging with critical friends?	Dialogue with critical friends	I was observed by a critical friend and discussed my lessons immediately after teaching. I reflected on my video recorded lessons with other critical friends.	-Lesson observation -Video recordings

2.6.1 Personal history method

In addressing my first research question: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to teach isiZulu reading, drawing from my memories?* I used a personal history method. This is a method of reflecting on personal experiences, employed by researchers to investigate how personal and learning experiences, culture and history, impact one's teaching (Russell 2002; Samaras, 2011). It stimulates thinking about one's teaching within the context in which it takes place (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Teachers employ personal history self-study to searchingly question the areas of their teaching that are often overlooked (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). They search for their role in the research process and explore the connections and influence of their beliefs and experiences in their teaching. This allows them to gain insight about themselves in order to improve their professional identity. Kortjass (2019) acknowledges the connection between teachers' personal life histories and their teaching.

I had a desire to examine the challenges I had encountered that hindered progress in my teaching and the kind of support I had received that assisted me to achieve my goals in teaching. Thus, I considered the personal history method as a starting point to explore my identity, the motivation behind my goals and to become aware of my professional development (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Using this method in my research enabled me to revisit my lived experiences as a learner at school, as a pre-service teacher and as an experienced foundation phase teacher. It also allowed me to reflect on how my experiences informs my current teaching and influences my learners' achievement. Furthermore, this reflection enabled me to understand the change I required in my teaching and the level of improvement I expected for my learners.

I reflected on my past learning experiences and recorded how I had received my foundation phase literacy learning. I relived my painful experiences of memorising everything that I was expected to learn in higher primary school. It had been difficult growing up in a rural environment but having to create and write stories about trains and aeroplanes that never existed in my context. I recorded my frustrating experiences of struggling to write extended writing in high school, lacking the vocabulary of a second language through which all the subjects were learnt, as well as being the college student expected to teach after three years of training, but struggling to communicate in English. I traced my teaching experiences as a young teacher teaching my learners the same way I was taught. Then I reflected on the professional development programmes I willingly engaged in to improve my knowledge about teaching.

My teaching experience includes a number of curriculum changes and different approaches to teaching language and reading. The record of my experiences proceeds until I participated in a professional development programme called Reading to Learn which was delivered by a nongovernmental organisation. In Chapter three I explain how my perspectives changed about teaching reading and language and the kind of environment in which teaching and learning should take place. The appropriate way to relive my experiences and learning from R2L and become a better teacher was through the use of memory drawings.

2.6.2 Memory drawings

Memory drawing is one of the popular methods used in South Africa with pre service teachers to explore different situations that might take place in their classrooms in the future and can also be used as a method to explore early memories of school (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). The method helps to picture things in one's mind and connect those to thoughts and ideas. It

involves engaging deeply with past experiences, which encourages the individual and provides the power to learn from the previous incidences and reinvent their teaching practice (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019; Weber, 2008).

I used memory drawings to prompt my memories and relive my experiences of certain aspects of my literacy learning from the first year of school. My intention for using memory work was to recall my experiences and learn to expose my learners to the positive learning experiences in classrooms different from what I experienced as a learner. Using memory drawings evoked the experiences and events that I thought had disappeared from my mind. I started to live those feelings and emotions again and make meaning of them. The important drawings that brought back pain and anger are of walking barefoot on the frosty grass to fetch water from the river in the morning during teaching and learning time.

The way a teacher was taught or trained to teach has the power to influence their present teaching practice and in the future (Kortjass, 2019; Mkhize-Mthembu et al., 2022). Thus, the drawings I used to recall my past experiences helped me learn about my positive and negative experiences and understand the kind of the teacher I am in the present and who I want to be in the future. When I started this study I thought that memory drawings should be a beautiful artistic creation, but as I engaged with the self-study literature, I discovered a contradictory idea. Kortjass (2019, p. 226) asserts that when using memory drawings, one does not have to draw "fancy or highly artistic drawings", but school memories can be evoked even by simple drawings. However, I had already involved an artist to do the drawings for me. I explained to him the kind of pictures I needed that would portray the situations I described in Chapter three. The results of my study using the memory drawings method will encourage teachers to consider using memory drawings to relive their past experiences in order to change the present and prepare themselves and their learners for the future.

Strengths and weaknesses of the memory drawing method

Reflection is an important foundation for teacher development, as it creates the teacher's consciousness about the feelings and thinking of the learners they teach and considers their prior knowledge (Korthagen, 2017). Recalling one's memories serves as the basis for reinforcing both present teaching and making plans for the future. Reflecting through memory drawing helps teacher-researchers to make their memories visible and learn from both their own and other teachers' early memories of school (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). The method of memory drawings in self-study research is more than simply making pictures, but is an effective

tool to reflect and communicate the meaning attached to drawings. Teachers reflect on how they were taught and strive to find better methods to apply that would benefit their learners.

Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) describe the method of memory drawing as an accessible and interactive social research method. It is simple and inexpensive, as it only requires a pencil or pen and paper. Drawings can be laid out in a tangible way and be accessible for scanning and be displayed on big screens or computers for viewing. They can be interpreted by anyone and have different meanings attached to them, thus allowing for the development of interpretive skills.

Apart from developing learners' fine motor skills through art, teachers can use the memory drawing method in their classrooms to improve the diversity of methods to develop storytelling and allow learners the freedom to deal with the issues they are confronted with (Korthagen, 2017). Using the memory drawings in my study, made me agree with Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019), that this method can also be used as a healing mechanism. It allowed me the opportunity to share my untold stories and heal from the pain I experienced as a child at school. Although memory drawings are beneficial in triggering rich memories, they can also evoke unpleasant memories that bring about pain and anger (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019).

2.6.3 Video recording

To reflect on my second research question: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' confidence to participate*? I made video recordings of my lessons. I used the process to gather evidence of my teaching and my learners' involvement in the lessons (details in Chapters four and six). Video recording and reflection were recommended many years ago to be an effective strategy for providing feedback and teacher development and have gained popularity for their accessibility (Fuller & Manning, 1973; Grossman, 2005). The video recording used is similar to the process called video stimulated recall, which is a process of collaborative inquiry and researcher-participant ownership of contributions (Powell, 2005; Rowe, 2009). The participant is videoed in action, after which they view a video sequence of their practice and then reflect on their thoughts and feelings about the videoed event. By collaborative inquiry, Powell (2005) means that the researcher and the participants draw on each other and extend and develop their thinking, using the video footage as a shared source of information. This data collection method is a tool that stimulates the dialogue between the researcher and the participant to improve teaching practice, and it contributes to the

development of the reflective skills of teachers (Rowe, 2009; Tripp & Rich, 2012). Thus, I had productive dialogues with my critical friends while watching the videos of my lessons (see Chapter six).

Strengths and weaknesses of video recording

Video recording is an inclusive way of studying the phenomenon and eliciting knowledge in action (Powell, 2005; Rowe, 2009). The teacher or researcher gets an opportunity to view their own actions, which is impractical during the actual lesson. It assists in stimulating dialogue between the researcher and the participant and contributes to the development of the reflective skills of teachers. It helps them to reflect on their thinking and feelings about certain aspects or the entire classroom episode. Tripp and Rich (2012) explain that video recording provides the researcher and participants ownership of contributions and they define it as a process of collaborative inquiry among the research participants as they draw on each other and develop and extend their thinking. While reflecting on the video, one makes a closer analysis of an interaction and can then improve some areas of practice where necessary. Thus, video recording is one of the tools that facilitates improvement in teaching practice (Rowe, 2009).

Apart from the benefits of using video recording, Rowe (2009) argues that a disadvantage is that the camera might attract the attention of learners and shift their focus from the teacher. Moreover, having the video camera in the classroom might affect the lesson presentation, as it might not be as typical as it should be. Watching one's teaching from the video might also reveal lots of weaknesses and cause anxiety and embarrassment and the feeling of hopelessness (Powell, 2005; Rowe, 2009).

Three cycles of my lessons were video recorded once, in term two and three in 2021, to capture my practice and how my learners responded to my teaching. I used the video recordings to reflect on my teaching and my learners' participation. I firstly did the reflection on my own and then represented the events from the video through the collage. Then I watched the same video recordings with critical friends to get their feedback and support on my teaching. The discussion on the classroom events are described in chapter six.

To facilitate the reflection on the video, I considered some guiding elements that have been used by other teacher-researchers, namely, the types of reflection tasks, individual and collaborative reflection and the length of the video (Tripp & Rich, 2012). The reflection tasks are the activities that the teacher does during or after the reflection. In my case, I created collages to represent and explain the events from the video. Using the video to make the collages and write the reflections improved my ability to use evidence to support the reflection

comments (Tripp & Rich, 2012). Watching the video helped me to view classroom interactions at a slower pace. I realised things I did not notice during the lesson presentation and that I would not have been able to remember when I reflected from memory (Bryan & Recesso, 2006; Miller & Carney, 2008).

Another element I used was individual and collaborative work. I started by reflecting on the video by myself and involved critical friends from R2L afterwards. Analysing the video before meeting with others helped me prepare for the discussion with the critical friends. However, our reflection together produced a higher rate of development than reflecting on the video alone (Bryan & Recesso, 2006).

In terms of the length of the video, studies have yet to determine the amount of time required to view the video clips or whether the amount of time impacts reflection.

However, the viewing time differs, from three-minute clips of a lesson to the whole lesson (Sharpe et al., 2003). Since there is neither an ideal length for teachers to reflect on the video, nor is there evidence of how shorter or longer videos impact teachers' ability to reflect on their videos, I viewed and reflected on the whole R2L interaction cycle per term.

2.6.4 Journal writing

The third question that guided my research was: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' reading comprehension?* In addressing this question, I used the journal entry as a data collection tool. Journal writing is the strategy for narrative writing through which teachers put themselves into the texts they are creating about the issues observed within the context that are meaningful to them and worth writing about (Pithouse et al., 2009). Writing a journal provides a safe place for us to expose our personal feelings and perspectives throughout the research journey and in our lives in general. Magubane (2014) and Makhanya (2010) agree that writing a journal in general affords individuals the power to narrate about themselves, as they know about all the aspects and angles of their lives more that other people who may tell distorted stories about them. In educational life they describe the journal as the means of knowing and realising the value of one's ideas through writing rather than only reading and understanding and implementing other people's theories.

There are several advantages of journal writing in the classroom such as documenting learners' behaviours and responses during the classroom interaction. The journal is also an accessible document to use whenever thoughts arise. For instance, some important ideas might come up

at night while sleeping or when driving, and one can access the journal and write those ideas down for future use (Makhaye, 2019). Teacher researchers can be encouraged to reflect on their daily experiences and express their ideas and feelings through informal writing without anxiety and fear of being judged (Samaras, 2011).

I wrote journal entries daily as a review of my experiences, feelings, observations and classroom interaction with my Grade 3 learners. In my journal I wrote the date, the topic of the lesson, how I presented the lesson and how the learners responded concerning understanding the content. I also expressed my feelings about what had happened. The following is an example of my reflections:

13 May 2021   *Topic: Reading for pleasure*

I am impressed that my learners have adopted the culture of reading I have created. When they arrive early in the morning, they do not play outside but go straight to the classroom, grab some books of their choice from the corner library and read.

14 May 2021

I commended Grade 3 learners for the good habit of reading they had adopted. I moved around listening to them reading different storybooks. I noticed that some of them were able to decode words although without flow, they were counting words, others were reading with flow. I was so disappointed when I asked them literal questions about what they were reading about. For example, I asked Azande "what did Nomsa do after the puppy had ran away with her sausage". She took time looking for the answer from the story until the other learner helped her."

This reflection was helpful, as it indicated that I needed to improve my teaching strategies to focus on teaching them to flow in reading and make meaning of what they were reading. I continued to reflect on the classroom events in the journal. Writing about my own ideas and emotions was a challenging experience, as I had never used a diary or a journal before, and it is not a common practice for the Black African community in South Africa (Makhanya, 2010). Apart from improving my teaching, my personal being also improved, as journal writing was part of my learning and development.

To respond to the focus on reading comprehension, I also administered the EGRA as a testing instrument to track my learners' reading progress throughout the year. This is a formative assessment of the basic foundational skills for literacy achievement that is administered orally

to individual learners in the early grades (Dubeck & Gove, 2015). It represents the collaboration of scholars, non-governmental organisation officials and government ministries from different countries that include South Africa. It was developed to enhance early grade reading and academic achievement in low-income countries. The development of EGRA was influenced by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) together with the World Bank. In 2010 they called for a change of focus from the historic pen and paper mode of assessment to the reading skills assessment, and the need for education researchers to focus on reading for meaning in early grades. Their suggestion was driven by the fact that the writing assessments that were used around 2009 often indicated what learners in low-income countries did not know, but could not determine what they did know. From Grade 4 onwards, the assessment is primarily administered in writing, a conservative kind of way with the assumption that learners can read and write (World Bank, 2015). It became challenging whether to attribute poor learner performance to lack of knowledge or to poor reading and comprehension skills.

Another reason for switching to oral tests was that in the PIRLS assessments, which were conducted in many countries around the world, mainly in high-income countries, learners, in most cases, were given short passages to read from which they answered multiple choice questions. If they lacked reading and comprehension skills, they could not succeed, and the results never revealed whether the reason for failure was a lack of knowledge or an inability to read the questions (Braun & Kanjee, 2006). Therefore, in light of these arguments, the oral reading fluency and comprehension skills test was recommended as a prerequisite for the paper-based assessment.

Dubeck and Gove (2015) argue that acquiring reading fluency and comprehension needs well developed foundational or lower-order skills, for example, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, decoding, and vocabulary. These skills could be easily discovered through oral assessments to determine at an early stage what learners know. After that the extent of their developmental process could be identified through pen and paper tests.

It is important to note that EGRA is not an instructional programme or curriculum, nor is it an assessment that accounts for learners' progression to the next grade. Yet, it is a formative assessment that intends to inform classroom practice, providing valuable facts regarding learners' literacy levels. It comprises different subtasks designed for special purposes in terms of intervention (Dubeck & Gove, 2015). The EGRA instrument, in the beginning, was a sample-based system diagnostic measure to record and inform governments and other

stakeholders about learners' achievement on early grade reading skills and what is needed by the system to improve teaching practice. Gradually, it has expanded and is used in different contexts. The EGRA comes as a toolkit with a set of subtasks stored in a folder, and the one I used in this study was the version adapted for South African schools and translated into isiZulu (see Appendix F). Braun and Kanjee (2006) outline the aims of the EGRA toolkit as follows:

– To generate data on early reading achievement in particular grades and/or geographies.

– To advise on planning and design of teaching programmes by identifying important skills or main areas of instruction that need to be improved.

– To monitor gradual progress in reading.

– To assess and analyse the result of the influence of programmes to improve early grade reading.

– To examine cost-effectiveness of different programme development.

– To develop reading indicators and benchmarks to place learners at their reading levels.

– To be used as a system diagnostic to inform education policies, strategic planning and allocation of resources.

In this study, I gathered numerical data by testing some of the foundational literacy skills needed for early reading acquisition. I monitored the progress of Grade 3 learners' reading abilities throughout the year. Testing was done in February 2021 with 45 individual learners and then done again in November 2021. The EGRA instrument starts with subtasks that focus on phonological awareness, sounds and letters in isolation, as they predict success in reading in upper grades, followed by word recognition, which informs reading fluency and progresses to reading comprehension passages (RTI International, 2015). This testing of skills is strengthened by the linguistic theory of teaching and learning, which confirms that the construction of meaning is informed by the reader's knowledge of alphabetic principles, phonics, punctuations, spelling patterns and word families, while other features of language continue to develop (Chall, 1967). The original EGRA contains six subtasks, but for this study, the following subskills were tested:

i.   Letter identification

This is the significant skill of identifying how letters relate to the sounds that they represent. The letter-sound relationship is taught through phonics-based approaches to enable learners to

decode words. The knowledge of how letters represent the sound allows correct sounding out of words and enhances reading competency. I included this subtask in the study because it is a reasonable assessment of reading in the early years of school, and it predicts reading achievement in upper grades (Lonigan et al., 2002). In preparing for the assessment, letters of the alphabet are listed randomly and learners need to look carefully at letters and produce the sound represented by each letter on the list within one minute.

This task, like any other, is limited to stopping in one minute, whether the child has finished or not, so I needed to have a stopwatch to time each learner's reading. After the child had finished the task, their scores were calculated as the number of correct letter sounds read per minute. When all letter sounds were completed before the time expired, the remaining time was recorded in the space provided on the record sheet. Where the learner got the sound wrong, I marked a letter with a slash (/); if they could not finish reading or continue with the task, I put brackets after the last letter read (]) and recorded the remaining time. The same manner of marking was also applied in familiar word reading and oral reading fluency subtasks. Time limitation is an accurate measurement of learner fluency at a moderately quick pace, without any stress or anxiety (Lonigan et al., 2002).

ii.   Word reading

In this task, learners' reading skills are assessed using a grid with a list of words not connected to each other. Familiar word reading provides a clear and straightforward measure of word recognition and decoding skills. For Grade 3, the assessment is the list of high frequency words selected from reading material and storybooks from the previous grades. Unlike in the connected text, this subtask does not allow children the advantage of predicting the next word from the context. The words on the grid are written in a lowercase font and not arranged in alphabetical order or any order of size or difficulty. It is important that words be written in the font that learners are familiar with, which is used in their official reading books. The grid includes a range of words formed by a variety of letters; some are common sight words and some are words that need knowledge of decoding. Before the learner started reading, I did a practical exercise with them using three different words of a similar level to those in the test.

iii.   Oral reading fluency with comprehension

According to Lonigan et al. (2002), fluency means the ability to read words quickly, correctly with expression. This closes the gap and connects decoding and comprehension. In decoding, readers recognise and pronounce written words using knowledge of letter-sound relationships

and letter patterns. Whereas comprehension means processing text and making meaning of what is read. This is a more advanced stage of reading that measures the entire reading competence. It needs more cognitive ability than translating alphabets to sounds and sounds into words. It considers the knowledge of all other skills including letter-sound relationships, combining sounds to form words and knowledge of vocabulary. Skilled readers easily combine these tasks, make connections and relate the text to meaning (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). The oral reading fluency test was also timed by correct words per minute. Poor achievement on this subtask would indicate low attainment in decoding, vocabulary, or the level of fluent reading that allows for comprehension.

After reading the story, learners have to answer the literal comprehension questions with answers found directly from the text and the inferential ones that are needed to measure their ability to connect text to their thoughts and prior knowledge (Appendix F). In this subtask, two scores are allocated to each learner. The scores are based on the number of correct words read per minute and for the number of comprehension questions answered correctly. In all three timed subtasks, three variables are used to calculate the results, that is, the total number read, the total number of incorrectly read and the time remaining on the stopwatch.

During the first term in 2021, all Grade 3 learners were pre-tested to ascertain their level of ability at the beginning of the year. Due to the limited time I had on each day and the fact that learners could not cover more than one subskill on one day as it would cause fatigue and poor performance (RTI International, 2015), I had to test one EGRA subtask per day. Both the learner and I had the same sheet of tasks. While they were reading from their grid, I was checking from mine, indicating with a slash over the item when they failed to read and brackets after the last item read correctly. When a minute had elapsed, I stopped them and recorded on my record sheet the number of words they had read; for the comprehension passage I recorded the number of questions answered correctly. In November 2021, the post-tests were administered to measure and compare the extent of learners' reading progress through the year. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise learners' reading scores in each subtask: letter sounds, word recognition, paragraph reading and the number of comprehension questions answered correctly. These were presented in a graph showing the number of words that individual learners were able to read per minute.

2.6.5 Collage

In my self-study, I made use of collage to support my self-reflection by representing classroom events through the arts. Collage is an arts-based self-study method used to represent and examine one's beliefs and thinking about teaching (Weber & Mitchell, 2004). It is a method in which the teacher-researcher cuts separate images from a newspaper or magazine and glues them together to create a new image that represents someone or an idea (Raht et al., 2009). Making a collage helped me to investigate, interpret and analyse the reality of the events that took place in my classroom and narrate a story (Gerstenblatt, 2013). After all the video recordings, I created another collage to stimulate a dialogue with critical analysis about how I had improved my teaching and was motivated to advance my professional development (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Using the collage was informed by the understanding that an art-form is a medium of articulating my experiences, communicating and reinterpreting the research as it goes public (Samaras, 2011).

2.7 Research participants

In this study, I am the focus of the research, as a teacher-researcher aiming to question and understand my practice, the culture of teaching and learning that I created in my classroom, and the influence of my past experiences on my learners' learning behaviour and achievement (Samaras, 2011). However, the paradox is that although self-study is individual, it goes beyond personal judgement. It requires that personal perceptions be shared and critiqued by others to validate the researcher's interpretations. Thus, critical friends played a significant role in the validation of research findings to avoid researcher subjectivity (Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Samaras, 2011). Researchers make their work available to others through dialogues to receive alternative views and continuous support for their research. This dialogue promotes the construction of new knowledge and understanding of a shared task within a learning community. For that reason, I involved colleagues from R2L to constructively critique my classroom practice. Their role was to provide feedback on my teaching and disclose some aspects of my teaching that I would never have considered.

Luthuli et al. (2020) posit that self-study teacher-researchers should involve others in their research to get criticism and constructive feedback. Apart from colleagues, the 'others' that I included among the research partners were the 45 Grade 3 learners, who were at the centre of the pedagogic process and part of my learning (Luthuli et al., 2020). Within a teaching and

learning situation, the participation of learners is another lens through which the teacher views their practice (Samaras & Freese, 2006). During the research, learners play a major role in shaping and responding to the study as participants and as a data source.

2. 8 Data analysis

Data analysis in self-study research takes place concurrently with data generation. Samaras (2011) advises that data be organised and analysed as the research proceeds to manage and store them systematically for accessibility in the later stage. Observing and recording what is happening as the research progresses is beneficial during the final stages of data analysis. Self-study research is a recursive process that does not follow a specific procedure. As the new data are generated, the researcher revisits previous steps, and reassesses preliminary data and interpretations (Samaras, 2011).

2.8.1 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative analysis means making sense of data collected and turning it into findings through explaining and interpreting the situation being examined (Cohen et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2018). They explain that making sense of data includes organising, describing, identifying patterns and developing themes and categories and then accounting for the data with reference to the definition of the situation by the research participants, which includes the researcher. Data are not analysed in a single method, but the method of analysis is dependent on fitness for the purpose of the study.

In this study I analysed data from different sources. The purpose of the video in my research was to capture and later reflect on my teaching and my learners' involvement in the lessons. In my data I was exploring the kind of interaction I had with my learners and relating my teaching to the way they responded. I first watched the video recordings of the first set of lessons by myself and created a collage to represent the classroom events. Thereafter, I arranged a meeting with critical friends to allow for their input on how I had presented my lessons and to gain constructive feedback and understanding of teaching using R2L. Then I met with them after every cycle of Reading to Learn I had recorded to reflect on each lesson. I audio recorded our dialogue and the discussion during my engagement with them is presented in Chapter six. The discussion of our reflection describes what I think went well and what I should have done differently. This indicates the new knowledge I generated for myself and for other R2L practitioners (Samaras, 2011).

I analysed data from the journal entries and retrospective reflections as well as from the video recording and collages. Regarding journal entries and retrospective reflections, I read the data as it is a valuable process of making meaning of it (Cilliers & Bloch, 2018; Samaras, 2011). Reading back through data allowed me to pay attention and think about what I was learning about both my role as a teacher and my learners and to understand my role as a researcher (Mitchell & Webber, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019; Samaras, 2011). I organised the data by identifying the significant information, which was the words and phrases that represented the events and feelings that were demonstrated in my classroom. I coded those words and phrases into three different colours to reduce data while maintaining its meaning (Adu, 2019). Three themes emerged from the coded data: creating a positive learning environment, intensifying support for my learners and the construction of learners' knowledge. The words and phrases that represented creating a positive learning environment were coded in red, those for intensifying support for my learners were coded in yellow and those representing the construction of learners' knowledge were coded in green.

Another piece of data was from the collage that depicted my learnings from conducting my lessons. The technique of collage originated from the arts-based method and represents the visual interpretative tools that form qualitative inquiry. The collage is not just a set of images or pictures glued together. It serves as a tool to evoke knowledge, experiences and feelings that reside within an individual, such as inner conflicts or introspection (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2007). As visual media in educational research, the collage is not impartial, but deliberately conveys messages and are interpreted in various ways. Creating the collage assists researchers to express themselves and then record the meanings they give to an image (Weber & Mitchell, 2004).

In my study, I created collages using words and phrases from magazines and newspapers to represent what I had learnt from critical friends, my feelings about my learnings and my motivation for continuous development. I established the categories by grouping the related phrases and images and created themes to describe my learnings and motivation to learn further. The themes identified from the collage include: explore and learn, support from others and achievement. The key themes that emerged from the journal and the collage will be discussed in Chapters five and six.

I used a concept map using boxes to analyse data in response to the research question four. A concept map is the visual technique that represents the researchers' knowledge that they seek

to acquire through research (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Concept maps are used by the researcher in "generating, connecting and communicating complex ideas" (Samaras, 2011, p. 209). Through this technique, the researcher is able to discover and demonstrate the connection between concepts. The design of my concept map, showing how I categorised the concepts that link to developing my learners' participation in learning with confidence is shown in Chapter four.

2.8.2 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis is a "powerful research form" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 725). It is usually used for large-scale research; however, it is also applicable in small-scale studies. In this study I used EGRA to measure my learners' reading levels. The EGRA test scores were analysed quantitatively using the t-test and the results demonstrated a statistically significant development, particularly in word reading and oral reading fluency. The first stage of the analysis was preparing the data by using a computer spreadsheet to change the format of the raw data. Then the data was coded by transforming the format of the information that could be used by Excel, the statistical computer package. After coding and entering the data, some errors were detected and therefore the data were cleaned before they were used for statistical analysis. Then, the frequency distribution was generated to represent learners' scores. The actual results of the learners' tests are demonstrated in Chapter five.

2.9 Ethical issues

As teacher-researchers, it is our responsibility to note that every person is worthy of respect and dignity. In our endeavour to improve our teaching practice, we are obliged to honour professional ethical standards such as fairness, honesty, trustworthiness and confidentiality. This also includes considering the dignity and cultures of others and not bringing harm to participants, families and the school community (Samaras, 2011).

Before conducting this research, I followed all proper procedures and ethical guidelines, as this improves the quality of the study and contributes to its trustworthiness (Samaras, 2011). I obtained ethical approval through the appropriate channels from the tertiary institution involved and received the permission to conduct the research in my school from the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education (Appendices A and B).

Participants were informed about the whole research process and they duly signed the informed consent forms containing the basic information about the research. The brief consent form, easy to read and understand, was for informing the participants about the aim and focus of the study, about the methods of data collection, and the time frames. I sent the learner assent forms to parents to sign on behalf of learners. These were translated into isiZulu home language to ensure that the contents were clearly understood by all parents and learners (Appendix E).

The participants were also informed about the voluntary participation and their rights to withdraw at any time (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). I assured them that the information generated would be kept confidential and that it could only be known by my supervisors. I confirmed that their names and other distinguishing features would be changed, pseudonyms would be used to protect them from traceability and harm.

The experiences of my personal and professional life I wrote about in my narrative were those I was comfortable to make public. I used pseudonyms in my writing to ensure the respect and dignity of the participants.

Undertaking research that involves children brings about a lot of issues and challenges, some expected and others unforeseen (Graham et al., 2015). I considered the dignity and well-being of learners, their abilities and preferences throughout the research by paying attention to some of the factors suggested by the "The International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children" (Graham et al., 2015, p. 27). These factors guide the research community that works with children to undertake high-quality ethical research that is respectful of children's rights, dignity and well-being, regardless of research approach, focus or context.

I was honest with my learners at the onset and explained to them that we were doing video recordings for my research with the aim of improving my teaching. I also explained that collecting the examples of their writing and reading scores would be beneficial to them, our school and the field of education, as I would be tracking their learning progress. I acknowledged that my learners come from diverse backgrounds and allowed them an opportunity to participate in the research without any prejudice, but with an understanding of their diverse contributions in the classroom. Awareness of their status assisted me in treating them fairly and equally, according to their needs without excluding anyone. This was to ensure justice for all and establish a safe and secure environment without any risks of harm. Graham et al. (2015) recommend that for ethical research teacher-researchers should do reflections frequently, even beyond formal requirements, to maintain focused attention on the values and practices that

influence the research process and impact on children. On that account, I recorded daily classroom events in my journal entry to reflect on the challenges and successes and plan the improvement for the future.

2.10 Learning from doing a self-study

Although I wanted to improve my teaching, I had no idea how I was going to do it, until I heard about self-study research from my supervisor. Initially, when I heard the term "self" I thought the research would be all about myself. Finding out about the involvement of critical friends made me hesitant and a bit frustrated, as I thought about the embarrassment when other people found out that I had challenges in my teaching.

Most of the time, my writing shifted away from myself to learners' improvement. I suppose the reason was that I had never regarded myself as a contributing factor in poor learner achievement. I had always thought that children were to blame for all the challenges I encountered in the classroom. However, embarking on self-study was a learning process and the insights I achieved about myself have helped me change my thinking. As a result, my supervisors always reminded me to use the pronoun "I" instead of "the researcher". This enabled me to keep focusing on myself as a significant participant in the research.

Initially I conceptualised the collage in a wrong way. I thought that I needed the actual pictures of teacher and learners in a class that I would simply download from the internet. However, I managed to do the collage after clarification from my supervisor, that I needed to use cut out images or writing from newspapers and magazines that would represent what I wanted to explain.

Writing a journal entry was learning in a hard way, as I had never used it before and I had never even kept a diary. I often forgot to reflect on what transpired during the lessons. It was also a challenge to write about myself in the journal entry and I was not comfortable documenting my failures. I wanted to write about the happy events. Although I was recording what had happened, I took time to learn that writing the journal entry should include my feelings and emotions towards the events.

I found it hard to relive my lived experiences, because of their distressing nature. Thinking about them and writing them down brought back anger and pain, and they were unpleasant, especially as I realised that they had an influence on my teaching and social behaviour. I felt

pain to the point of crying. When I shared that pain with my psychologist, he told me that crying was a positive gesture towards easing my physical and emotional state. Then, I gradually got better as I continued with my writing.

2.11 Trustworthiness

The researcher in self-study has a twofold role to play, both as a researcher and a participant. Their responsibility is to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of their self-study research by showing accountability in their communication with other participants (Hamilton et al., 2020). Assessing the quality of self-study relies on the interplay of ideas between the researcher and the critical friends (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This interrelationship reveals the experiences and issues that the researcher would not have thought about.

In this study, I acknowledged that I was operating inside my practice and therefore I made sure that I guided all my actions as a researcher. As the research progressed, I always recognised the work with critical friends. I disclosed my wonderings and concerns to them and made my research questions, data collection and data analysis explicit, as their important role was to examine whether the generated data were worthy of measuring the phenomenon under study (Samaras, 2011; Samaras & Freese, 2006). They must also measure the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations and assumptions regarding the impact of the research on learners' performance.

Knowledge generated from self-study should be presented in rich detail and quality, as it can be beneficial to colleagues and other researchers (Samaras & Freese, 2009). To strengthen the credibility of the study, I employed different methods to generate data. For the quantitative data I administered pre-tests and post-tests and recorded learners' reading scores, and for generating qualitative data I used journal writing, collages and video recordings. Using the various data sources was also for the affirmation of my interpretations.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) emphasise issues of rigour in self-study, like in any other good research. As a researcher, I made what I was researching explicit to myself and my peers. My peers and I ensured ongoing communication to improve the quality of the study. The sense of openness permitted the critical friends to ask probing questions and offer opinions that helped me improve my teaching. The range of perspectives I gained from them about my beliefs and actions increased the validity of the study (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). I audio recorded the conversations with them and all their critiques. I discuss this in Chapter six, providing verbatim

quotes to enhance transparency in the research (Wolcott, 2001). It is this background that provides the descriptions of the proceedings that may contribute to the knowledge of others involved in similar studies.

2.12 Chapter summary

In this chapter I described the self-study as a reflective and collaborative methodology that is characterised by reflecting on one's teaching in collaboration with critical friends. I explained that I used self-study to consciously and intentionally act on my desire to take agency to improve my teaching practice. I also mentioned that I chose the members of the R2L community as my research partners because they would contribute meaningfully to my development in using the R2L methodology. The knowledge and skills that I would acquire from reflecting on my teaching would also benefit my critical friends, as well as my learners. Furthermore, I discussed the concept of scaffolding which helped me to better understand the kind of classroom that supports learning and sustains learners' motivation to learn. Then, I outlined the analysis of data generated through the journal entries, collages and EGRA. Thereafter, I highlighted the challenges that I encountered through the process of this study. I also discussed my responsibility to honour the ethical standards while conducting the research and the issues that ensured trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: A trip down memory lane

"We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience."

(Dewey, 2003, p. 78)

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter two, I explained that I chose the self-study methodology because it is a reflective practice conducted by researchers to reflect and examine themselves, their actions and ideas for continuous learning (Loughran, 2005). It provides the opportunity for teachers to become agents of change in their behaviour and practice by executing their professional development consciously and intentionally (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). Similarly, embarking on self-study would afford me the opportunity to discover the aspects of my life that are different from what I know and understand about myself.

Dewey (2003) states that "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience". He stresses that reflective thinking is an important part of learning from one's experiences and planning for the future. Exploring our past, present and future begins as we encounter challenges that raise questions about ourselves and stimulate the desire to understand the problems, consider possible solutions, and construct and reconstruct our knowledge and skills. Relating to Dewey's phrase, I had known myself as a good and skilled foundation phase teacher until I looked more closely at my problems in teaching Grade 3 in 2018, the relationship I had with my learners and their academic performance. Then I developed the desire to do reflection as a key component of effective teacher professional development. Reliving my past experiences would help me recollect both pleasant and frustrating events that shaped my personal and professional identity. In addition, reflecting on my experiences would allow me to gain more insight about myself and acquire knowledge of what I needed to improve.

In this chapter I respond to my first research question: *What can I learn about using R2L to teach isiZulu reading, drawing from my own memories?* This question emanated from my desire to explore my experiences as a child before going to school and the way I was taught reading at school. Exploring these experiences would help me understand my current practice and influence change. As I was using the R2L methodology, I was determined to improve on using its strategies and become a better teacher. Reading to Learn is not a curriculum, but

strategies that are applied to the curriculum using the texts that learners are expected to read (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). It encourages opportunities for learners to succeed through teacher scaffolding in all stages of learning. Among several other theories (see Chapter one), R2L draws from Vygotsky's theory of social learning in which one learns in collaboration with others in a healthy environment that embraces social relationships (Vygotsky, 1978).

To address the aforementioned question, I used the personal history self-study method which is used to explore how the individual experiences, culture, history and their learning experiences to inform their teaching practice (Samaras, 2011). Samaras She asserts that teachers bring their personal experiences into their teaching practice. Thus, I employed this method to explore the kind of attitude I have brought into my classroom and how my learning experiences have informed and supported my teaching of isiZulu in Grade 3. Samaras (2011) further recommends the personal history method as an effective one for teachers to explore and know themselves, their identities and their learners so as to move them to a high level of success. Teachers use the method to examine their educational beliefs and goals of teaching, to investigate the difficulties they have encountered and the support they received along the journey of reaching their goals. In this chapter, I narrate the exciting and frustrating experiences I encountered, in my family as a child and during the whole journey of my formal learning. I also highlight how these experiences influenced my personal behaviour, my professional practice and social relationships with other people, particularly my learners.

My narrative begins with my childhood experiences, reflecting on the house chores that I performed together with my mother and my older sisters, as I was the last girl in the family. That is where I got the mentality of gender-centred duties, where I learnt that there were duties specifically for girls that included cleaning the house, doing laundry, cooking and fetching water from the river. I do not have a memory of my brothers doing any house chores. Girls did all the duties because the belief in the 1970s was that girls had to learn to do the chores to prepare for marriage responsibilities. Thus many parents are still holding on to the human behaviour that was shaped by our experiences from school and home (Ntombela & Mashiya, 2009).

I go on to describe the games we engaged in and the conversations we had in the evenings as a family. Those kinds of interactions promoted closeness and understanding of each other. This was also where I started to acquire language and developed thinking, listening and speaking skills and was exposed to reading. I then continue to describe the environment in which I started

learning in a junior primary school and I show the images of the poor environment in which my formal learning started. In my narrative, I present both the contrasting and the similar traits I witnessed between the home and school environment. This is followed by an explanation of the slight changes I experienced in higher primary and high school in terms of the school environment, but the methods of teaching and learning were similar. Next, I discuss the difficulties I experienced in learning at the college of education I attended. After that, I reflect on my working experience as a foundation phase teacher. I discuss my encounter with teaching, using the same methods that were used by my teachers when I was a learner. Then I describe the efforts that I have made to improve my knowledge through furthering my studies. In conclusion, I clarify the changes in my teaching and my current practice since being introduced to the Reading to Learn methodology.

My learning experience is explained by the use of pictures of real objects that helped me recall how I engaged in isiZulu language skills at home as a child and the frustrations I encountered during the early years of schooling (see method of memory drawings in Chapter two). Employing the personal history method to explore my past helped me to relive my experiences and inquire into how they have informed my teaching behaviour. Exploring and reliving our experiences makes us aware of who we are and helps us to strive to improve ourselves (Kortjass, 2019).

3.2 The cornerstone of my childhood experiences

I decided to use the heading cornerstone, because in this section I narrate about my home and church, which are the basis of my literacy learning. I grew up at Inadi village, the rural area which is 45 minutes' drive by bus to the city of Pietermaritzburg. I was born into a big family of three boys and four girls. Two brothers were older and one was younger. All three sisters were older and I was the last girl at home. My mother was a domestic worker in town and my father worked at a bakery factory. My parents had gone to school up to a higher primary level. They could both read and write isiZulu and had learnt to read, write and speak English from their workplaces.

Initially, when I was thinking about my childhood literacy experiences my mind just focused on my sub-standard A (Grade 1) class, but when I explained this study to my elder sister who is a retired teacher, she reminded me of lots of literacy activities we engaged in as a family and at church before I went to school. Mophosho and Dada (2015) argue that the home environment

and society is a significant factor that provides a foundation for children's learning and reading behaviour through parent-child interaction and with the community around language and reading-based activities in natural surroundings without any overwhelming settings. And Spaull et al. (2020) add that the formal school builds on that foundation and adapts the reading behaviour and introduces children to the knowledge of different strategies of reading and making meaning of written texts. Incidentally, I acquired those literacy skills from home and church, and they would have been the foundation for the school to build on.

When we grew up at home, we used to go together as sisters with our mother to prepare the field and grow different kinds of crops, to fetch firewood, because there was no electricity and we used wood burning stoves, and to fetch some water from the river. That was the time we learnt the appropriate way of talking and approaching each other as we had all kinds of conversations. That is how we built our relationship and developed our communication skills. After discussing this with my sister, I recalled the days when we used to sit together with my older siblings in the kitchen playing cards (displayed in figure 1). Playing cards promoted collaborative work as we played in pairs supporting each other and it stimulated our thinking and problem-solving skills. This kind of working together is in line with the idea of peer scaffolding, where peers support each other to allow meaningful and successful participation and to gain skills through the activity (Belland, 2014, p. 2). Playing cards was another foundation for learning mathematics, as I also unintentionally acquired mathematical concepts before going to school, and after starting school this kind of play reinforced counting at home as we were never given homework. We also played *iziphicaphicwano* (quizzes), one of us would say *isiphicaphicwano* and others would promptly give an answer: Example 1. *A reliable friend, I leave her here and never moves until I come back,* and the answer is the stone because it cannot move by itself; Example 2. *It has four legs, stays outside and barks at night to protect the family,* and the answer is the dog. The winner would be the one who said the answer first. This game enhanced my knowledge of isiZulu vocabulary and stimulated attentiveness and the ability to provide prompt responses.

Figure 1. Playing cards, we played in the evening in pairs

My parents usually left us in the kitchen and sat in their bedroom, but when our mother was with us sitting around the wood burning stove, she would tell us stories. I remember one of the stories she told us:

> *Her mother (our grandmother) did not know her mother as she passed away while giving birth. So, she grew up with a desire to know how her mother looked like. As the years went by my grandmother's community was introduced to Christian religion for the first time as they were confined to their traditional Zulu culture. They heard that if a person goes to church and dies believing in God, they would be able to see their loved ones who had passed on. My grandmother misinterpreted the preaching and started going to church thinking that she would see her mother there and that is how her lifestyle changed.*

The listening skill starts to grow at home as the child hears many simple words and language from storytelling, reading and instructions, and gradually learns the vocabulary and grammar of their home language (Department of Basic Education, 2011). We loved my mother's stories and this practice developed my listening skill. As a result, we made sure that we ate and washed the dishes before the storytelling began so that we could all sit quietly and listen, laugh and ask her questions if we had some.

It was the family tradition that we prayed together at night before going to sleep. Before praying we would sing and one of the parents would read the scripture from the bible and gave us the

opportunity to explain what the scripture meant and how it related to us. We took turns to explain the scripture and by doing this practice my father was transmitting religious traditions to us while we were incidentally learning to read and talk and show understanding of the text. This exposure to reading would be an advantage to me when I got to formal schooling as children learn in different ways, some, surprisingly, learn without any specific instruction, but incidentally through exposure to print (Snow, 2017). However, the practice I engaged in at home was totally different from how we learnt at school. The artist who made memory drawings for me was the son of the priest and therefore he was familiar with the scene I explained for drawing the figure 2, I explained to him that when we prayed we would sit on my mother's bed and listened to the one who speaking about the bible verse. After that we would kneel around the bed to pray. Then, the artist imagined that situation and produced the picture.

Figure 2. Family praying together

We were also exposed to literacy activities in the church. It was compulsory that we all go to church on Sundays. Children would go earlier to attend Sunday school before the starting time for the whole congregation. My younger brother and I were always the first to arrive, as our house was very close to the church. Our Sunday school teacher would narrate the bible story first, then read it from the bible and ask us questions about the story; we would find answers from what she had read or provide answers from what we were thinking about the story. We memorised some of the verses from the bible (shown in figure 3) and sometimes she gave us opportunities to act out the story to the whole congregation. Although I knew nothing about reading strategies, now I can identify that the Sunday school teacher's approach was aligned with the Reading to Learn methodology of teaching the story where the adult provides children

with the background knowledge, models reading and creates interaction (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017; Rose, 2005; Steinke, 2012).

Asking us literal and inferential questions and acting out the story was to develop and demonstrate our comprehension skills. She used to say that it was for building our confidence.

I discussed the Sunday school experiences with my younger brother, and we recalled the incident where I burst into tears because I was too shy to stand and talk in front of an audience. That day the teacher said, "Bongi, you can do it, just think of those people as ants and you are much bigger and cleverer than all of them." This was her way of building my confidence and teaching me how to ignore the audience. Scaffolding (the framework for this study) is not limited to formal education, but can be applied in all learning environments (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Thus, I relate her motivation to speak as shaping and scaffolding my social cognitive skills. Unfortunately, this did not change my nature, as I am still shy and reserved. However, my home background and the church had an influence on laying a foundation for my learning home language and reading. I told the artist that my mother used to open the bible and read a random verse for us to discuss. That gave him an idea of drawing an open bible.
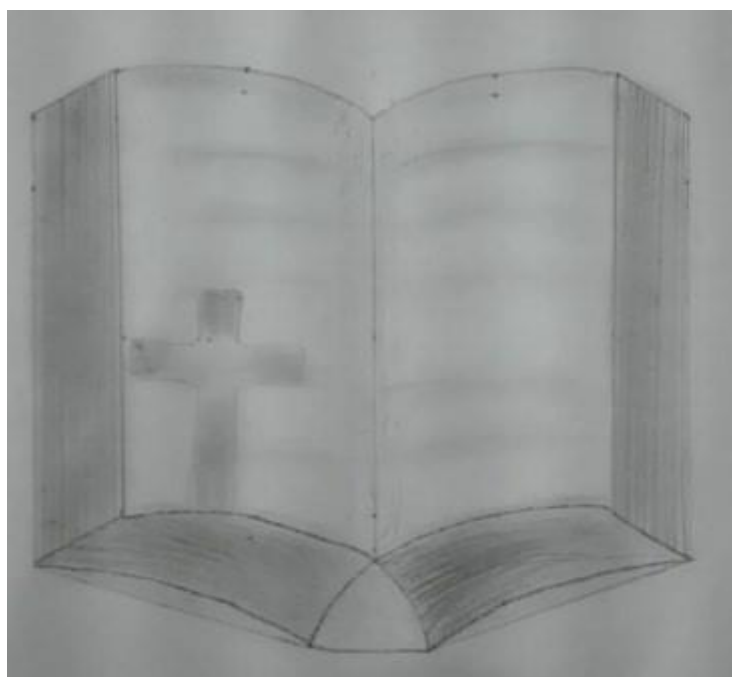
Figure 3. Bible – my first reading book

All the activities we did at home and in church are specified in the foundation phase CAPS document as language skills. According to the CAPS document, these skills are significant to produce learners who can read for meaning, produce meaningful text and use language skills

in different modes. It also enables learners to use critical and creative thinking to solve problems and make decisions (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

3.3 Downturn in learning: My junior primary learning

I refer to this section of my narrative as a downturn in my learning because there was a huge difference between the way we did reading at home and the approach used by the teacher at school. There was no time for storytelling where we would enjoy ourselves and had time to relax like we used to do at home and in church. The skill of holding a book and pointing at the words, like we did when reading the bible, discontinued as we did not have books; we had to listen to the teacher. When I came to school I could speak isiZulu fluently and I knew several words from home, but the Grade 1 teacher did not build on that knowledge and skills. Although I was not aware at that time, now I realise that building on what I had learnt at home and church would be a better foundation for teaching us reading at school.

I started my junior primary schooling in 1973 at the age of seven, as per the norm during those years, that a child had to start their first year (Grade 1) at that age. There were two primary schools in our village. One of the primary schools was very far from where we lived and the other one, which was a bit closer, was within a Roman Catholic mission and only accepted children from Roman Catholic families. As a result, schooling for other groups of children (not Roman Catholic) took place in local churches, especially for young children from Sub A (Grade 1) to Standard 1 (Grade 3), who could not walk the long distance to a government school. Then after that, children would walk the long distance to start upper primary schooling (Standard 5) at a school far away from home. Nothing motivated us to attend school; we attended school because it was a norm that every child should go to school. Even the names of the schools in our area did not invoke passion for learning. We referred to ourselves as "*Sifunda kwaMthembu*", meaning, we go to Mthembu school, because Mr Mthembu was the elder in that church. Other schools were named after the local chiefs, which had no connotations to our learning.

The churches were used as schools during the week and we went to a particular church house according to grades. There was a limited space to accommodate the whole group. Therefore, we were divided into groups to attend classes on a rotational basis according to our cognitive abilities. The group that was perceived as slow learners came in the morning and the clever ones in the afternoon.

The church wall was made of wattle tree posts with mud soil to cover the wall and the floor was made by mixing cow dung and mud to make it solid. On Thursday afternoon when we got home, we had to take plastic bags and go around the neighbourhood looking for the cow dung.

We filled our plastic bags with cow dung so that we could take it to school the following day. Every Friday, we had to carry cow dung from home in plastic bags so that we could coat the floor in the afternoon. Cow dung was used back then to make the floor smooth and fine and the house would be clean and cool. It was only the girls who mixed the cow dung with water in the buckets and then did the coating in our school uniforms. We were very good at this kind of cleaning, as most of us did it at home or always observed elders doing it as household duties. After we had finished we would wash our hands, wipe our knees and walk home with filthy clothes. We did not worry about this and even our families did not have a problem because it was a normal practice for girls to do hard work, which was a sign of respect and responsibility. This practice demonstrates that responsibilities given to children can make them occupy many positions at the same time; for example, children can be learners, servants, entrepreneurs, artists and this is determined by the context (Ntombela & Mashiya, 2009). In my context, these kinds of duties defined girl children as learners and workers at the same time. Nevertheless, from this we learnt the skills of tidying up the house that some of us could never have learnt from home because we had older siblings who were doing it and others did not have parents to teach them household responsibilities. The artist who made the drawings for me grew up in a rural area, and he is of the same age as me, thus he knew about cleaning the house with cow dung and fetching the water from the river. That prompted his understanding of the structure of the church house that we used as a school, the groups of girls going to the river and thus it was easy for him to draw the girl in figure 4 and 5.

Figure 4. Girls cleaning the floor with cow dung

There were no taps where we could get clean drinking water, not only at the church, but also around the area. Thus, some of the girls had to go and fetch water with buckets from the nearby river every morning before classes began. We did that even on cold winter mornings walking on grass covered with frost, some of us barefoot. Some of the learners in my class stayed at home to avoid going to the river on a cold winter morning, but my mother would not allow me to stay; therefore, I had to go to school every day. Sometimes I could feel that I did not want to go to the river, but for me, being out of the classroom was an excuse for escaping from learning in a scary environment. We walked a distance of about 100 meters while the teacher continued teaching and we had to miss out on what our peers had learnt. This impacted our learning negatively, as a lot of time was wasted by the end of the week.

Figure 5. Girls fetching water from the river

Having no access to clean water and healthy sanitation in schools did not matter in rural areas at that time. However, nowadays it would be denying children their basic rights, as it has a negative impact on learning and brings threat to children's lives as they do not wash their hands properly (Khumalo & Mji, 2014). The system of apartheid neglected the rural or previously disadvantaged communities, including schools. Thus, the problems of infrastructure development in some rural schools are regarded as the legacy of the apartheid era (Khumalo & Mji, 2014). This portrays the situation in our community, where we did not have proper school infrastructure which is one of the essential elements in education. The school infrastructure allows teachers and learners to access a wide range of resources and services to support teaching

and learning. The teaching and learning process in a classroom with adequate resources and a welcoming atmosphere directly influences teaching practice and learner achievement (Khumalo & Mji, 2014; Ntombela & Mashiya, 2009; Pretorius, 2015). Our so called classroom did not have proper desks suitable for learning, but there were rows of long benches where we would sit and learn. The teachers used a small portable chalkboard that was stood on chairs as shown in figure 6. On one side, the chalkboard had squares permanently drawn for writing mathematics and on the other side it had lines to write words.
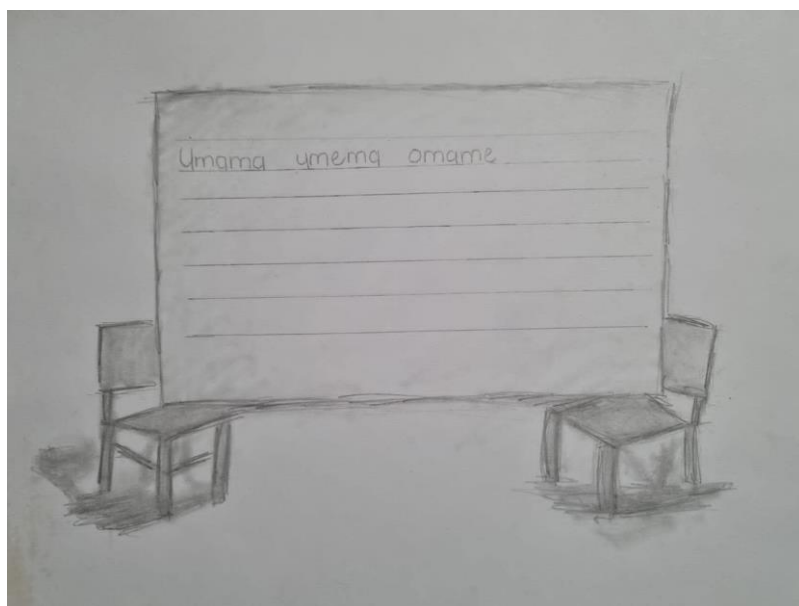
Figure 6. Small chalkboard placed on chairs

Sub A (Grade 1) to Standard 2 (Grade 4) classes always started with mathematics in the morning, and, due to lack of resources, we used stones to count and calculate answers to given sums. During the isiZulu period in Sub A, the teacher would write the vowels on the chalkboard for us to read after her *a, e, i, o, u* and thereafter the syllables, *ma, me, mi, mo, mu,* and others. We repeatedly read that in group, chorusing until the teacher told us that we all knew it. This was the traditional view of teaching reading, which represents the perspectives of the behaviourist theories (Pardede, 2008). Contrary to the R2L approach, mentioned in section 3.3, which suggests scaffolding in teaching learners to read, the significant idea of the behaviourist theories is that learning is a spontaneous behaviour acquired and demonstrated as a result of the repetition of stimulus and response interaction. Learning happens through imitating what is being modelled through drilling, repetition and error correction. I remember the teacher saying, "No one can tell me you do not know this, unless you are inviting a hiding onto your back." This scary talk made us try by all means to cram it. Her statement included every one of us and

neglected the slow learners who needed special attention and those who could not quickly memorise the work. The feeling of neglect results in some learners feeling unsafe in an uncaring environment (Khumalo & Mji, 2014). We had insecurities that made us doubt our abilities and competences.

The teacher would then read from the small book (*Masihambisane*), leading us to shout the words, echoing her without touching the book or seeing the words. This was a teacher-centred and whole-group chorusing approach with little assessment of learner performance in oral activities, and minimal assessment in individual reading of text, commonly used in South Africa during the apartheid era (Hoadley, 2012; Macdonald, 1991). After all these years, I have remembered the first page of that small yellow book in figure 7, *mama ima, ima mama, umama umema omame…* The teacher wrote the list of words from that book on the chalkboard and we repeatedly read them after her in group-chorusing. We were never told to copy the words to read at home. In that way, I was not exposed to doing homework, because our teacher never gave us any. Regarding not having homework, I think it was because we were using slates and anything written there would be easily wiped out even before we got home. My sister told me that they were also never given any homework in primary school. I was told that doing homework was not a popular practice then; learning only took place at school. Hence, we did not continue practising what we were taught on a particular day. Besides affecting our learning, not giving homework means that teachers spend much time the following day repeating the work that learners could have practised at home (Khumalo & Mji, 2014). In addition, the teacher could not leave the work on the board for long, as the chalkboard needed to be used for other activities. Moreover, she never used charts or flashcards that could be hung on the wall for us to see and remember what we learnt, which makes me think that she never had any. We only learnt the words in class, by heart on a Thursday, and then the teacher assessed that spelling on the following day. Should we get some words wrong, we got a number of strokes equal to the number of incorrect words.

m   mother

stand, stand

mother,

invite mother,
mother invites mothers,
mother invites mothers.

mama ima
ima mama
mema mame
umame umema omama
mamo umame umema o
umame umema omame
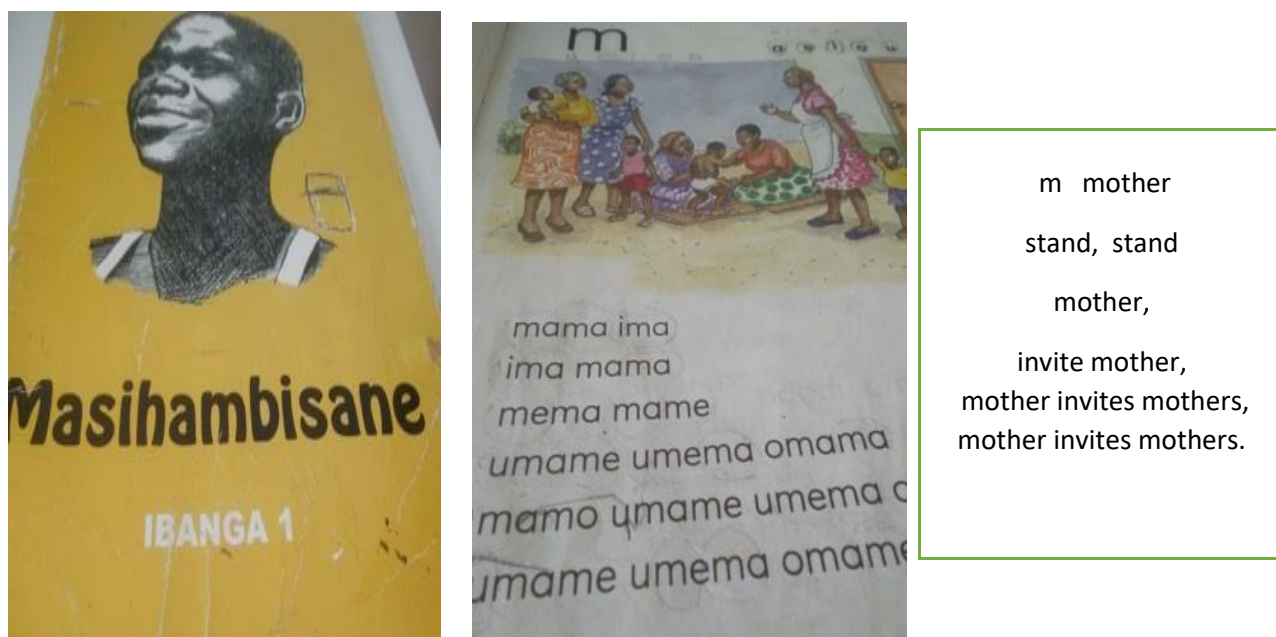
Figure 7. Masihambisane (Let's walk together): a reading book

When I reflect on my teacher's practice, I assume that according to teachers, there was no need for us to have our own books as it was only the teacher who had a book. I think some families could afford to buy books for their children, but the teacher never asked if we had books. We did not experience the strategies that were used at church for understanding the story through acting out, which Pretorius (2014) explains as an essential component of learning to read and for enjoyment. However, we developed the skill of memorising, which was helpful when I progressed to the higher primary where we had to memorise poems and some notes in content subjects.

The CAPS nowadays emphasises teaching and learning handwriting skills where children develop fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination, the correct way of handling the pencil, letter formation and other skills (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Children learn to copy words and sentences correctly and a good sitting posture is also significant. I believe that if I had had an opportunity to learn these skills from my early stages of schooling, I would be more effective in teaching my learners. However, as we used slates (see figure 8) to write our school work, so we did not learn to hold a pencil or form letters properly. A slate was a four-cornered rectangular object made of a fragile black stone-like material set in a wooden frame on which the owners' name was written. It was designed to be written on like a chalkboard and I used to carry a small water bottle and a cloth to wipe it and use it again for another activity. The slate pencil was made from the same stone as the slate and I often sharpened it on stones before I got

into the classroom. As a fragile object and crucial for our daily learning, the slate had to be handled with extra care. I carried my slate in my hand because I did not have a school bag and it was easy to handle it with care as I did not have anything else to carry when I went to school, except the cow dung on Fridays. It was very rare for me to break the slate because I was a very shy little girl. I did not play much at school and I walked alone to and from school. In that way, I was able to keep my slate safe for a long time.

Figure 8. A slate with a pencil and eraser

During English lessons the same approach of teaching and learning applied. We named classroom objects repeatedly as group-chorusing after the teacher and then the teacher would write the words on the chalkboard for us to read and learn by memory and our memory would be tested on Friday. What I learnt from Sub A (Grade 1) to Standard 2 (Grade 4) were the syllables, words and the skill of listening, imitating the teacher and memorising. The whole afternoon on Thursdays was terrible, thinking about whether I could recall the spelling words the following day and thinking about those hard strokes I would get. This was a very scary experience of school and learning. I always thought of learning as a nightmare and the teacher as an enemy.

The oral orientation style of teaching implicitly states the insignificance of books and the perception that knowledge and facts are detached from learners, but only transmitted from the teacher. Learners rely on listening to the teacher and chorusing the responses. It gives learners limited exposure to books as a primary source of knowledge of content and language, to some

extent resulting in a poor reading approach and low language and comprehension development (Pretorius, 2015; Sibanda, 2017).

I performed at an average level in terms of achievement and I was well cared for at home, as I had older sisters and parents to take care of me. But my first year of schooling was terrible because the teacher did not like me. I was not the only fat child in the class, but the only one called "the tortoise". After she had marked our maths or spelling test, Mrs Gaba would call us to the front and then we would go back to our seats according to the marks we had gotten starting from those who got it all. Then she would start beating us according to what we had got wrong. Regardless of how I had done in the test, every day she would tell me to stand in front of the class, and tell my fellow students to laugh at me: "Here is a tortoise, laugh at her.", and the whole class would laugh pointing at me. I never told anyone about this because I was a child. Although it was painful at that time, I had to get used to it because my teacher was an old woman from the neighbourhood. According to the culture at that time, children were not allowed to express their feelings and opinions, unlike nowadays, where women and children have become assertive and confidently fight for their voices to be heard (Ntombela & Mashiya, 2009). Moreover, it was disrespectful for children to talk badly about adults, particularly teachers, as they were the most trusted people in the community.

Children spend most of their time at school and this environment should be free of fear, danger and harassment, for both teachers and learners (Segalo, 2013). On the contrary, there were days when I wished there was a place to hide and not go to school, because I did not like the nickname the teacher had given me. Despite the fear of severe corporal punishment, the teacher's behaviour towards me deprived me of happiness, from being among other children, and created a lack of motivation to learn. Since the time when I was growing up, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher, and if I became one, I would be careful that no child would be marginalised due to their home background, their learning abilities or how they looked. My teacher's behaviour towards us also taught me that corporal punishment does not mould a child, but creates fear and hatred. Some children drop out of school, or harm themselves trying to save themselves from the teachers. However, as a teacher, I found myself caught up in the same situation of snapping at children and creating fear. Conducting the self-study helped me to realise that the context I grew up in shaped my identity negatively. I realised that I grew up bottling up anger, which has influenced my relationship with other people, particularly the learners that I teach.

We continued with our learning as children in the neighbourhood by 'playing school' in the afternoon and on weekends. To me, playing school was our way of learning at home because

we were not given homework. One of us would act as a teacher, especially those that were socially confident, and the rest of us as children. Then we would remember what we did at school and repeatedly do or say it as it happened in class. We wrote on the ground, pretending to be writing on our slates. I remember one girl from a neighbourhood household acting as Mrs Gaba (our teacher) and she called me a tortoise. That was the first time I got into a fight. I was so furious and beat her; to me it felt like I was beating my real teacher. As I recall my past experiences I realise that I was a quiet child, but full of anger caused by the hateful attitude I got from my Sub A teacher.

By the time I got to Standard 2 (Grade 4), the proper lower primary school had been built not very far from my home. The lower primary school at that time started from first year (Grade 1) up to Standard 2 (Grade 4). The new school had proper classroom furniture: desks, teachers' cupboards and a huge chalkboard on the wall. That was the first time I used an exercise book and a pen to write. The parents had to buy stationery for the children and pay school fees. I then learnt how to organise work in an exercise book, like writing the date on top, and skipping two lines when writing. Grades 1 to 3 is a critical phase for learners reading and writing skills development, which could determine either their continuous success in schooling, or, rather, their disorientation (Pretorius, 2014). In Standard 2 we had to use cursive handwriting, which was very difficult as I was left-handed. It was a bit late for me to learn and develop good handwriting after three years of writing on a slate without any lines to give direction to my handwriting. I remember that the Standard 2 teacher used to say that my handwriting was like flying cockroaches and told me to try writing with my other hand. I had a challenging experience because I tried writing with my right hand and it became ugly; I tried using the other, and it became more terrible. I believe the appalling handwriting that I have now is a problem that arose from my childhood experience.

3.4 Higher primary school experiences

The transition from lower primary to higher primary school refers to the learner crossing from the phase of "Learning to read" to "Reading to learn" (Pretorius, 2014, p. 53). Learners who have never developed reading and writing skills in the foundation phase are likely to become disoriented in the upper levels of schooling. At the beginning of the higher primary, or intermediate phase, learners should extend their skills into more academic literacy, supposedly building on what they have learnt in the foundation phase (Pretorius, 2014; Sibanda, 2017). Learners at this stage are introduced to the content subjects and English as the LoLT. This also

happened to us, when I proceeded to the upper primary. I had a challenge in mastering new concepts and understanding abstract ideas in English, as I lacked a strong foundation in my home language. A strong foundation in one's home language prepares one for English as the language of learning and teaching in upper grades. However, this depends on how home language was taught and the time frame provided for literacy development that could allow for a seamless switch to English as the LoLT and handling content subjects in the intermediate phase (Pretorius, 2015).

The school environment was much better because we had proper classrooms with furniture, a proper chalkboard and textbooks. We were still learning spelling in the same way as in previous grades. In addition, we memorised and recited poems in three languages: Zulu, English and Afrikaans. Teachers taught us grammar rules and let us write sentences to reinforce the grammar. I remember an explanation from my teacher that "a verb is a doing word" and she gave us examples of verbs. When I was in Standard 5, we had a homework task where we had to underline the verbs from the English textbook. I came across a sentence written thus: "That little boy is naughty". I could not find the verb in the sentence and my sister suggested that I underlined *naughty.* When I handed the homework to the teacher he marked it correct and then I knew that "naughty" was a verb. As I went on with learning in different levels of schooling, I learnt about parts of speech, but I was never exposed to deeper knowledge about language, until I learnt from the R2L training to describe types of verbs. Then I realised that in the kind of sentence like the textbook example, the correct word to underline was "is" as a linking verb that connected the subject "The little boy" to the word "naughty", which provides additional information about "The little boy." The information I received from the R2L teacher training demonstrates inadequate content knowledge, which could be one of the factors that contribute to the learners' poor academic achievement (Ntuli & Pretorius, 2009; Pretorius, 2015; Spaull, 2016).

An extended text we were given in primary school was called "A composition" where we were supposed to write a story. In this activity the teacher would write a topic such as "Myself" or "My family" without talking about the topic. The teacher would just write one to ten sentences about her family, underline her personal information and instruct us to change and make it relevant to ourselves, for example:

1. *I am a girl.*
2. *My name is Nomusa.*
3. *My surname is Zuma.*

4. *I am 10 years old.*
5. *I live at Gezubuso.*

The teacher would mark each word that we had changed and that would be our creative writing.

In content subjects such as agriculture or general science, the teachers read the English textbooks to us and explained the content in our home language. They then wrote some summarised notes on the chalkboard for us to copy into our exercise books. The way we were taught caused a lot of confusion for us, as everything was explained in isiZulu, whereas we were expected to give answers in English during the examination. This code-switching practice is used in many South African classrooms even today, because, as teachers explain, when learners are asked questions in English, they do not respond, and so teachers use the home language to help learners understand the concepts (Desai, 2001). This is similar to an observation of a mathematics lesson in the context of an isiXhosa speaking Grade 4 classroom (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004). The teacher explained the mathematics, and other subject lessons, in isiXhosa for the duration of the lesson except for the minor code-mixing which was the affirmation, whereas class activities were written in English.

Our Afrikaans teacher (Mr Sosiba) would write a "composition," as we called it at that time, and poems on the chalkboard for us to copy and learn by heart at home. He used a long heavy stick made of leather (sjambok) shown as figure 9, to punish those who could not say them the following day. At the higher primary level, we were grown-up girls, no longer playing at being at school, because we could no longer play on the sand. After school we used to go to the river in groups to fetch water. On our way to the river we recited the poems we had learnt at school, which helped to remind us. On the following day I would carry a piece of leather that I had cut from a traditional women's skirt (*isidwaba*) (figure 9) in my school plastic bag to put on my back under the uniform. I prepared this in case I forgot the Afrikaans composition or poem, because the teacher would make us bend over and hit us on our backs with a sjambok. Unfortunately for us there were no extra-curricular activities that we could engage in to escape corporal punishment, which is referred to as "abuse of power" (Ntombela & Mashiya, 2009, p. 103) and was our everyday experience.

Figure 9. A piece of *isidwaba* provided protection against a sjambok

Examinations were written twice a year, in June and in December. The examination paper for the content subjects always consisted of questions that required one-word answers, multiple choice questions and filling in the missing words or labelling a plant or an animal. This was not very difficult, because I had learnt to memorise and the information that we had to provide was from the notes that we had copied from the chalkboard. Our memorisation skills helped us to remember some concepts in content subjects during upper primary and high school grades.

3.5 High school experiences

In high school there was no learning of spelling in any of the languages. I had acquired knowledge of vocabulary through memorising during my primary school years. However, I needed to have developed literacy that encompasses all the language skills that are developed within the school setting because I could not use those acquired words in verbal communication and writing. The literacy skills that a child should have acquired at this stage support subject based learning, which includes reading and understanding, oral and written communication, and viewing and critical thinking (DEETYA, 1998; Louden et al., 2005). Our teachers in high school taught us story books, the rules of grammar, and writing sentences and stories. When teaching a novel in any language, the teacher would read to us and explain each paragraph. When learning English and Afrikaans, most of us could not engage in any discussions as we had very little understanding of the languages. We knew that the test and exam questions about the novel would be, "Who did this? When and how" or "Who said these words…? To whom and what had happened?" I remember when I was in Standard 9 (Grade 11), the English teacher

organised for us to go to the Kismet cinema to watch the film of Julius Caesar. I did not understand the English that was spoken in the film, I only looked at the images and action. Hence, I could not tell or write anything about that play because I had not developed English communication skills and comprehension.

Literacy learning is embedded in the context and therefore should be considered a cultural and social practice, as literacy differs according to contexts and cultures (Street, 1996). Our learning would have been enjoyable and productive if the topics for extended writing had been about things that we were familiar with, such as fetching firewood and preparing the soil for planting in the field. But instead, it was about something I had never seen, such as "*Mhla ngiya eGoli ngesitimela*," or "*n reis per trein*" (The day I travelled to Johannesburg by train). I would sit at my desk with my hands over my head feeling like crying, as I did not know even how to begin because we were not given a framework on how to structure the story and I had never been to Johannesburg or even in a train. Then I would write anything using any word that I remembered from the vocabulary I had learnt from primary school and sometimes used Zulu words in the English or Afrikaans essay. The challenge we had was that high school teachers expected us to use the knowledge we had acquired from primary school. Primary school learning had never prepared me for high school, especially with reading and writing skills. This kind of learning shaped my future as a teacher, as, unknowingly, during the early years of my teaching I gave my learners similar topics to write about.

3.6 Tertiary education

In 1989 I went to the teacher college of education to study for a Junior Primary Teachers' Diploma (JPTD). I chose to go for this course because I loved music and had been singing in adult choirs at that time. Music was offered as a module for three years for the JPTD students and for one year in the Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma (SPTD) course. In South Africa during apartheid, the education system was segregated (Welch, 2002). The schooling system was organised according to White, Indian, Coloured and Native education. There were colleges of teacher education and universities for white children who had obtained matriculation and institutions for blacks who had passed Standard 6 and then went to college for two years. Others finished Form three, currently known as Grade 10, and went to college for two years, and, later, those who finished matric had two years of college education (Welch, 2002). Thus, I went to the college of education that was in the black township in KwaZulu-Natal, which was for African students only and even the majority of lecturers, about 97%, were African. The college

trained teachers for junior and senior primary diplomas. The extra-mural activities that were dominant at the college were athletics, netball, soccer and music. Music was the most dominant and good singing practices were emphasised every morning during assembly in the main hall. The college had basic facilities such as proper classrooms and furniture, sports fields and equipment. Lectures ran from 07:30am to 2:00pm. The teaching and learning style was the same as in the high school I came from. We sat at desks in rows and lecturers used textbooks and chalkboards to teach. We did library orientation as a module in the first year. We learnt from the textbook why the library was important, how books in the library are arranged and how to care for them.

Language development and strong literacy skills from lower grades predict success at all levels of schooling, contributing to academic achievement and lifelong learning (Trudell et al., 2012). This argument is the evidence of my learning experience as I got to the college of education without having developed reading and writing skills and could not communicate in English properly. Other than isiZulu and Afrikaans, all modules were conducted in English as a language of teaching and learning. It was a huge barrier to use English as the language of learning and therefore some lecturers made it better for us by using code-switching in most of our interactions. Like my high school teachers, they did this to help us understand the lessons. However, this practice made it difficult for me when I had to write assignments or essays and examinations in English and Afrikaans.

As mentioned earlier, I was fond of choral music and good singing practices were emphasised at the college. I was a famous solo singer in the choir, which made the way for my development in literacy because I was chosen to be the secretary of the music committee. Although it was a challenge, writing the minutes of the meetings and reporting to the choir conductor, who was also a music lecturer, was the beginning of the transformation in my level of writing and speaking.

At 6:00 pm during the week, it was compulsory for all of us to study in the classrooms until 9:00 pm. The fact that we did not understand what we were learning made us less eager to study, so we spent those hours doing homework or just wandering around with friends. Koda (2007) argues that the interest in and motivation to read and the purpose of reading is significant because as the reader develops motivation to read and the reading stages advance, the ability to construct meaning improves (Koda, 2007). I think the reason we did not value the time that we were given was the lack of motivation to read and that we had no idea about how to study. The purpose of reading and studying was for writing tests and examinations. It was only during the

examination that we used the study time profitably to read the scope of work that we had been given. Lecturers always gave us the pages to read so we always knew what work to read for the examination preparation. Then we would 'hit' the books all night, cramming what we knew would be asked in the paper. I was an adult then, but I had never acquired reading skills, or knowledge of text structure, which impeded my interest and motivation in reading.

Modules for the JPTD were conducted by lecturers who were qualified specifically for the junior phase. They progressed with us from the first year to the third year. The content and didactics modules were separately conducted by different lecturers. The content we learnt was not specifically for foundation phase learners, but for our own academic achievement. Our English lecturer (Mrs Mlaba) was an African lady from Umthwalume. From her childhood she had had a good background in English, as she was raised by a family of academics that frequently travelled abroad. She had the accent of an English speaker and always emphasised that we should imitate how she spoke. All the lecturers of languages would give us topics for essays, assuming that the knowledge we were meant to have acquired at high school on how to write an essay would help us. I remember one day Mrs Mlaba gave us a topic "The day I saved a friend" on the chalkboard, and she said, "You will write like you used to do in high school, use the same writing strategies."

She used to start a lesson by calling each one of us to the front to tell stories. When we were in the third year only three students could try and say a few sentences of their stories and the rest of us would go to the front and keep quiet. Those same students were the ones who always read when the lecturer taught us a short story or a novel while we all listened. Pretorius (2014) and Sibanda (2017) argue that learners that acquire strong foundational skills succeed throughout the years of schooling; those who did not, do not catch up with the required standard for the upper grades, and instead, the challenge persists. Thus, I assume that the fellow students who could speak at the front and read had had a good background of literacy in both isiZulu and English. After each paragraph the lecturer explained but we could not understand anything. As a result, there was always a low rate of student achievement in the English module. Towards the third year final examinations some students bought some English study guides from a bookshop in Durban. These guides had all the short stories, novels and poetry already analysed and we used these and helped each other to prepare for the examination.

The didactics module equipped me with both propositional and practical knowledge (Knight, 2002). Propositional knowledge is the knowledge of principles, facts, abstract ideas and concepts that comes from books and does not depend on the particular context. Practical

knowledge is through which propositional knowledge is put into practice. It is acquired informally through participation within the context. It is also called knowledge in practice, because it does not reside within the individual, but is distributed across colleagues, learners and the available resources (Bertram, 2011). I acquired the knowledge that in teaching isiZulu, the teacher starts with the knowledge of phonics as forming the building blocks that teaches children to identify letters and sounds that distinguish one word from another. Therefore, teaching the isiZulu language was based on the bottom-up approach, also called the phonic or alphabet approach, of teaching reading (Joubert et al., 2008). It is underpinned by the behaviourist theories of reading that view learning to read as a logical and sequentially ordered process, progressing from letters to words, sentences to paragraphs, then to the whole text and meaning (Pardede, 2008). It assumes that reading is merely the knowledge of signs and symbols and using words to make sentences, and the ability to read is influenced by phonological awareness and phonic awareness. The teacher starts by teaching letters and sounds, then progresses to building up words using the sounds learnt. These words would be used to construct sentences. The ability to read letters, words and sentences would mean mastering the skill of reading.

3.7 My early years of teaching

I started teaching Standard 2 (Grade 4) in 1992. The junior primary schools at that time went from Grade 1 to Grade 4. The staff consisted of experienced teachers, most of them with Primary Teachers Certificates. When we arrived in the school as a group of young teachers, the older teachers expected to learn new things from us, as we had come to teaching with diplomas. Surprisingly, I discovered that the method of teaching they used to teach languages and reading was the was the bottom-up approach, same as the one I that had learnt at college. The components of language were taught in isolation, with no connection between the teaching of language, phonics, reading, handwriting and writing.

As the only method of teaching I knew, for both English and isiZulu, my teaching of reading started from letters and sounds. Learners in standard 2 were required to have learnt up to three-letter sounds in isiZulu. They continued with complex ones such as ngqw, nhlw, tshw, ntshw.

I wrote the sound on the chalkboard and then together with the class we added vowels to the sounds and I drilled them until learners mastered how to write these syllables. Then I asked learners to think of words with a particular sound for the week.

The Department of Education did not provide any books at that time, so parents bought the books for their children. Having a book was determined by the affordability in the family and so I let children share books when I wanted them to read. Children used "*Masihambisane*" to decode the words using their phonics and learn to read new words. I wrote a list of words on the chalkboard for them to copy and learn by heart at home. Friday was "spelling day" in all grades, when teachers dictated spelling words and children wrote them from memory. There was also a dictation of sentences and some children could not achieve in this activity because the sentences were made up of a combination of words with sounds different from the ones they had memorised. This method of teaching equipped learners with a knowledge of vocabulary which could be the building blocks of fluent reading, but it was not enough to enable comprehension (Pretorius, 2010). Despite knowing the meaning of a certain number of words, my learners had difficulty in understanding what they were reading and could not use the vocabulary to produce meaningful writing. The critics of the bottom-up approach to teaching reading argue that knowledge of vocabulary cannot facilitate complete understanding of the entire text. Children might say the words in a text without getting the message, which is defined as "making noise" (Smith, 1994, p. 73).

The strategies that were used to teach grammar were the same in both Zulu and English. The rules of grammar were explained and then learners were given activities on that particular grammar for the week. For example, I would tell them that past tense means that something happened in the past. I then would give them a list of words in two columns, one for present tense and one for past tense. The following day, or during the week, learners would be given the columns with blank spaces to fill in the present or past tense words. Sometimes they were given sentences with two words in brackets and had to choose the correct one for the sentence. Writing extended text (composition) was the same as we were taught in higher primary school when I was a learner.

Gains (2010) conducted research with 27 foundation phase teachers from various socioeconomic school backgrounds in South Africa. This study aimed to examine the teachers' conceptualisations about literacy and how their early experiences in literacy related to their present understanding and how it influenced their classroom practice. One of the findings of this study was that their practices suggested a narrow understanding of the nature and development of early literacy and how to instil a love for reading so that children can read enjoyably (Gains, 2010). Similarly, I taught reading and composition and assessed learners the same way I remembered being taught from my higher primary schooling. This kind of teaching

was quick and easy for me to mark, but learners were denied the opportunity to think and develop their reading and writing skills.

3.8 Further education

In 1994 my peers and I decided as a group to further our studies and we registered for the Higher Diploma in Education with the Natal College of Education. This course was the requirement for acceptance into an honours degree at university. The institution was in town (Pietermaritzburg) so it was easy for us to attend classes in the afternoon after school from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. My learning at this institution was not very different from the previous college of education. In the module called Junior Primary Studies, I learnt that a lack of reading and writing skills and knowledge of spelling could negatively affect the child's progress in all subjects, causing their overall performance to deteriorate. Another thing I learnt was that an effective method of teaching learners to read in any language begins with phonics. That is the kind of practice we were assessed on during our group teaching in class.

In 1998 I decided to pursue my studies and registered for an honours degree at a well-recognised university with a good reputation for producing competent professionals in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. My degree included a module, Language in Learning and Teaching, which was about language and social power. This module equipped me with the knowledge that teaching learner's language provides them with the ability to communicate in a way that is understood by the society. We also learnt that language and literacy is the main component of power and identity is encompassed within the beliefs, practices and cultural values of a society (Perry, 2008). In this module we used newspapers and magazines through which I was trained that a teacher, together with learners, can use old newspapers to create stories as well as their own magazines to be read by other people. Learners can also make class stories using pictures taken from outdated magazines and newspapers. We learnt that these activities stimulate learners' creativity and develop them into good readers and writers. I tried this strategy with my learners. They were good at cutting out and pasting pictures but very few could write anything about pictures. I now understand that one of the causes of low literacy skills and poor academic achievement in my classroom could be due to poor instructional practice. As much as I was aware that learners needed to learn how to read and write, I did not have the strategies to teach them how to read and write, and I did not have the skills of encouraging reading within and beyond the classroom setting (Ntuli & Pretorius, 2009). So, my teaching of language was still dominated by teaching vocabulary.

Another degree module was Issues and Strategies for Multilingual Classrooms, from which I learnt that using code-switching in class promotes classroom interaction, as it builds up the learner's understanding of the lesson. It also promotes teacher-pupil unity and the teacher can use it to advance their interpretation of what is being taught to make it accessible to learners. In my case, code-switching was not only for the interest of learners, as I was teaching in a deep rural area where learners did not come from a literacy background, but I used this strategy to my own advantage because I was not proficient in English.

I then enrolled at the same institution in 2016 for a Master's degree with the desire to learn how to do research. For all the modules in the first semester, we were required to write assignments that equipped us with skills for academic writing. Developing these skills supported me in the second semester when developing a research proposal and throughout the journey of writing my thesis. When doing this degree, I learnt how to structure my writing to be easily followed and understood by the reader. This was a very challenging experience, as my literacy skills did not develop progressively over my educational levels. I learnt that meaningful writing has an introductory paragraph that guides a reader and progresses coherently to the conclusion that restates the main idea and reiterates the important evidence that supports the argument. While I studied for this degree, my writing gradually developed with the support from lecturers and my supervisors. This has also helped me to teach my learners how to write their own stories, even at a level as low as Grade 3.

3.9 Transformation in my teaching

My teaching approach did not change from 1992 until 2008, when the Foundations for Learning campaign was introduced to schools. This was a four-year national literacy and numeracy programme that provided teachers with lesson plans and resources for effective teaching and learner assessment. This was the year in which I moved to another school. The campaign emphasised that isiZulu phonics should be taught from the context of the story. When I could not find a story from books, I could create a short paragraph comprising of words with the phonics I wanted to teach. This was different from what I had been doing for many years. With this methodology, the teacher had to read the story to the learners, and they read after the teacher. After that, learners identified the words with the sound that was common in many words. The teacher wrote those words on a separate chart and then learners underlined the targeted sound from the words. This method was only for teaching phonics; however, it helped the children to see how the words were used in the sentence and get their meaning.

The Foundations for Learning campaign ran from 2008 to 2011, after which was the development of a single comprehensive CAPS, as a result of the amendment of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and improvements to its implementation had occurred. The conception of the CAPS is to teach the five components of reading for the foundation phase: phonics awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, it does not explicitly specify an approach to teaching these components. Teachers used different approaches in their teaching and I did not have an explicit approach. I tended to mix all the approaches that I had ever used.

In 2012, I moved to a new school again, where I was the Head of Department (HOD) in the foundation phase. Towards the end of the first term in 2012, my school was introduced to the R2L programme, which is a teaching professional programme and a teaching methodology. It integrates the teaching of the curriculum in all stages of schooling with the teaching of reading and writing skills (Millin & Millin, 2014). The programme was delivered to my school by a non-governmental organisation to try and address the widely known crisis of learners who cannot read with meaning and to develop writing in both their home language and in EFAL. The training of teachers was every Wednesday from 13:00 to 15h00 from March until September 2012. During the training I acquired the knowledge of genre and became aware that each type of text I teach has its specific purpose, structure and language patterns. I learnt that reading is learnt in conjunction with writing and these cannot be separated. The activities in R2L are built in a five-stage cycle of steps in the foundation phase with the teacher providing extra support to learners until they reach the stage of confidence and ability. I was also introduced to a fourteen-point scale of assessing learners' reading and writing for different grades.

Initially, all the teachers in my school did not want to attend the training and to start implementing the methodology in our classrooms. It was the principal who wanted to see all of us doing the training and he prohibited requests for an early departure on Wednesdays.

Teachers had been called and had to comply with the professional development activities regulated by people outside the classroom environment, but some of them did not correspond with teachers' needs or were consistent to their daily practice, thus rarely improving teaching practice (Calvert, 2016). I assume that was the reason we were not motivated to attend. Other teachers often feel scared of learning a new thing because of the changes that would be expected in their classroom practice (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Because of our attitude towards the

workshop, when we saw the facilitators coming, we called them "the principal's people" and referred to the programme as "this principal's thing".

Our principal believed in transformation and in maintaining the good reputation of the school. He instructed that during the integrated quality management systems (IQMS), class visits the heads of department should evaluate the implementation of R2L and support teachers. The IQMS is a programme initiated by the Department of Education to monitor and support the process of ensuring quality education in all public schools. In this way, I was forced as an HOD to dedicate myself to taking up the methodology so that I would be able to support teachers. I then started to implement it in Grade 2 while the training was still in progress. I used it in all subjects, including mathematics and life skills, and I realised that my learners' participation was changing and developed a love for the methodology. I also noticed an improvement in my learners' motivation to learn and in their attitude towards reading and writing. By October of the same year, my learners were able to read with understanding isiZulu books, having words with four syllables, as well as English short stories. From then my teaching practice changed. That was the professional development from which I acquired knowledge and skills to broaden my understanding of the field and improve my professional practice.

In 2017, the Jika Imfundo campaign was launched by the Department of Education in our district (Metcalfe, 2018). This programme consists of teacher toolkits comprising of lesson plan documents and trackers. The curriculum in the lesson plan is aligned with the CAPS. It stipulates how the teacher should go about teaching mathematics and languages and specifies expectations about learners' responses during the interaction. Shortly after that campaign launch, the primary school reading improvement programme (PSRIP) for English was rolled out in some schools to replace Jika Imfundo for English (PSRIP, 2016). Despite all these changes, I decided to continue using the R2L methodology in conjunction with the departmental programmes.

3.10 Learning from my memories

From the reflection on my memories, I have learnt that home literacy was a strong foundation in my home language, isiZulu, as I was engaged in reading the bible and discussion every night. My learning in the lower primary school (foundation phase) was difficult, as we had no books to read. Learning to read was characterised by memorising sounds and words and we were not given homework to practise reading and writing. The classroom ethos was not supportive of learning, so there was no motivation to learn. I had a fear of failing the spelling test and of

punishment, which was the order of the day. The teacher dominated the lessons, so for us it was just chorusing the answers and reading words that had no meaning for us. Using slates implied that handwriting was not a priority. By the end of Grade 4, I could decode words, but could not make meaning of sentences or longer texts. In the senior primary, Grade 5, the LoLT changed to English. I had to write the compositions with unfamiliar topics. We had textbooks, but I could not read for meaning in either isiZulu home language or in English, so memorisation continued. Even in high school, I still could not read for meaning. I could not understand spoken English and therefore teachers used code-switching and gave explanations in the home language for us to understand concepts and stories. Reflecting on my experiences of learning made me realise that for many years of my teaching I did not have skills to motivate my learners to love reading. Nor did I not support them to develop reading and comprehension skills. Doing this self-study has helped me to discover that the challenges I had in my classroom were caused by my own teaching that was influenced by my experiences of having scary teachers.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to narrate both the exciting and the frustrating experiences I had from childhood and their impact on my personal and professional journey. I have explained the challenges of learning without proper school infrastructure and learning resources, and that we did not have proper school buildings, the chalkboard was too small and the teacher could not leave the work on it for long enough for us to see and learn from it. We could not copy the work to learn at home as there were no exercise books so we had to learn by writing on slates.

I also described the duties that girls had to perform at school that wasted teacher-learner contact time and the abuse of power we experienced from teachers. We did not have enough tuition time, as it was wasted when girls went to fetch water in the mornings and we finished earlier on a Friday to mix cow dung with water and clean the floor. Moreover, corporal punishment and humiliation were the order of the day.

Then I discussed the teaching approach that was used to teach languages, which became our legacy over the years. The drilling method that was used pushed us to memorise to save ourselves from daily punishment and the oral orientation deprived us of exposure to book reading.

These experiences created an unhealthy teaching and learning environment which resulted in fear and demotivation, and also contributed to poor academic achievement. Thus, I decided to

conduct this self-study to evaluate and reflect on my own practice, to understand myself as a person and as a teacher. Then, the object was to learn from my experiences and improve my teaching to develop my learners' reading competences in isiZulu home language.

The next chapter describes and reflects on the first two cycles of lessons that I taught using R2L. I describe the particular lesson that did not proceed until the end and how I improved my teaching in the cycle of lessons that followed.

CHAPTER FOUR: Exposing myself to a vulnerable situation

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to make myself the subject of my own inquiry in order to understand the challenges I experienced in my classroom regarding my teaching as well as my learners' participation in lessons. This self-study was the methodology I instituted to explore ways to improve my teaching practice. In addition, I aimed to get a deeper insight into the learners' minimal participation in my lessons. This seemed to be caused by a negative learning environment, with me dominating the lessons and discouraging learners from participating confidently. I video recorded my lessons so that I could reflect on my classroom practices later.

This study focused on my teaching of isiZulu using the R2L methodology in a township primary school to improve the levels of reading comprehension in the home language. Enhancing reading skills in Grade 3 would likely facilitate a smooth transition to the intermediate phase, as higher levels of literacy and language proficiency learners acquire from the foundation phase determines levels of success in upper grades (Pretorius, 2014; Sibanda, 2017). Hence, I was enthusiastic about improving my knowledge and skills in teaching reading.

The previous chapter, presented the narrative of my lived experiences to address my first research question: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to teach isiZulu reading by drawing from my own memories?* This question stemmed from my frustrating experiences in my classroom, which prompted me to examine my teaching practice. I wrote about my personal history to explore the impact of my past experiences on the current situation in my classroom in order to improve my teaching practices. Exploring my memories revealed that listening to bible stories and being engaged in discussions at home and in Sunday school built a strong foundation of literacy. Reflecting on my learning in the lower primary school revealed that it was different from home activities, as there were no reading books at school. Instead, our learning depended on memorising sounds and words written by the teacher on the chalkboard. I learnt from my memories that we did not learn much in the classroom, as the teacher was always dominating the lessons, and our role in learning was to read the words, as a whole group, that had no meaning to us. My memories also revealed that having bad handwriting had likely resulted from my childhood when we used slates on which we could not practise handwriting skills.

In Chapter three, I described my experiences of learning to read in a daunting and unhealthy classroom atmosphere without a good teacher-learner relationship. Working with my memories taught me to create a safe and positive learning classroom for my learners. This is one of the strategies used for motivating learners to participate in the classroom (Acevedo, 2020). Since I began using Reading to Learn, I realised that my role as a teacher is to guide and facilitate learning while children are engaged in reading and discussing texts. Learners participate with confidence if they can relate to the text they are reading. Reading and writing on familiar topics enhances their fluent reading and comprehension (Millin & Millin, 2014). My memories enlightened me about the importance of providing learners with text books and giving them homework to practise reading at home. These practices facilitate knowledge of language and develops the skills of reading with meaning and the love for books. Then, by the end of Grade 3, they would be likely to have good foundational reading skills to allow a smooth switch to English as the LoLT in Grade 4 (Sibanda, 2017).

In this chapter, I address my second research question: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' confidence to participate?* I describe and reflect on the first two cycles of lessons using R2L and the changes that have taken place in my teaching since I was introduced to the R2L methodology. The title of this chapter is "Exposing myself to a vulnerable situation*"* because conducting self-study is about exploring one's practice, driven by a desire to learn and develop knowledge and skills. However, this practice exposes the researcher to a vulnerable situation (Loughran, 2004). Initially talking about my study to critical friends and writing a narrative about myself (see Chapter three) was a challenging venture. In this chapter I reflect on my first two cycles of lessons with critical friends. While writing about it, I felt vulnerable exposing my weaknesses. But I gradually developed a more positive view and became comfortable with the sense of vulnerability, as this tension could compromise the study.

I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of the language in education policy in South Africa and the CAPS. This discussion provides an understanding of the importance of improving learners' reading skills in their home language in the foundation phase, which induced my desire to improve my teaching of isiZulu. I then briefly explain my experiences of using the R2L Reading to Learn methodology and when I started to realise the challenges that led me to conduct this research. After that explanation, I provide an overview of the lessons that I was supposed to teach and the description of the R2L cycle. Then I describe the first lesson I

presented for video recording as data collection for this study, which did not go well. I used the collage to reflect on and describe the frustrating situation that led to the failure of that lesson. Then I describe the second cycle of lessons where I improved my teaching. I describe the concept of scaffolding, which is the framework for this study, and I explain the strategies that I used to support the development of social cognitive aspects in my classroom. I conclude the chapter by discussing my learnings by reflecting on the lessons that I taught.

4.2 Language in Education Policy and the CAPS

After the apartheid era in South Africa, the new language policy in the South African Education Act of 1996 that came with the constitution aimed at recognising all indigenous African languages and making them official, resulting in 12 official languages that also included sign language. The country's official languages are English, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa, and isiZulu (Department of Basic Education, 1996). The main goal of the LiEP was to improve equality in education so that learners receive a high-quality education regardless of the environment where they come from and to promote multilingualism. It was also to enhance communication for people from different language groups and protect previously marginalised languages.

The norms and standards for languages for South African public schools (South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996) states that in the African home language context, the home language is used as the LoLT up to Grade 3. After three years, learners switch to English as the LoLT in Grade 4, while the home language is retained as a subject and is continuously developed (Department of Basic Education, 1996).

The majority of South Africans are home language speakers of African languages which means that 70% of schools in South Africa offer African languages as the LoLT for three years, with English as the First Additional Language (FAL) (Spaull et al., 2020). In these schools, the LoLT switches to English in Grade 4. This makes English a LoLT in about 90% of schools from Grade 4 with African home languages remaining as a subject. The remaining 10% of children learn in Afrikaans home language as their LoLT (Barnes, 2004; Department of Basic Education, 1996; Spaull et al., 2020).

According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), children learn vocabulary at home and come to Grade 1 with that knowledge as a foundation for learning to read and write in their mother tongue. Similarly, Pretorius (2010) explains that the home, community and

socioeconomic status are the external social systems from which the behaviour of reading is acquired. This behaviour is acquired during the parent-child interaction around language and reading-based activities. Against that background, the CAPS official curriculum seems to assume that learners will have attained a high level of reading and writing skills in their home language in Grade 3 and the ability to understand English in Grade 4 (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, this curriculum offers a slow provision of phonics, as it does not provide phonics instruction in Grade R (Hiralaal, 2017), resulting in the letter-sound relationships introduced up until learners reach Grade 3, which means that they reach this grade without having enough knowledge of phonics as a resource to help them decode written words. This delay of phonics teaching has a negative impact on teaching other forms of reading in Grade 3 such as group guided and independent reading and hinders the development of reading fluency and comprehension which learners should be acquiring through independent reading. Thus, the reality in the classrooms demonstrates that many learners do not cope with learning in English as the LoLT from Grade 4 onwards, as they have not developed sufficient vocabulary and understanding in English. This continues into high school and tertiary education (Desai, 2016). As a result, most teachers generally code-switch during the lessons to help learners understand the subject matter (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004; Shinga & Pillay, 2021). Code switching refers to the teacher alternating the use of English and learners' home language in the classroom. In this context, I decided to improve my teaching, since Grade 3 is a critical class that determines failure or success in learners' switch to English as LoLT in Grade 4 and their continuous success in schooling (Pretorius, 2014; Sibanda, 2017).

4.3 My experiences with the Reading to Learn methodology

I learned how to use the Reading to Learn methodology in 2012. For seven years after this training I had been alternating with teaching learners from Grade 1 to Grade 3 in a school where all teachers were using the R2L methodology in their teaching. Learners in that school were familiar with the strategies of the methodology from Grade R, so I could see improvement in reading even in Grade 1. I was satisfied that the method that I was using was effective in teaching reading. I also believed that my learners were improving more than their peers from other classes and other schools. In 2018, I moved to another school where I was the only teacher who was using Reading to Learn and I had to introduce learners to these new strategies of learning. A challenge I encountered was a lack of participation during lessons, so there needed to be an improvement in reading and writing extended texts. I also noticed the tension during

our interactions and the learners that were achieving seemed unhappy to be in the classroom. Thus, in 2019, I embarked on this self-study to reflect on my teaching and explore my Grade 3 children's learning.

4.4 Description of the Reading to Learn methodology

Reading to Learn is a programme that was designed to integrate the teaching of the curriculum across all phases and grades of schooling, teaching children the knowledge and skills needed to read different genres and how to learn from reading. Its principle is to provide a highly explicit and supportive teaching process that continuously affirms learners and develops their learning potential. It is based on carefully planned teacher-learner interactions within a cycle of six stages starting from the level of text where learners make sense of the content and its organisation. However, the R2L cycle can be adapted for different levels of learners; hence, in South Africa, it was adapted to five stages for the foundation phase learners (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). From the level of the text, the cycle moves down to the paragraph or the sentence where learners identify the sequence of words and the meaning of word groups, then to the arrangement of letters and how they form the words. Low-achieving learners receive maximum scaffolding as they develop language and the skills needed for independent reading, comprehension and writing texts (Rose, 2005).

The first stage of Reading to Learn is preparing for reading, followed by shared book reading with all learners. Then the content of a subject is dealt with during detailed reading activities including sentence making, sentence writing and spelling. The cycle continues to the joint rewriting of the story and ends with learners' individual writing.
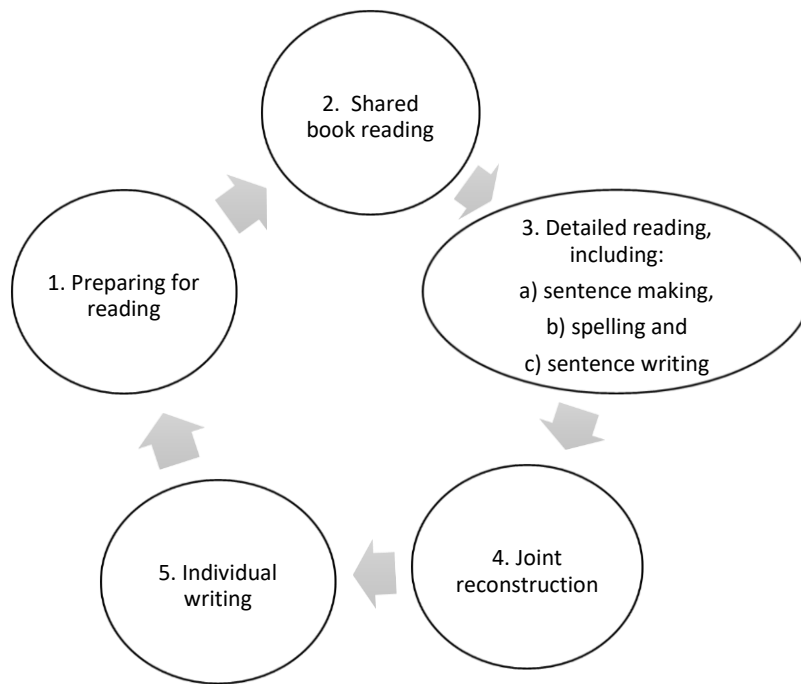
Figure 10. Reading to Learn cycle in the foundation phase

1.Preparing for reading

The teacher links the text to learners' prior knowledge or personal experiences through questions and brief discussions. Then the teacher summarises the text in sequence and meaning using the pictures from the book to provide background knowledge about the story. The teacher engages learners by asking them questions for their input that lead to how the story would unfold and then starts the actual reading of the story.

2. Shared book reading

The significance of reading to the class is to demonstrate how to pronounce words correctly and to model reading with fluency and flow. After that, in the foundation phase, the teacher reads together with the learners, elaborating on the unfamiliar words and involves learners' input to stimulate their thinking.

3. Detailed reading

Three activities are included: sentence making, spelling and sentence writing. This stage enables learners to understand how the text unfolds and to be able to write similar text by themselves. One of the key strengths of the R2L methodology is that every reading exercise is followed by a writing exercise (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). In this study, I did not explore

writing. I only provide a brief description of writing activities as my study only focused on reading fluency and comprehension.

3a. sentence making

In this activity the teacher picks out a sentence or two from the story to work with; this selection depends on the grade or level of the learners. This is the stage in which the teacher unlocks the text by giving a summary of each sentence and then reading it to the learners. In sentence making, as one component of detailed reading, the content and language patterns are taught. The teacher asks learners cue questions and gives them the position cues and clues to allow them to identify keywords in the sentence. As the learners give answers, the teacher affirms them and then elaborates on the meaning and language and then instructs them to cut out words or word groups from the sentence or paragraph. They put the words together again to reconstruct the sentence. This activity develops their knowledge of vocabulary and meaning as they recognise the words in and out of the sentence. During this stage, learners are given strategies to construct meaning by sifting important information in the text, and they develop skills for reading other texts.

3b. spelling

Pretorius (2015) asserts that spelling knowledge helps learners to read and write quickly with accuracy and fluency. Therefore, after the learners have learnt to recognise words in and out of the sentence, they practise spelling together with the support of the teacher. The words are practised in spelling patterns based on onset and rhyme, prefixes and suffixes, compound words and in multiple syllables. The teacher uses the look-cover-write-check approach. After checking the word for themselves, learners can write it at least three times to embed the word into their long-term memory.

3c. sentence writing

Once learners can spell the words in the paragraph, the teacher puts the sentence or paragraph with gaps on the chalkboard for learners to fill in using the spelling words they have learnt. This is done until even the weaker learners can remember the paragraph or sentence. This activity is followed by writing the paragraph from memory, with the teacher scaffolding all learners. The sentence writing activity, and the following stages of the cycle focus on writing activities. As mentioned earlier, I discuss the stages of writing to complete the description of the Reading to Learn cycle, not for the purpose of this study.

4. Joint rewriting

Leaners rewrite the new text of the same genre. The teacher explicitly guides and scaffolds learners to practise writing using the structure of the original text as a model. This is to guide them to understand the language used in the text and to use the same in their own writing. Learners brainstorm new ideas, characters and situations, particularly in narratives. This gives them a chance to go over the keywords identified in the detailed reading that were underlined or highlighted and construct meaningful sentences using those keywords, or their synonyms. This activity is aligned with the psycholinguistic perspective of language acquisition through communicating and recreating own experiences orally with others, with the teachers' support, and the ideas are written and later can be read, even for pleasure (Flanagan, 1995). Joint rewriting of the text provides lots of opportunities for learners to practise grammar, spelling, punctuation, handwriting and letter formation, and paragraphing.

5. Individual construction

Learners are expected to write the text on their own using the language skills learnt in the class. Although their text will be new content, they follow the language patterns learnt from the original text and joint rewriting. The joint rewriting work is removed from the chalkboard except for the keywords. In narratives, learners read through the original story again, and the new one from joint rewriting, discussing text patterns and key elements. Then, they write their own stories using the ideas that were brainstormed. This is where learners demonstrate knowledge of vocabulary and how language is used. Some learners will be able to write independently at this stage, then the teacher supports the struggling ones with text organisation, language features and grammatical structures.

4.5 An overview of lessons taught

For the purposes of this study, I video recorded a set of lessons in May 2021 and then another set in September 2021. The first two videos were recorded in the second term of the year. One of them was recorded by my colleague using a cell phone. However, that lesson did not go well due to the negative interaction with my learners. I asked my colleague to stop taking the video at the first stage of the R2L cycle, called preparing for reading. I then asked one of the trainers from the R2L organisation to do another video recording the following week. The following table provides an overview of the R2L lessons that I taught which were video recorded for the purpose of this study.

Table 4. Overview of the lessons that I taught covering the R2L cycle

Date	Isihloko sendaba (Title of the story)	Okufundiswayo (Topics to teach)	Content concepts and skills	R2L stage
4 May 2021	Esiqiwini sase Pilanesberg (*Visiting Pilanesberg Game Reserve*)	Ukufunda (Reading)	Fluency and comprehension	Shared book reading
5 May 2021		Izimpawu zokuloba (Punctuations e.g. comma, full stop, capital letters)	Using punctuation correctly in sentences	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
6 May 2021		Amagama amqondofana (Synonyms)	Knowledge of and use of synonyms	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
7 May 2021		Imisindo (Phonics) – chw, khw,	Identify three letter sounds, recognise learnt sounds from words	spelling
10 May 2021	Esiqiwini sase Pilanesberg (*Visiting Pilanesberg Game Reserve*)	Ukufunda (Reading) Imisindo (Phonics) – shw, qhw, thw,	Fluency and comprehension, Identify the introduction, body and conclusion in a story, identify three letter sounds, spell words correctly using knowledge of sounds	Shared book reading Spelling
11 May 2021		Using verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives in sentences	Knowledge of parts of speech	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
12 May 2021		Ubunye nobuningi bamabizo nesenzo (Singular and plurals of verbs and nouns)	Ability to use singular and plurals in speaking and writing	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
13 September 2021	Ingozi yase Moyana (*Accident at Moyana*)	Ukufunda (Reading)	Fluency and comprehension, ability to answer high order questions	Shared reading
14 September 2021		Imisebenzi eyenziwa abantu (Occupations)	Knowledge of occupations	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
15 September 2021		Isabizwana soqobo (Pronouns)	Ability to [i]use pronouns	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
16 September 2021		Imisindo (Phonics) – Amagama eqa onkamisa (Words that omit vowels)	Awareness of omission of vowel 'u' in speech and writing	Spelling

Table 5. Grade 3 Annual Teaching Plan (Department of Basic Education, 2011)

AMAKHONO OLIMI OKUMELE AFUNDISWE JIKELELE ULIMI LWASEKHAYA KUMABANGA APHANSI (IBANGA-3)

UKULALELA NOKUKHULUMA	IMISINDO	UKUFUNDA	UKUBHALA	ULIMI
• Llalela athole ingqikithi, imininingwane yendaba aphendule imibuzo evulekile. • Llalela uzindaba athole imbangela nomphumela wezindaba. • Llveza imizwa ngombalo anike nesizathu. • Llalela imiyalelo exubile elandelanayo bese enanela ngokufanele. • Uzibandakanye ekuxoxisaneni okusezingeni lokuhlalisana, amukele ahlonziphe futhi abanye akanye nabo ngendlela abakhuluma ngayo. • Wenza ngomlomo(isib.uyaxoxa ngezindaba zakhe achaze izinto ahlangabezana nazo, achaze izehlakalo.) • Lixoxa indaba enohlaka olulula kanye nabalingiswa abahlukile.	• Uthisha akaqale ngokubukeza imisindo efundwe ebangeni2. • Kulelibanga abanfundi kulindeleke ukuba bayifunde yonke imisindo etholakala olimini lesizulu. • Uthisha akaqhubeke athule imisindo enhamvuntathu njengo"ngc,ngk,ngq". • Uthishaethula umsindo ejobelela umsindo "W"kwimisindo enhlamvumbili.isibone lo (dlw, hlw, klw, chw, khw, qhw, shw,chw,xhw, gcw, gxw, gqw.) • Uthisha wethula umsindo onhlamvune isibonelo(ngqw,ngcw, ntsh ,ndlw,nhlw,nthsw). • Uthisha wethula imisindo eyeqa	• Uthisha ufunda imibhalo ekhulisiwe njengezinkondlo, izincwadi ezinkulu, amaphosta nemibhaloyemishini nekilasi lonke(ukufunda ngokuhlangnyela) • Sebenzisa izithombe ukukhombisa injongo yezikhangiso kubathengi. • Uthisha ufunda incwadi nekilasi lonke(ukufunda ngokuhlanganyela)bachaze ukulandelana kwezigameko nobudlelwanobembangela nomphumela. • Xoxa nabantu uphinde ufunde kabanzi ngenhlosos yokuthola ulwazi ngemisebenzi abayenzayo. • Sebenzisa ulwazi olusesithombeni isib. Ukuba yingxenye yokuzungeza isikole balandela izinkomba zebalazwe. • Thola usebenzise umsuka wolwazi njengamalunga	• Unikeza imibono, amagama itanye nemisho endabni yekilasi (uma kubhalwa ngokuhlanganyelala) • Usebenzisa amasu okuzilungiselela ukubhala ukuze athole ulwazi kanye namacebo okubhala. • Ubhala ingxenye yezindaba ezimfushane nengezizathu ezahlukene(inkulumomphikis wano) • Ubhala ngokwakhe okwamehlela ngezindlela ezahlukeke (isib. isiqeshana sephephandaba) • Wenza umbhalo lokuqala (draft) abhale ahlele abuye ashicillele indaba yakhe okungenani enezigaba ezimbili(zibe nemisho eyi-12) ukuze abanye bekwazi ukuyifuinda • Ubhala aphinde asebenzise imisho (engaba yi-6 kuya kweyi-8)ukuchaza ngesihloko ukuze assize ekwakheni indab yekilasi.	• Bhala incwadi elula obuyibuka. • Sebenzisa ulimi oluyilo ukuze abanye abafundi bakwazi ukufunda ngokuqonda lokho obekubhaliwe. • Sebenzisa izimpawu zokuloba eziyizo:osonhlamvukazi,o khefana,onobuza, nabacaphuni. • Sebenzisa ulwazi lemisindo nemithetho yesibizelo ukubhala amagama angajwayelekile. • Zakhale inqolobane yamagama nesichazamazwi sakho usebenzisa uhlamvu lokuqala lwegama njengesango, vula. • Khomba usebenzise amabizo, izichasiso, izenzo kanye nezilandiso, ngokuyikho.
• Usebenzisa ulimi olunemifanekisomqondo.(i sib.usho Amahlya Kanye neziphicaphicwano.) • Lixoxisana nomuntu umbuze imibuzo, ngesizathub sokuthole okuthile. • Usebenzisa amagama afana nokuthi: inhloko yomusho,isenzo,umenziwa , umbuzo, isitatimende, umyalelo, umqondofana, umqondo ongafani/ ophikisayo, isibabazo.	unkamisa, isibonelo.(mb-umbuzo/umubuzo, msh-umshado/umushado, njll.)	omphakathi womtapo wezincwadi • Thola isingeniso, umzimba nesiphetho sendaba. • Sebenzisa okuqukethwe ,uhla lokungaphakathi ,Kanye nezinombolo zamakhasi ukuthola ulwazi. • Sebenzisa amagama abalulekile Kanye nezihloko ukuthola ulwazi ezincwadini ezinezindba ezinamaqiniso. • Phendula imibuzo esezingeni eliphezulu ebhekiswe esiqheshini esifundiwe.	• Usebenzisa izakhiwo zolwazi uma ubhala (uhla lokwenza ukudla) • Ungcina idayari isonton elilodwa. • Ubhala ukubuyekezwa kwencwadi okulula ubukezo ncwadi olulula. • Uhlela ngokulandelana ulwazi ufake ngaphansi kwezihloko. • Ufingqa abhale ulwazi (isib. esebenzisa ibalazwe ngqondo) • Sebenzisaizimpawu zokubhala ngendlela efanele (isib. osonhlamvukazi, ongqi, amakhefu, izibabazo nomacaphuna.	• Ubunye nobuningi bamabizo • Isabizwana soqobo.

In the week of the first attempt of the video recorded lesson, the curriculum required me to teach isiZulu synonyms and to emphasise how to use punctuation and I was going to teach the phonics *chw* and *khw*. According to the CAPS, learners in Grade 1 learn all the single

consonants and by end of the year they start to learn double consonants. In Grade 2, they learn all the double consonants and towards the end of the year they start three letter sounds (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In Grade 3, learners learn 3, 4, and 5 letter sounds, including those that omit the vowels. By the end of Grade 3 they should have learnt all the sounds from their home language.

Table 6. An extract from the CAPS document on the overview of the language skills to be taught in isiZulu home language

AMAKHONO OLIMI OKUMELE AFUNDISWE JIKELELE OLIMINI LWASEKHAYA KUMABANGA APHANSI (IBANGA R – 3)				
	IBANGA-R	**IBANGA- 1**	**IBANGA-2**	**IBANGA-3**
IMISINDO	• Ukwazi ukubona amagama akhombisa isigqi nomilolozelo ejwayelekile Isib. Owa mntwana, owa mntwana • Uqala ukubona ukuthi amagama akhiwe yimisindo Isib. Umsindo wohlamvu loku-qala egameni lakhe • Uhlukanisa imisho ngamagama (NGOMLOMO) • Kumele abafundi bakwazi ukubona le misindo: a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j,k,l,m,n,o,p,q,r, s,t,u,v,w x,y,z • Uhlukanisa amagama ngokwezinhlamvu • Uhlukanisa ngokulalela nangokubona ongwaqa nonkamisa ekuqaleni kwamagama	• Kumele ukuba abafundi bayakwazi ukuyibona bayikhombe le misindo: a,b,c, d,e,f,g,h,i,j,k,l,m,n,o,p,q,r,s,t,u,v,w x,y,z • Uthisha akaqale ngokubuyekeza le misindo engenhla. • Kuleli banga kulindeke ukuba abafundi bafunde yonke imisindo enhlamvunye ngokuhleliwe. • Uthisha kufanele aqale ngonkamisa ukuthula imisindo: a, e, i, o,u. • Ungwaqa ngamunye kumele aham-bisane nonkamisa. • Uthisha makenze isiqiniseko sokuthi abafundi sebeyayazi yonke imisindo enhlamvunye ngaphambi kokudlulela emisindweni enhlamvumbili. • Uthisha makethule imisindo enhlamvumbili ejobelela umsindo-""h"" isibonelo.(bh, ch, kh, ph, qh,sh, th, xh, hh).aland-elise ngemisindo ejobelela msindo '" l "' isibonelo.(dl, hl, kl).	• Uthisa akaqale ngokubukeza imisindo efundwe ebangeni lokuqala. • Kulelibanga kulindeleke ukuba abafundi bayifunde yonke imisindo enhlavumbili. • Uthisha akaqhubeke ethule imisindo enhlamvumbili ngokuphongoza imisindo "" m no n "" isibonelo (nc, nd, ng, nj, nk, nq,ns,gq, nt, nx, ny,nw, nz ; mb,mf, mp,mv,). • Uthisha uzothula imisindo ejobelela umsindo ""w"" isibonelo. (cw, dw, gw, jw, hw, kw,lw, nw, qw, sw, tw, xw, zw). • Uthisha uzofundisa eminye imisindo enhlamvumbili njengo: gc, gx, gq, ts. • Kulelibanga kuzofundiswa imisindo enh-lamvuntathu elandelayo isibonelo. (ndl, nhl, ncw, ndw, ngw, nkw, njw, nqw, ntw, nsw, nzw)	• Uthisha akaqale ngokubukeza imisindo efundwe ebangeni 2. • Kulelibanga abafundi kulindeleke ukuba bayifunde yonke imisindo etholakala olimini lwesiZulu. • Uthisha akaqhubeke ethule imisindo enhlamvuntathu njengo "ngc, ngx, ngq ". • Uthisha wethula imisindo ejobelela umsindo "w" kwimisindo enhlamvumbili. Isibonelo (dlw, hlw, klw, chw, khw, qhw, shw, thw, xhw, gcw, gxw, gqw.) • Uthisha wethula umsindo onhlamvune isibonelo.(ngqw, ngcw,ntsh, ndlw, nhlw,ntshw) • Uthisha wethula imisindo eyeqa unkami-sa isibonelo. (mb – umbuzo/ umubuzo, msh -umshado/ umushado, njll.)

The table 6 illustrates the content contained in the CAPS document that is organised for each grade from Grade R to Grade 3. The purpose of teaching the sounds *chw and khw* is to enable learners to know and identify three-letter sounds. Phonics serves as the prerequisite for learning to identify different sounds of the language and decoding (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Decoding is a foundation and entry point into reading fluency. It is the process of converting symbols and codes into language and the ability to use the knowledge of letters and sounds, blending them to pronounce the words regardless of making meaning (Hoadley, 2012; Pretorius, 2010). Therefore, the teaching of phonics enables learners to recognise letter-sound relationships, combine the letters to form words and recognise the words from the text. Poor decoding hinders fluency and reading comprehension, as these skills develop through practise, reading the words from the text (Pretorius, 2010). It is important to note that the programme of teaching phonics is provided in CAPS as a guideline; schools may use the programme of their choice, as long as they stick to the curriculum and time provided by policy (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Therefore, I was at liberty to use R2L to teach and cover the

requirements of the curriculum. In the next section I describe in detail how I conducted my R2L lessons in my class.

4.6 Description of the first lesson

The first lesson was video recorded on 4 May 2021 from 9:00 to 10:00 with 45 learners. The purpose of the lesson was to teach my learners all aspects of the isiZulu language as shown in the tables 5 and 6 however, the focus was on developing reading fluency in order to learn. The CAPS prescribes to teachers the skills they need to develop and the content they have to teach following the CAPS annual teaching plan.

I used a story from the isiZulu Department of Education workbook as the text to teach phonics. The departmental workbooks were developed for children in South Africa as part of the intervention from the department to improve learners' achievement in all subjects in the first six grades of schooling. The development of workbooks was funded by the South African treasury; thus they are distributed to all learners at no cost. All the activities in the workbook have icons that guide teachers by indicating what learners should do. It is not compulsory for all teachers to use workbooks for teaching phonics. It is according to the R2L methodology that I use the stories as the context from which I teach all the language skills required. The story for that week's lessons did not have all the phonic sounds that I needed to teach. Thus, I added one sentence in the middle of the story to cover all the sounds that I needed. This would not be a problem as the story would be read from the chart. Hence I edited the story by adding one sentence, so that I would be able to include all the phonics sounds I needed to teach. All children had their books in front of them. The title of the story was *Esiqiwini sase Pilanesburg* (Visiting the Pilanesburg game reserve). It was about children who visited a game reserve. The things that happened at the game reserve were broadcast on the television news. According to the Reading to Learn methodology, I would use the same story to teach all the language aspects for the week, but on different days.

4.6.1 Reading to Learn Stage 1: Preparing for Reading

The lesson started at 9:00 with preparing for reading. I began the lesson by asking learners where we normally get the news from. They gave answers such as from the television, radio and newspaper. I then explained that we would read a story that had been broadcast on the TV news about children who visited a game reserve. Then I asked them who had been to a game

reserve and which animals did they see. They gave different answers according to their experiences. Then I told them the page number and asked them to open their workbooks as we were going to discuss pictures and then read the story from the chart. Going through pictures together was part of shared reading, one of the factors that facilitate reading development and the acquisition of literacy skills that determine learner progress through schooling (Ntuli & Pretorius, 2009). The development of literacy skills is enhanced by the extent to which children are exposed to social interaction and the expression of thoughts through language.

I started to ask them questions based on the pictures from the departmental workbook (figure 11). My aim was to summarise the story through a picture walk. As I was talking about the pictures I told them to point at the particular picture I was talking about and I also asked them questions.
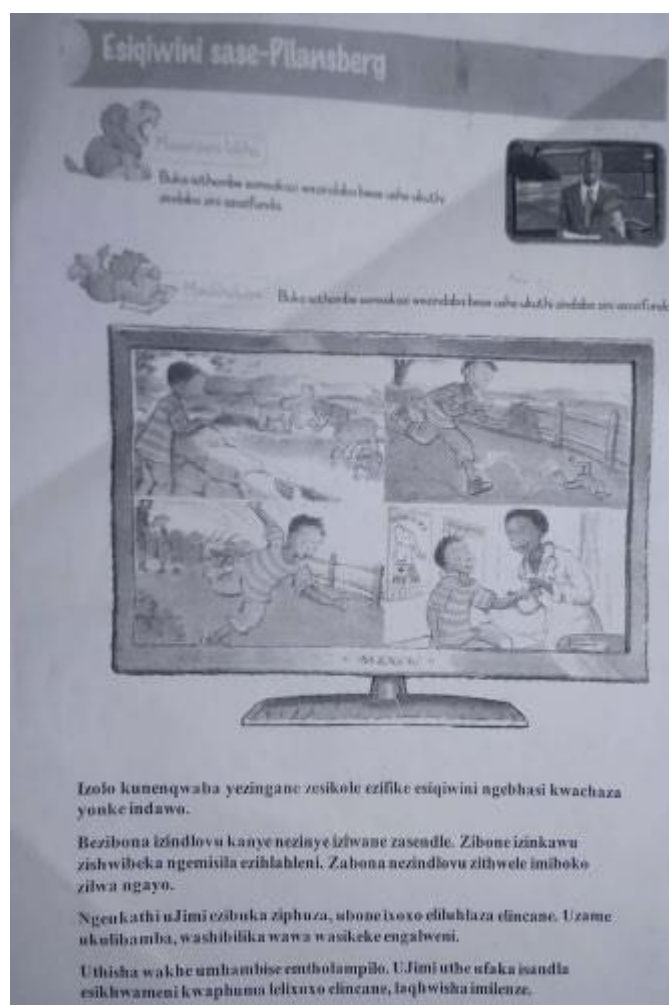
(English translation)

Visiting the Pilanesburg game reserve

Yesterday a group of school children arrived at the Pilanesburg game reserve in a bus. They came to see the elephants and rhinos and other wild animals. While Jim Smith watched the elephants drinking, he saw a small green frog. He tried to catch the frog but he slipped and cut his arm. His teacher took him to the clinic. Later Jim found the small green frog in his pocket.

Figure 11. Grade 3 story – DBE workbook terms 1 and 2

When the learners opened the page, I started by showing them the newsreader and I asked them to point at that picture. A boy in front of me pointed at the picture of a boy watching elephants.

I instantly got angry, snapped at him, and showed him the right picture. All the learners raised their heads and looked at their classmates and at me in terror. After that, I became calm, and I explained that the instruction on top of the pictures said that they should look at the picture of the newsreader and explain which news was going to be read. Then I started talking about what was happening in each picture and asked for their input. As I walked around in the rows, I saw two other children who were lost and pointing at the wrong pictures. Immediately my emotional state changed, and I shouted, telling them that they were not attentive. Then the classroom atmosphere changed again, and learners looked down and were scared to talk. As the lesson went on, I told them about what was happening in each picture.

I continued to ask them questions such as "*Lalikuphi ixoxo elincane ngesikhathi umfana emile ebuka izindlovu?*" (Where was the frog when the boy was watching the elephants?) I expected them to look for the frog and see that it was on the wall that confines the river. "*Uma nicabanga, lezindlovu ezazingaphuzi amanzi zazenzani zona?*" (What do you think the elephants that were not drinking were doing?) Very few children raised their hands to answer; others just looked down, avoiding looking at me. I became stressed and I realised that the lesson was not flowing as I was the only one talking. The few that were talking were giving wrong answers, showing that they were not clear about what I was talking about. Then I decided to abandon the lesson and told the learners that we would continue some other time.

4.7 My own reflection after the first lesson

The key focus of self-study is connected to the acquisition and development of knowledge of practice as a tool for promoting reflective teaching which enhances one's personal and professional identity (Ritter, 2009; Ritter & Hayler, 2020). Thus, as after the lesson I did the reflection to re-think my teaching and realise the strategies of refining in order to improve.

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I am very disappointed because the lesson did not go well. I had to discontinue before I had finished because of the poor classroom interaction. I do not understand why the learners could not follow the

lesson because everybody had the books in front of them. I also wondered how did it go wrong because this lesson took place in the morning at 9h00 when learners were still fresh and supposed to be lively.

I then created a collage using pictures and newspaper cuttings to represent what had happened and my response to the classroom situation (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Collage representing my classroom situation

This collage represents my understanding of the events in my classroom. The picture of the generator represents the irritating noise that I made in the class when I was teaching. The woman is shouting with her hands up, and this shows what I did when snapping at the children when they did not give the correct answer or missed book pages. Although the children did not convey any feelings through the posture of their bodies, the picture of the them blocking their ears and eyes was the mental image I formed of children irritated by the unpleasant noise. The picture of a girl sitting depicts how miserable my children looked after I had raised my voice. They sat quietly with fear, facing the ground. When they were like that they withdrew from participating in the lesson, so the lesson became unsuccessful as I had created fear and a lack of confidence. The woman demonstrating emotional strain represents how my mind and body responded to the circumstances.

Even though I could not change the education system, I was determined and believed that I could change myself. Therefore, making a collage helped me to think deeply about my practice.

However, Loughran and Northfield (1998) explain that self-study extends reflection from the personal to the public, as individual change requires openness, support and constructive criticism from others. Dialogue with others and their critiques leads to gaining insights into one's professional development (Mittapalli & Samaras, 2008). Thus, after my own reflection, I arranged a meeting with critical friends who were also implementing Reading to Learn in different schools, so that we could watch the recorded lesson together (see Chapter six). Our joint reflection and discussion about my teaching was the second opportunity to disclose my teaching. I had another critical friend, who is a retired teacher and an administrator in Reading to Learn, who observed me in action and commented on my teaching.

We picked up from the video that I was short-tempered, that my emotions tended to control the atmosphere in the classroom, which negatively affected learner participation. We also noticed inadequate lesson planning, which might have caused some gaps in the lesson presentation. We assumed that, as years went by, I had got used to the R2L methodology and had not prepared my lessons thoroughly by collecting suitable material and making pictures visible to the whole class. My critical friends suggested that I enlarge the pictures from the book to make them clearer when I discuss them with learners. That could be one of the gaps that had caused me stress and anger, yet I had shifted the blame to the children and did not realise my own faults.

This was an embarrassing moment for me, as I had never thought of myself as being so irritable. I never thought that I might have shortfalls, and I blamed the learners for everything that went wrong. But apparently, the learners were not the problem; it was I who had not enabled a classroom environment that was supportive to learning. The reflection with critical friends is discussed further in Chapter six.

4.8 Description of the second cycle of lessons

In the following week, 10 May 2021 (see Table 4 I used the same story to teach the same class other language concepts during that week. Although it was the same story, the purpose of reading for that week was to teach learners to identify the beginning, the middle and the end in the story. I was also aiming to teach how the verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives are used in sentences, to be able to use singular and plural of nouns, and the sounds *shw, qhw* and *thw* so that learners would be able to identify three letter sounds and spell words correctly, using knowledge of sounds.

When I planned for teaching this story, I prepared all the material that I would use. I enlarged the pictures that were in the book for all learners to see, as suggested by critical friends. I also wrote the story on the big chart, as shown in Figure 13, so learners could all follow the text as I pointed out words. My attitude and temper did not change instantly, and even during this lesson the anger kept cropping up, but I tried and managed to control my emotions, as I was conscious that I wanted to change.
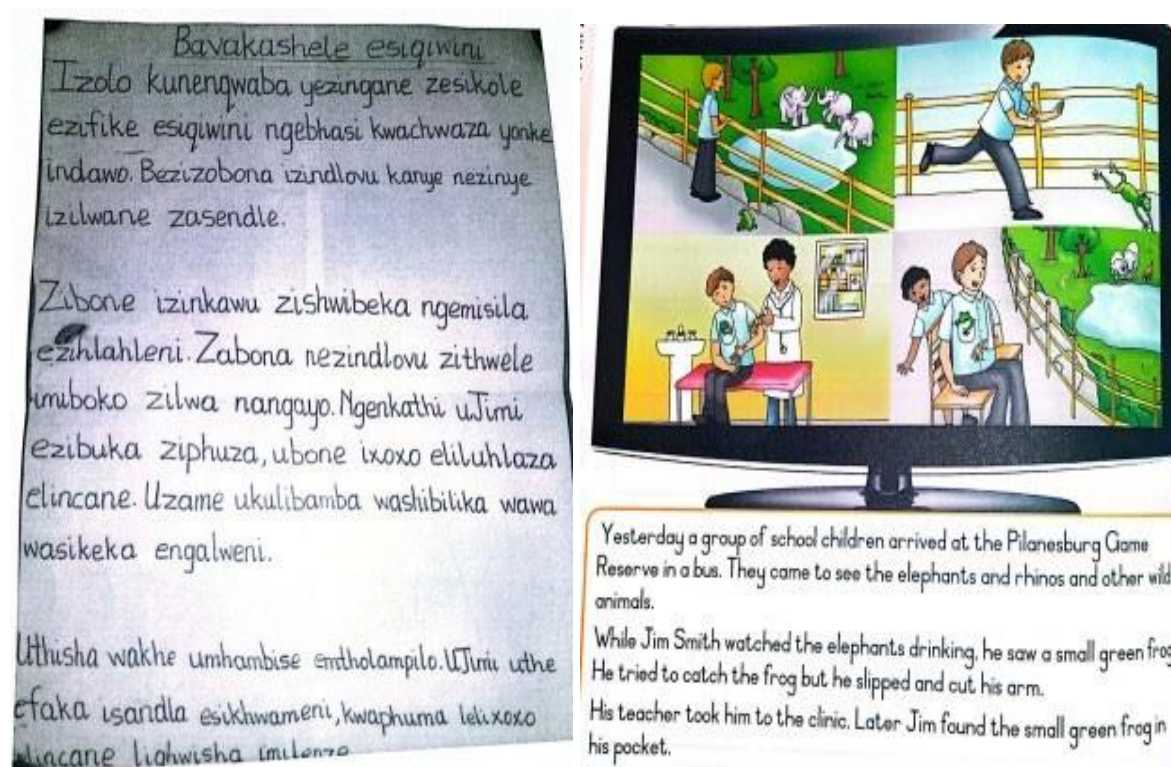
Figure 13. The story I edited written on the chart in isiZulu and with English translation

Some words from the story were not commonly used in a spoken language, such as "*kunenqwaba, kwachwaza*". Therefore, I saw a need to elaborate on them during shared reading such as "*kunenqwaba*", which means a lot, and "*kwachwaza*", which means making a lot of noise. Elaboration in R2L means to explain or give synonyms so that children understand unfamiliar words or concepts. I made my sentence strips and copies that would be used by learners. I also made the word cards that I would use to teach spelling and those that I would leave at one end of the chalkboard for learners to practise reading, as well as the sentence with gaps in which learners would fill in the missing words. In the next section I describe how I followed the R2L strategies.

4.8.1 Reading to Learn Stage 1: Preparing for reading

Preparing for reading is the first stage of the R2L cycle in which the teacher provides the background knowledge of the story. I asked the children whether they had been to the zoo. I did this to relate the story to their real-life experience. Some of them raised their hands and told the class about the animals they saw. I then asked the class why we do not have those animals in our homes. After they had given different answers, I then explained that those are wild animals, they live on their own, and they do not need any help from people. They find food and shelter for themselves. Some of them are dangerous, and they cannot live around people. The game reserves were made to protect wild animals from hunters and poachers.

After that explanation, I told the learners that we were going to read the news that was reported by the news reader on television. I then summarised the story in its sequence to give them background knowledge about it. I put the enlarged pictures on the chalkboard and started showing them what I had already discussed. At that stage, I was pointing at pictures and asking them questions to engage them in the lesson, such as, *"Bukani lezindlovu ezingaphuzi amanzi, nicabanga ukuthi zenzani?"* (Look at the elephants that were not drinking water, what do you think they are doing?) I got answers such as *"Ngicabanga ukuthi ziyahlebelana"* (I think that they whispering),*"Ngicabanga ukuthi lokhu ezikwenzayo indlela ezidlala ngayo, Ngicabanga ukuthi ziyalwa zibangisana ngendawo yokuma"* (I think that is the way they play, I think they are fighting over the spot on which they were standing). *"Ukube ubungu Jimi ubungalenzani lelixoxo uma usulibambile?"* (What would you do with a frog if you were Jim and you had caught it?) They gave different answers thus: *"Bengingayolifuya ekhaya, Bengingalakhela ibhokisi elizohlala kulo la ekilasini ukuze sonke silinakekele, Ngangizolibuka bese ngilidedela lihambe, bengizolibulala, bengizolithela ngosawoti"* (I would take it home as my pet; I would make a box to keep it in the classroom for all of us to feed; I would just look at it and let it go again; I would kill it; I would sprinkle some salt over it). I affirmed all of them, but to respond to some of their answers, I explained that all animals are an important part of nature, we must not harm them, but we need to love and protect them.

4.8.2 Reading to Learn Stage 2: Shared book reading

After talking about the pictures, I asked the class to listen and looked at the words while I modelled reading from the chart. I read the story twice loudly and clearly to model fluent reading and show them that we do not count syllables in a word when we point. After that, I

asked them to read along while I was pointing. I raised my voice where I felt that learners would not manage or where they seemed unsure. In the sections where they seemed comfortable, I lowered my voice and allowed them to take the lead. As we continued reading, I stopped and elaborated on some words, as aforementioned.

4.8.3 Reading to Learn Stage 3: Detailed reading

The next stage of the cycle is detailed reading in which there are three activities: sentence making, spelling and sentence writing. In sentence making, the teacher selects a sentence, or a few sentences, from the story that was read in shared reading, and together with the children, works with that small selection of sentences. Learners read the sentence or sentences in pairs and then take turns to cut out words they have identified as a response to the teacher's questions. (see an example of interaction below). After that, they jumble up those separated words and arrange them to reconstruct the sentence (Acevedo & Rose, 2007; Mawela, 2018). The CAPS document stipulates that in Grades 2 and 3 the teacher uses the text to develop knowledge of vocabulary, text structure and understanding of punctuations and language structure. Thus, from the part of the story I had selected, I was going to teach all the aspects of the curriculum for that week.

Detailed reading activity 1: Sentence making

For this lesson, I selected two sentences from the story from which I was going to teach the sounds *qhw*, *shw* and *thw*. Every time I write a sentence on the chalkboard I remind my learners about punctuation marks, as many of them often ignore punctuation when they read and write. After I had put the strip with two sentences on the chalkboard, I asked them to identify how many sentences there were and what showed them that there were two (see Figure 5). Those questions were to emphasise that a sentence starts with a capital letter and the full stop shows where the sentence ends.

Before reading the sentences, I summarised them like this: the first sentence tells us about the animals that the children saw swinging on the trees with their tails. The second one adds that children also saw other animals fighting with their trunks. Reading to Learn suggests that although learners had seen and read the sentences from the story, summarising them reminds the children and provides support to weaker ones (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017; Rose, 2005). It helps them to realise that it is the same story and the same sentences they have read.
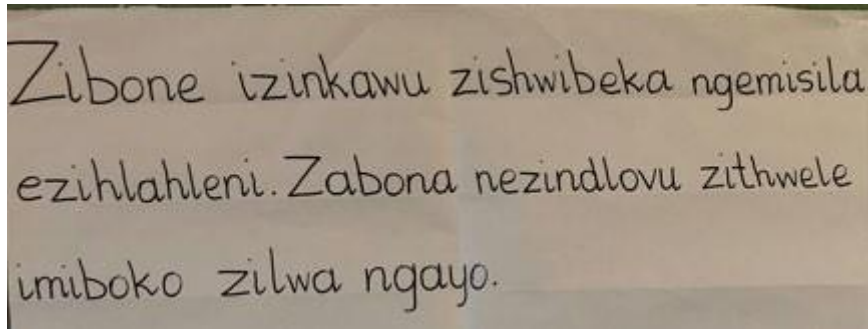
Figure 14. Sentence strip

After that short summary, I read the sentences and we all read together. Then I distributed the sentence strip for them to read in pairs. Paired reading provides an opportunity for learners to practice reading the text they have read as a class and during group guided reading until they develop fluency and the ability to read books for pleasure (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The text they read should be easier than the one from shared reading and group guided reading. The pair can read inside or outside the classroom when they have finished their classwork. However, in R2L all children work in pairs in this stage to learn a specific aspect of a language. As soon as I gave learners their sentences, they started to read. They were able to read it because they were supported during shared reading and we read it together beforehand. As they were reading, I was moving around the class, helping those who still could not point at the words correctly. This step allows the teacher to assess individual reading.

When I was satisfied that all learners were able to read the sentence, I then started to ask questions from which they would identify certain keywords from the sentence. I gave them position cues as to where they would look for the answer and gave them the meaning or synonyms of the words I wanted them to identify. After one of them had answered, I affirmed and instructed them to cut up the word and put it aside until we finished cutting all the words. The above process continues as: cue question ⟹ identify ⟹ affirm ⟹ instruct

When the children had cut up all the words, I reminded them about the structure of the original sentence. I then told them to jumble all the words and arrange them to reconstruct the sentence. They jumbled and reconstructed the sentences several times as some of them could not do it easily. I moved around helping those who could not put the sentence back together on their own until they mastered it. Children were very excited during this exercise as they were working with the sentence they had read from the story and the words that they had seen. The slower individuals could hear others reading and they could follow. Moreover, those that were struggling to write had a chance to construct sentences, as I explained to them that when they put the words on their tables they should start from the left corner of the table and move to the right as they always write in the exercise book. This activity allows the learners an opportunity to learn the meaning of words and a chance to play around with words as they recognise them from the text.

Detailed reading activity 2: Spelling

Another activity in detailed reading is spelling, where learners practise writing words they were manipulating in the sentence. When we got to spelling, learners were already familiar with the words, as they had learnt them from the story and the sentence making activity. The rationale for teaching spelling was to develop fluent reading and knowledge of vocabulary.

I told learners that we were going to practice writing the words that they had read from the sentence strip. I then gave them the resources that we used for the spelling lesson such as small green writing boards, pieces of chalk and small dusters. The strategy that I used for practising each word was to hold up the whole word and learners read them out. Then I broke the word up

into syllables, for example, *zi/shwi/be/ka*. Breaking the words into sounds or syllables teaches learners to sound out isolated parts that form the word as well as put those together to form the word (Department of Basic Education, 2011). I wrote each part of the word on the chalkboard and got the learners to write it three times on their boards until we finished practising the whole word. They read the words and then they rubbed them out. I showed them the word again, hid it and let them write it once on their boards from memory. Once they finished writing the word, I put the flash card on the chalkboard for them to see and correct themselves. After that, they wrote the word two more times. They did this to embed the words in their long-term memory.

From the spelling words, I introduced and taught the sounds *shw, qhw* and *thw*. I wrote the sounds that I intended to teach for learners to sound out, and I wrote the words underneath each sound. As these words were from the story, they were the learners' prior knowledge learnt from the context. From that knowledge, they would be able to move to new words which have the same sounds. Thus I asked them to think of any other words with the same sounds as the ones we had learnt. I made a list of those words on the chalkboard and they copied them into their homework books to read at home and prepare for the spelling test.
Following, is the list of spelling words provided by children:

shw	*thw*	*qhw*
shweleza	*isithwathwa*	*qhweba*
shwashwatha	*isithwalambiza*	*qhwanda*

Detailed reading activity 3: Sentence writing
The last activity included in detailed reading is sentence writing which prepares learners for writing activities. During sentence writing, learners recognise the words out of context and put them into the sentence to show their understanding of the sentence. I put the sentence with gaps on the chalkboard and I read it together with the class saying *mmm* when there was a blank space. I asked learners to come to the front and choose the correct word to fill in the gaps. They were choosing from the words that I had stuck on the board, not in the order of the text. As they were filling in the gaps, I kept on affirming them as mentioned in the previous section. Affirming the learners enhances their confidence and motivation to learn (Acevedo & Rose, 2007).
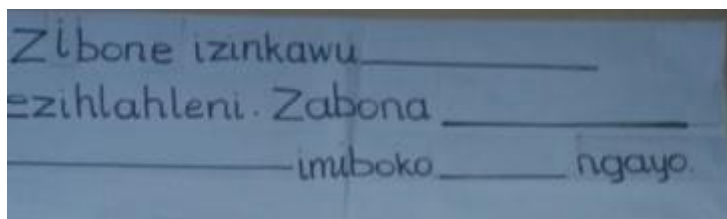
Figure 15. Sentence for gap fill
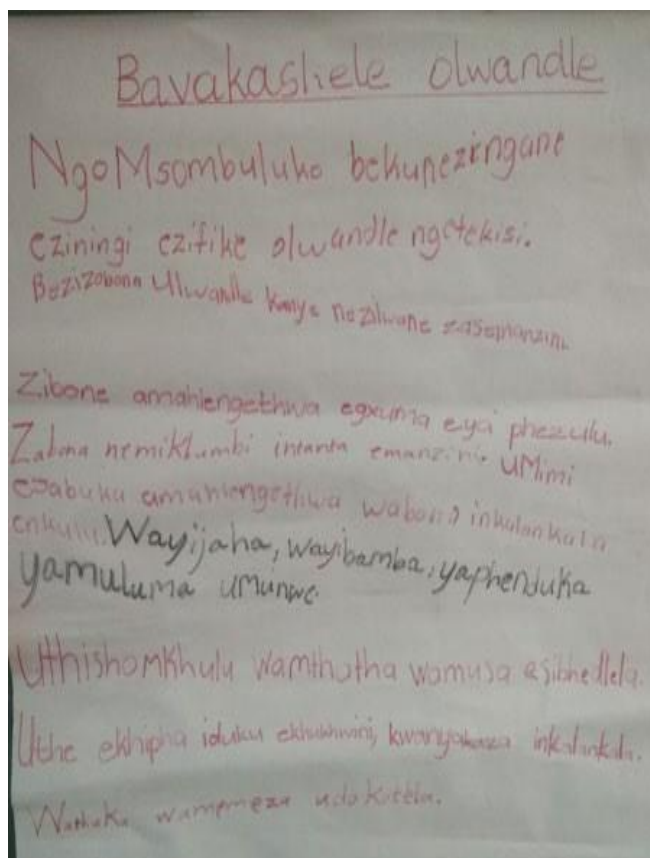
4.8.4 Reading to Learn Stage 4: Joint rewriting

The next stage of the cycle is the joint rewriting of the story. Shared writing of the story is recommended for Grades 1 to 3 in isiZulu home language to prepare learners for their individual writing (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The story from shared reading can be used to demonstrate how language is used, and to select spelling words and other language structures that can be useful in writing a new story. The joint rewriting prepares learners for creative writing as they use the story that they had been reading several times as the foundation and support for creating the new one. They reach this stage having learnt the spelling and developed some vocabulary (Mawela, 2018).

Although my study focuses on reading, I describe the writing lesson because in R2L reading activities are succeeded by writing activities and the learners' ability to write is determined by their level of development in reading (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). Similarly, the CAPS recommends that shared reading be followed by shared writing where learners share ideas and the teacher becomes the scribe to demonstrate how the stories are written (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, in this study learners became the scribes while others and the teacher offered them the necessary support. This allowed opportunities for all learners to come up and write on the board. Allowing learners to participate built their confidence and feeling of being in charge of their learning (Steinke, 2012).

At this stage, we wrote a similar story in which learners came up with new events and new settings following the structure of the original one. I asked learners to think of the different places that they could visit and different characters. I wrote the ideas they brainstormed on the chalkboard and I let them vote on each idea we were going to use: A visit to the sea; A visit to the museum; A visit to the Royal Showgrounds. I had put the original story on the board as well as the blank chart to write the new one. After we all agreed on the title, I asked who would like to come up and write a sentence on the blank chart. I told the learners that they should keep

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on saying the sentence to remind the scribe until they finished writing. When the learner came up to write, I stood next to them to help them with the spelling of words and provide any support they might need. Because of the support I was providing, learners were not scared, but were all willing to come and write with the confidence that whenever they got stuck I was there to help.

English translation
Visiting the sea

On Monday a group of children arrived at the beach by taxi. They came to watch the waves of the sea and sea animals. They saw dolphins jumping up and down. They also saw boats and ships floating above the water.

While looking at the dolphins, Mimi saw a huge crab. She tried to catch it and it bit her finger. The principal rushed her to the hospital. When she pulled out the handkerchief from her pocket, her hand touched the crab. She screamed and called the doctor.

Figure 16. Story from joint construction: Learners' writing and English translation

4.8.5 Individual writing

Individual writing is the last stage of the Reading to Learn cycle. After writing a new story together on the chart, learners moved on to write their individual stories. They had to follow the language patterns learnt from the original text and joint reconstruction. This stage has been described in section 4.5. I did not focus on their individual writing for this study, as was mentioned earlier, and my focus was only on reading.

The lessons described here went well and I could feel that my teaching was improving. My interaction with the learners encouraged them to communicate their ideas and participate with confidence. After the cycle of these lessons I documented my feelings in the journal entry:

I am happy with the way I engaged my learners in the lessons for the past three days (10-12 May). They participated very well in all the activities and they demonstrated confidence. It was so nice to see the low achieving learners arranging the words to put back the sentence and able to recognise the words to fill in the gaps in sentence writing. I was not sure if they would be able to come up and write the story on the chart. When they did it I felt proud of them and of my improvement in interacting meaningfully with them. I am so excited that my memory has been refreshed about scaffolding my learners in all the tasks.

Disclosing my teaching to critical friends was the first step to improving my teaching. The presentation of the lessons described here was successful because the critical friends had reminded me about scaffolding my learners to develop motivation and willingness to learn. Improving my planning of relevant and clear teaching aids and engaging learners meaningfully with the activities were some other strategies of scaffolding them. Being aware of my temper helped me to think about how I would express my emotions before going to class and to be able to control myself. In the next section I describe the concept of scaffolding as the significant principle in R2L to support learners to master new concepts and be able to demonstrate their knowledge.

4.9 The concept of scaffolding

Learners need support in achieving reading skills and performing the required tasks, and therefore they need teachers who are well prepared to support them to improve their reading and comprehension (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). As mentioned previously, the term scaffolding is the metaphor developed by Bruner et al. (1976) to describe the impact of an interaction between a learner and an adult to influence learning. The development of the term was used by Bruner et al. (1976) when they observed the strategies used by adult guardians to support children in performing different activities. According to Hammond and Gibbons (2005), scaffolding is "the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom taken in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring" (p.9). Scaffolding activities can be applied in any learning environment and at different levels. It can be provided by the teacher at the level of the classroom during a teacher-learner interaction or by the parent at home as a temporary support until children develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As children acquire knowledge, skills and understanding, the teacher or parent gradually withdraws scaffolding and provides further

support to new challenging tasks. Scaffolding can also take place at higher levels of developing and designing curriculum and classroom programmes (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) distinguish between planned scaffolding and interactional scaffolding as two types.

4.9.1 Planned scaffolding

Planned scaffolding is the pre-determined support provided in the form of a curriculum and learning material such as pictures, posters, diagrams and other text features. This kind of scaffolding is deliberately planned before teaching and learning take place due to the awareness of what learners may need to learn and use to reinforce learning, but is not directly intended for the needs observed during the lesson. Planned scaffolding can be extended to the level of the classroom as teachers design the classroom programmes through their understanding of the curriculum they are required to transfer to learners. Planned scaffolding is apparent in the Reading to Learn methodology, as the teacher is expected to have knowledge of genre. The methodology is not a curriculum, but is applied to teach the requirements of the curriculum with clear scaffolding of children's learning (Steinke, 2019). Therefore, knowledge of genre allows the teacher to unpack the text specified in the curriculum according to its structure and purpose. As the teacher draws on the knowledge of genre, they introduce learners to the knowledge and understanding of the text (Rose, 2015). Understanding the curriculum makes the teacher aware of the possible challenges in the tasks prepared for learners. Therefore, they plan the learning activities and set realistic goals that learners have to achieve and that will extend learners' knowledge and understanding (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016).

4.9.2 Interactional scaffolding

Interactional scaffolding is the support provided by the teacher instantly in the classroom as a direct interaction responding to the learners' particular needs. It is not included in the official curriculum, but it happens in the classroom and defines the quality of teaching (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). The reciprocal nature of scaffolding supports the view that learning is a social process that takes place as the teacher and the learner or a group of individuals communicate and together construct new knowledge and understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).

Interactional scaffolding requires the teacher to know the learners and their levels of ability and it involves timely support whereby the teacher provides the necessary support precisely at the

time of need. Reading to Learn provides a scaffolding cycle that emphasises the teacher-learner interaction. Teachers interact with learners in all stages of the cycle, engaging them in discussing the text before reading it. Interactional scaffolding is apparent during reading as the teacher unpacks the text according to its purpose and elaborates on certain aspects to facilitate learners' understanding. As the learners get involved in the lesson, the teacher continuously affirms them to motivate those who lack confidence in their abilities to learn. Knowing and understanding the learners' abilities informs the teacher of the teaching strategies to use and to apply the scaffolding strategies that respond to the perceived needs of each learner. As learners begin to develop independence, the teacher gradually adjusts scaffolding according to their level of development and allows them to take charge of their learning (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Both planned scaffolding and interactional scaffolding can be used together, as the teacher can use textbooks specified in the curriculum, supplementing them with the other teaching and learning material to reinforce learning experiences. To complement the planned scaffolding, the teacher can verbally motivate the learners to use text features like pictures and drawings from the textbooks, provided they support their needs.

Reading involves the interaction between the reader's cognitive and social processes, as social or interactive learning enhances the learners' development of language skills, thinking and understanding of how ideas are connected (Pretorius, 2010). In this context, teachers are required to scaffold the development of these two dimensions of learning: cognitive and social aspects. In this chapter, I focus on scaffolding the social aspects, while the cognitive aspects are dealt with in Chapter five, where I describe scaffolding strategies I applied to support learners' reading comprehension.

4.10 Social aspects of scaffolding

Scaffolding learners in social aspects is premised on the sociolinguistic theory of learning. Sociolinguistics perceives teaching of language, reading and writing as a social interaction or the event shaped by the home, the community and the instructional context of a learner (Halliday, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978). Learners are perceived as a social group caring about each other and interested in the environment that they share. The South American sociolinguists, Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that education and reading are not confined to words and academic text, but also involve understanding and engaging with the world. Therefore, reading should influence a change of attitude about the self, others and society. Thus, the social

dimension of scaffolding highlights that reading does not occur in isolation, but is influenced by the overall context where reading takes place (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016; Rosenblatt, 1994). This dimension of learning includes learner affect, which plays a crucial role in hindering or building up learning behaviour, reading and literacy practices (Rosenblatt, 1994). Therefore, it is imperative to attend to the motivational needs of learners and allow group tasks in which learners discuss the text with peers, share ideas and support each other. Understanding and allowing this kind of learning inspires learners to read, and improve their confidence to participate in a safe environment (Guthrie et al., 2004). Confidence and participation in learning enhance the acquisition of knowledge and the development of comprehension.

4.11 Analysing the strategies I used to scaffold social aspects in my classroom

The R2L methodology that I was using to teach isiZulu home language is underpinned by the significance of social interaction and context in enhancing children's learning and understanding of the language. The workbook that I used from the first lesson was an example of planned scaffolding from the curriculum and I should have complemented it with interactional scaffolding by stimulating discussion around the lesson (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Meaningful interaction with the teaching and learning material would prompt learners to engage in the lesson and promote comprehension.

When I was planning the second cycle of lessons, I spoke to one of my colleagues about the story I was going to teach and she told me that the local preschool had visited the local Lion Park in 2015, and most of our learners had been in that preschool at the time. Others had visited a game reserve with their families. That information assisted me to create the context from which I would stimulate my learners' interest during preparing for reading. Building the lesson from a meaningful context that related to what my learners already knew supported the development of attitudes towards reading the text. I brought enlarged and bright pictures to draw their attention and facilitate discussion about the story. The classroom interaction that I established encouraged sharing of ideas and supported the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the text.

Bruner et al. (1976) define scaffolding as a process whereby the teacher supports the learner by modelling or demonstrating how to perform tasks or solve problems. Thus, during the shared reading of the story, I modelled and demonstrated fluent reading before I let the

children read. As I read with expression and voice fluctuation, learners became excited and they were eager to join in the reading. They laughed at me as I imitated the animals, which indicated their interest in the story and motivation to read. They even developed motivation to read other stories and as the year progressed, their reading levels advanced and their comprehension skills improved (see Chapter five).

For the sentence making activity I reduced the text to two sentences which they would read in pairs to provide them with a supportive reading experience (Bruner et al., 1976; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). This kind of scaffolding enhanced reading behaviour and reading with peers built their confidence to read aloud and created a love for reading other texts independently. Reading to Learn also suggests that the teacher encourage learners by cueing when doing the detailed reading. I was conscious of some of the scaffolding strategies pre-determined in the curriculum such as demonstrating and cueing (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). I used those strategies as cues to help my learners identify keywords from the sentence. I wanted them to tell me what the monkeys were doing in the trees with their tails, then I swung my finger in the air and they all recognised the word through that gesture. It was fascinating to see them looking for the words together, sometimes arguing about the correct answer until I gave them clues. When I wanted them to reconstruct the sentence, I scaffolded them with some clues like asking them about the order of events that happened in the sentence. Giving them clues helped them to remember the arrangement of words in a sentence (Bruner et al., 1976).

Scaffolding is both an outside-in and an inside-out process, meaning that one receives knowledge and skills from outside support, and the learner can then reproduce the knowledge from inside themselves to the outside world. To align my teaching with this process, I allowed the learners an opportunity to practise reading and spelling words repeatedly to gradually develop knowledge of vocabulary and the confidence to read (Donald et al., 2006). Similarly, from Mgqwashu and Makhathini's (2017) suggestion, I affirmed my learners for providing expected answers in all activities; for the wrong answers, I praised them for their attempts and allowed their peers to assist. This kind of scaffolding encouraged all the learners to participate willingly without fear of failure.

Freire and Macedo (1987) and Guthrie (2015) suggest that collaborative learning through brainstorming develops a sense of safety and confidence to participate in learning and improves the acquisition of knowledge and comprehension. Thus, to prepare my learners for the joint rewriting of the story, I created a social learning environment where they worked together as groups of five to discuss and agree on group ideas. Then during the writing of the story, three

groups would raise their idea on a certain part of the story and other groups would vote for one of the ideas to be used. This exercise scaffolded insecure learners to participate in the group and seeing their idea being considered improved their confidence to share their thoughts.

Journal entry------------------14 May 2021

I am so excited that my lesson went well. It was for the first time I allowed my learners the opportunity to write a new story on the chart. I was so doubtful but I told myself that if it did not work it would be a learning curve for me and them. Seeing them so eager to try gave me confidence in them. Because of the support I gave them in all the stages, they were willing to participate in the lessons. Their participation resulted in the understanding of the story as they were able to use their imagination about visiting other places. Being conscious of my temper and emotions, gave me the power to control myself throughout the lesson. This allowed my learners to share their ideas with confidence.

In addition to reflecting on my classroom events and my feelings in the journal, I felt the importance of getting more insight into what I was learning from the critical friends as I continued to transform my teaching. Learning from the views of Hiralaal (2017), that researchers do a retrospective reflection to gain more perspective about their self-reflection, I did the retrospective reflection on the last day of the cycle of lessons here described to reflect back on the experiences I had written in the journal.

Retrospective reflection

By the end of the lessons it was clear that my scaffolding had supported my learners' confidence to participate. Allowing repeated reading enabled them to give correct answers during sentence making. Their ability to rearrange the words to construct a sentence demonstrated that they had learnt the vocabulary. Because my temper had improved, my learners demonstrated interest in brainstorming ideas for the new story. Their willingness to write the ideas on the chart demonstrated an understanding of the text that we had read.

4.12 My learning

This self-study project encouraged me to constantly inculcate a reading culture in my classroom and learn how to establish a positive learning environment. I also learnt to skilfully involve learners in the lesson without creating fear, but in a way that supports the development of their reading skills. Ntuli and Pretorius (2009) assert that one of the problems with learners' poor achievement in reading is that, while lacking reading ability, they also lack a reading culture and do not see the value in reading.

I gave myself time to reflect honestly by reading and rereading my data. Using the inductive process, I coded the categories to help me sort my data and develop the themes (Samaras, 2011). I used the concept map to capture the themes. Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) describe concept maps as "a means to document emergent phenomena visually in ways that words or other visual forms are incapable of doing". I captured the themes in the following concept map:
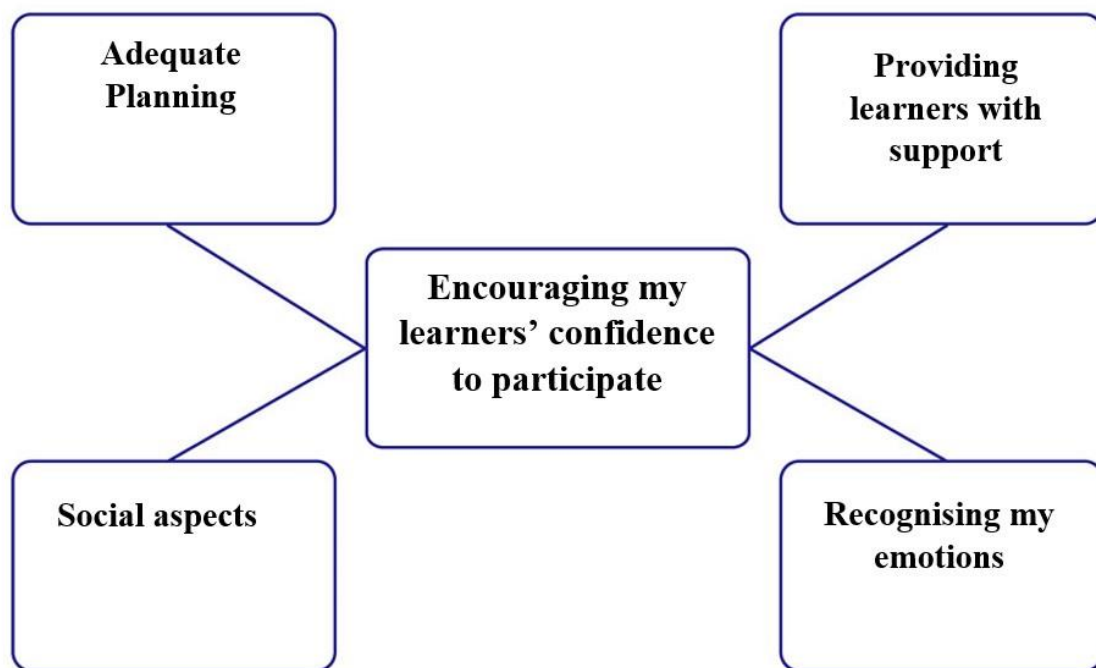
Figure 17. Concept map capturing the themes of my learning

4.12.1 Adequate planning

I learnt that adequate planning results in a successful lesson presentation. I realised that for effective teaching, it was not sufficient to be acquainted with the R2L methodology, but it was necessary to support children's learning. Therefore, proper planning of the lesson and giving myself time to prepare the teaching and learning resources was significant. I recognised that

in the following year, I needed to consider the new context in which I would be implementing the methodology, as the learners coming from the previous grade would not have been exposed to the R2L strategies. I learnt to always scaffold learning by using instructional material such as sentence strips, small chalkboards and scissors until they got used to my teaching strategies.

4.12.2 Providing learners with support

I learnt to prepare clear teaching aids that would allow the engagement of learners in the lesson. I was reminded by critical friends to summarise the story clearly before reading to give learners the background knowledge about the story and how it will unfold. Critical friends reminded me that affirming learners encourages and develops their confidence and promotes their involvement in the lesson. Reading to Learn suggests that spelling is practised by learners together with the teacher in the class. Critical friends emphasised that after the spelling lesson, I should pay attention to the sound that I am required to teach and explicitly teach phonics. From the knowledge of that phonic sound, it would be easy for leaners to form other words with the same sound. I realised that supporting my learners facilitated a smooth lesson presentation until the end. And my support gave them confidence to go to the front of the whole class and for the first time to write the story on the chart.

4.12.3 Social aspects

In some activities, I allowed my learners the opportunity to work in groups to support each other to understand the tasks. Involving them in the shared reading experience encouraged them to share their feelings, ideas and experiences relating to the story. Practising reading in pairs during sentence making helped them to develop reading fluency. Hence, teaching and learning became successful and meaningful, and the lessons were fascinating to both my learners and to me. Their excitement about playing around with words facilitated knowledge of the meaning of words, and so they developed knowledge of vocabulary, and it also created a love of reading for enjoyment.

4.12.4 Emotional identification

The teacher's attitudes and emotions are among the many factors that stimulate learners' participation and influence their successful learning and achievement (Frenzel et al., 2021). I learnt about my temper, which I had not been aware of. That awareness encouraged me to

seek professional help and start the emotional identification sessions. From the sessions, I learnt to be conscious of my emotions before I went to class so that I would go there with a desire to do better. The expression of unpleasant emotions improved. Monitoring my emotions and improving my teaching became my everyday endeavour, owing to the healthy relationships and academic success of my learners. More generally, doing self-study changed my perception of teacher development, as I learnt that I could take control of my own improvement through self-initiated investigation without external professional development providers.

4.13 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to describe what I could learn about implementing the R2L strategy and encourage my learners' confidence to participate in my lessons. In the process, I experienced several challenges. The challenges in my classroom were caused by various factors such as a lack of proper planning of teaching resources, not considering the new context when I had just started in a new school where children had never been exposed to the R2L methodology, and not communicating well with my learners. These factors prevented a smooth learning process which I interpreted as the learners' fault. My interpretation of the situation led to the emergence of angry emotions that I could not control but expressed to learners.

In this chapter I firstly discussed the language in education policy and CAPS for isiZulu home language. Discussing these policies was significant as isiZulu as an African language should receive the same treatment as all other official languages as emphasised in the LieP. Moreover, I regarded reading in the home language as crucial in Grade 3 because the expectation by the CAPS is that when learners exit the foundation phase they have reached a high level of literacy in their home language.

I then highlighted my previous success in using Reading to Learn which was of importance as those experiences made me familiar with the methodology and assumed that I would always provide effective teaching. Thus, taking my teaching practice for granted contributed to the challenges that I encountered in the new school environment. I recounted the two sets of lessons that I conducted, that describe the shortfalls and successes. I explained how the first lesson did not achieve its end and why the other one became successful, while using the same approach. Describing my lessons highlighted that the way I used the departmental workbook as a resource

compromised the flow of the lesson. The description of the lessons also outlined how my teaching improved during the second set of lessons when I had developed my scaffolding strategies. I further explained the concept of scaffolding and discussed how I used this concept to support my learners' participation in learning. The chapter concluded by highlighting all my learnings.

In Chapter five, I reflect on the presentation of the third cycle of lessons. I describe the lessons that I presented to illustrate my improvement in supporting my learners' reading comprehension.

CHAPTER FIVE: Realising, recognising and rethinking

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I responded to my second research question: *What can I learn about using the Reading to Learn methodology to develop my learners' confidence to participate?* In the description of the two sets of isiZulu reading lessons that I taught in Grade 3, I identified and discussed both the challenges of my first lesson, which resulted in frustration, and the improvement in the subsequent lesson and the second cycle of lessons. My intention in reflecting on the lessons was to improve my teaching and learners' participation and create a supportive classroom environment with shared responsibilities.

This chapter addresses research question three: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' reading comprehension?* I describe the third cycle of lessons to respond to this question. These descriptions demonstrate how I worked collaboratively with my learners and how they subsequently worked with each other to develop reading and comprehension. I elucidate how I used R2L strategies to develop their comprehension by allowing them to confidently practise reading and speaking. Then I explain how I applied scaffolding to support their cognitive aspects of learning. I entitled this chapter *Realising, recognising and rethinking* because it describes the realisation of my shortfalls and my perceptions regarding my classroom ethos, the recognition of what to do to support learning and the rethinking my teaching strategies.

5.2 Description of the third cycle of lessons

This set of lessons was conducted in the third term of 2021. All lessons commenced at 09:00am on four consecutive days from 13 to 16 September 2021 (see table 7).

Table 7. Third cycle of lessons (13 to 16 September 2021)

Date	Story	Activities	Reading skills	R2L strategies
13 September 2021	Ingozi yase Moyana (Accident at Moyana)	Ukufunda (Reading)	Fluency and comprehension, ability to answer high-order questions	Shared reading

14 September 2021	Same story as above	Imisebenzi eyenziwa abantu (Occupations)	Knowledge of occupations	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
15 September 2021		Isabizwana soqobo (pronouns)	Ability to use pronouns in sentences	Detailed reading (Sentence making)
16 September 2021		Imisindo (Phonics) – Amagama eqa onkamisa (words that omit vowels)	Awareness of omission of vowel 'u' in speech and writing	Spelling

5.2.1 Reading to Learn Stage 1: Preparing for reading

Reading to Learn emphasises teaching the aspects of language from the context of a story that relates to learners' everyday life to facilitate their understanding of concepts (Mawela, 2018). Thus, I taught all the aspects of language from a story that I created. The purpose of these lessons was to teach learners about different jobs that people do, the qualifications required for the particular job and the kind of uniforms people wear. I also wanted to teach reading a fiction text using illustrations to develop learners' knowledge of vocabulary, the pronouns and the words that omit the vowel 'u'. At the end of the lessons, learners would have gained knowledge and understanding of different careers, be able to use pronouns in sentences, and recognise and use the words that were learnt in phonics in their writing. Learners would also be able to demonstrate development in fluent reading and comprehension.

Figure 18. The poster of occupations

The learners and I discussed the pictures, and they described the kinds of work that people illustrated on the poster do. As they looked at the pictures, learners used their prior knowledge of sounds learnt from previous lessons to read the words next to the pictures and describe people's work. Thereafter, I summarised the story that we were going to read involving the emergency services, which related to some of the people shown on the poster. Learners had seen the emergency vehicles that I mentioned in my summary, and they knew some of the uniforms that were shown on my poster. They were also familiar with the local taxis from their community. So, both the poster and the summary of the story were good sources of learning to read and to prepare learners to understand the context of the story that I had to teach. Understanding the language that is used in the story supported their comprehension of the text. The discussion continued as I summarised the story using gestures and expressions, requesting learners for their views and posing relevant questions. Justice and Ezell (2002) assert that talking about the story allows children to express their feelings and develop speech and

pronunciation. In addition, social interaction develops comprehension skills, as children respond to open-ended and cognitively demanding questions that promote abstract thinking (Mol & Bus, 2011). Since I could not locate a story in the departmental workbooks, I created a story that would be contextually relevant to the topic and the poster. The title of the story was "*Inhlekelele yaseMoyana*" (The terrible accident at Moyana). I read the story together with the whole class. This text was used to teach other components of language following the steps of R2L.

5.2.2 Reading to Learn stage 2: Shared reading

Shared reading is the most effective stage for developing literacy skills in the early stages as it introduces children to knowledge and understanding of story structure, language use and how sentences are arranged (Justice & Ezell, 2002). During the actual reading of the story, children are exposed to text which facilitates knowledge of vocabulary and the development of word recognition skills. At the same time, they also get to know about the world around them. Vocabulary and word recognition are foundational skills crucial for fast-tracking learners' early reading development and understanding of the language (Spaull et al., 2020). These skills are acquired through consistent practice so that readers create a specific knowledge of words and gradually improve their reading speed with automaticity. Due to an insufficient vocabulary meaning, many children are able to decode words, but are unable to make meaning of what they read (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Thus, I exposed my learners to reading the text repeatedly to build their vocabulary and introduce the grammar I anticipated teaching at a later stage.

The CAPS requires teachers to cover four text types in the foundation phase: narratives, procedures, information reports and personal recounts (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Reading to Learn suggests the explicit teaching of knowledge about the types of text which is referred to as genre. Genre explains the different kinds of text organisational structures to achieve a particular purpose. Teaching learners about types of texts provides a clear approach to reading a particular text and produces meaningful writing (Mawela, 2018; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). In the lessons recorded for this study, I read a narrative text and explained to my learners that a narrative text goes through a series of steps to achieve its purpose. I explained the purpose of the narrative text, which is to tell the story, and that it goes through three key stages: orientation, complication and resolution. Orientation specifies the place where the event took place, the time at which it happened and introduces the characters and the kind of event that has taken place. Complication presents the sequence of events as how the problem

occurred and the reaction of the characters towards the problem. Resolution shows how the issue was resolved (Mawela, 2018; Rose, 2017). I taught my learners about the common language patterns in a narrative, for example, that it uses the present and past tense and different kinds of verbs. I also emphasised that the narrative text usually has some descriptive and figurative words such as "terrible, badly", as were found in our story.

I read the story repeatedly with the children following the procedure of shared reading described in Chapter four. The central theme of the story focused on a terrible road accident between an ambulance and a local taxi. The ambulance driver and his assistant died on the scene and the taxi driver and his friend were severely injured. The ambulance had been rushing to the local school that was on fire. Although it did not make it to the school, the police and firefighters were already there rescuing teachers and children. I elaborated on the phrases *enyantisa umzimba* "something tragic", *imindeni isemanzini* "the accident was a tragedy for the families." to increase the learner's vocabulary. Elaboration enables learners to relate to the terms, which also suggests an understanding of the tone of the story. After reading the story, I posed several questions to stimulate learners' thinking. Table 8 illustrates examples of my questions and responses from some of the learners.

Table 8. Examples of classroom dialogue showing questions and responses from some learners

Questions in English	Questions in isiZulu	Learners' responses in English	Learners' responses in isiZulu
Who do you think caused the accident?	Uma ucabanga ubani obangele ingozi?	It was the driver of the ambulance because he was rushing to school.	Umshayeli we ambulance ngoba wayejahe esikoleni
How did the police and the firefighters arrive at the school as there was an accident on the road?	Pho amaphoyisa nezicishamlilo bona bafika kanjani esikoleni njengoba kwakunengozi emgwaqeni?	They were ahead of the ambulance, so the accident happened after they had passed.	Bona babengaphambili kwe ambulance, ingozi yenzeka sebedlulile

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The firefighters went there to put out the fire, and what did the police go to the school to do?	Amaphoyisa wona Ayeyosiza ngani esikoleni?	1. They wanted to find out who started the fire and arrest them. 2. They were there to control people not to get into the school premises.	1.Ayeyofuna umuntu oqale umlilo Ukuze aboshwe. 2.Ayeyovimba abantu ukuthi Bangangeni ngaphakathi Esikoleni.
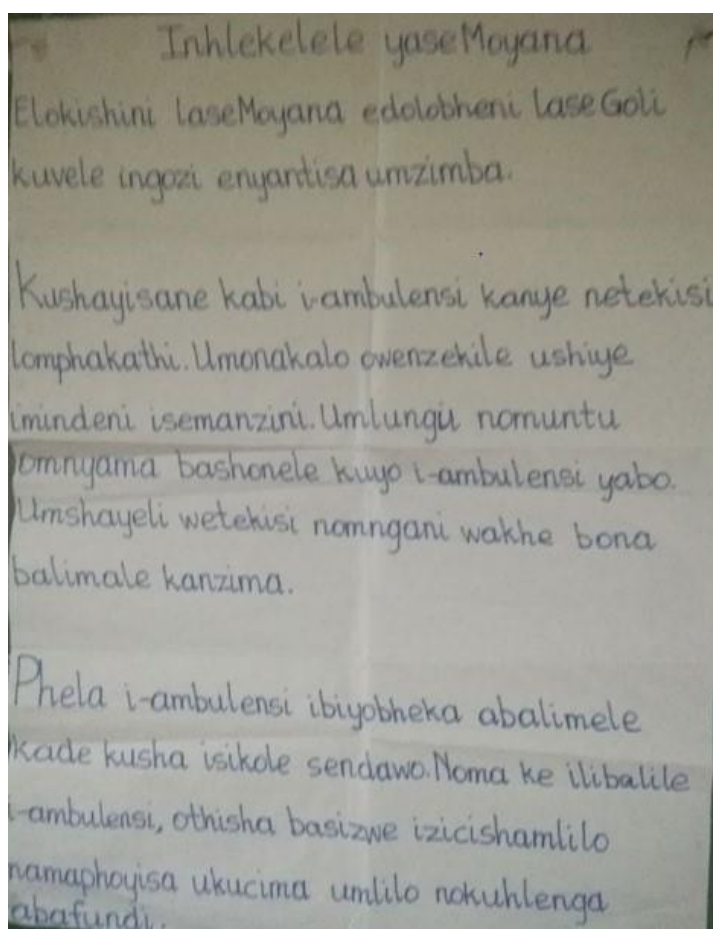
A tragic accident at Moyana

A tragic accident took place at the Moyana township in the city of Johannesburg.

There was a collision between an ambulance and a local taxi. The disaster left the families in despair. The driver of the ambulance and his assistant died instantly at the scene. The taxi driver and his friend were badly injured.

The ambulance was rushing to take people who had suffered burn injuries from the fire at the local school. Despite the ambulance crash, the firefighters and the police arrived at the school to rescue teachers and children and to put out the fire.

Figure 19. Text of the story I created

5.2.3 Reading to Learn stage 3: Detailed reading

Activity 1: Sentence making

I selected sentences from the story and made a sentence strip from which I taught the pronouns: *Umlungu nomuntu omnyama bashonele kuyo i-ambulensi yabo; Umshayele wetekisi nomngani wakhe balimale kanzima.* Then I informed the learners that instead of the noun "*Umlungu*" in the first sentence, the pronoun "*yena*" is used, and the sentence becomes *Yena nomuntu*

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omnyama bashonele kuyo i-ambulensi yabo. In the second sentence "*bona*" is used as a substitute for the noun group *Umshayeli wetekisi nomngani wakhe* and the sentence changes to *Bona balimale kanzima.* Then, I presented the sentence strips in which they would work on their own with the pronouns written on cards:

bona   wona   yona   lona   zona

They worked in pairs to choose the correct card, put it on top and cover the underlined nouns in the sentence strip. They worked on the following three sentences: *Kushayisane kabi iambulensi kanye netekisi lomphakathi*; *Othisha basizwe izicishamlilo namaphoyisa; Umonakalo owenzekile ushiye imindeni isemanzini.*

Activity 2: Spelling (see figure 20)

For the spelling activity, I picked the words that learners had seen from the story and from their sentence, and to teach phonics I indicated to them the space in the words where we should be pronouncing vowel 'u' *um-lungu*, *nom-ngani*, *um-shayeli* and *om-nyama*. I explained to the learners that these words can be pronounced and written as *umulungu, nomungani, umushayeli, omunyama*, but according to the rules of isiZulu orthography and speech, we omit the vowel in writing and speaking. Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) suggest that learners acquire knowledge of spelling through understanding parts of the word, roots, prefixes and suffixes (morphology). Contrary to this, I broke each word into syllables as, according to R2L, this scaffolds the learning of difficult words (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). Breaking the words into letter patterns assisted my learners in knowing the syllables that form the words and understanding the phonics that I was teaching.

Umlungu	White man
i-ambulensi	ambulance
nomngani	with a friend
kanzima.	hard
Umshayeli	driver
balimale	were injured
omnyama	black
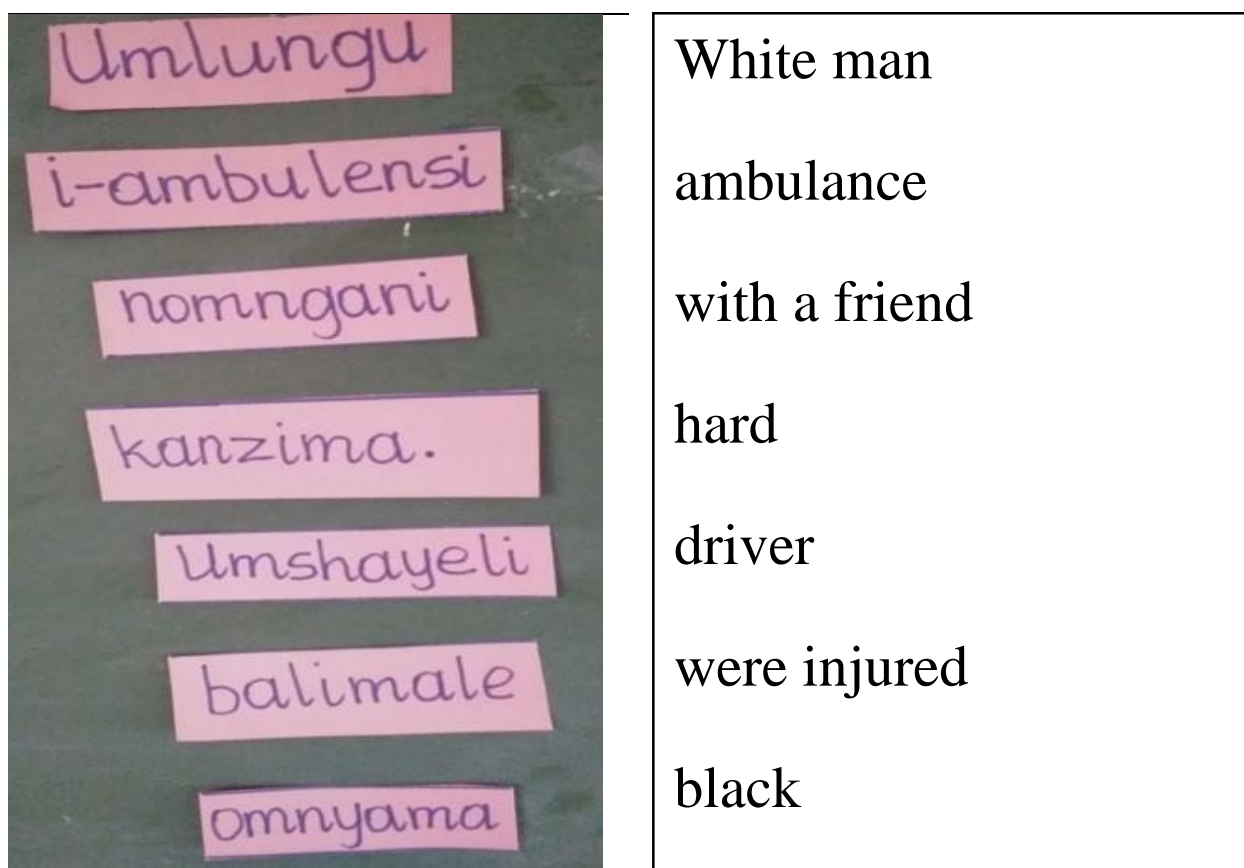
Figure 20. Spelling words

5.2.4 Reading to Learn Stage 4: Joint rewriting

I mentioned in Chapter four that my study does not focus specifically on writing. However, by writing a new story, learners demonstrate comprehension, which is the focus of my research question. In this lesson, I was creative and used objects such as toy cars and some costumes that learners wore and acted out the story. I used these resources to enhance learners' understanding of the story and motivate their participation and to develop their interest and confidence in reading. Thus, the lesson continued smoothly, and learners came up with different ideas for writing a new story, participating very well in writing on a chart and were engaged until the end in helping the scribe to write correctly on the chart.

Figure 21. A new story written by learners

The fourth stage of the R2L cycle involves creating a new story (Figure 21), similar to the original story (Figure 19). When writing a new story, learners use the structure of phrases and language patterns from the original text. I divided the learners into groups and asked them to think of a similar situation. They thought of an accident, but in a different area and presented the following: An accident at Azalea; A terrible accident at Edendale; A severe accident in Pietermaritzburg. Then they voted on "The accident at Imbali" as the title of the new story. They brainstormed ideas following the pattern of events, problems and reactions from the original story. As the class had agreed on the idea, the learners took turns to come and write sentences on the chart. Hence, the story on the chart shows different handwriting. As they came up to write, I stood next to them to assist with spelling, remind them to leave spaces between words and to use correct punctuation.

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The learners' knowledge of the narrative text puts them in a position to read and understand the story and to think of how the new story can be structured following the same pattern. Their ability to think of and write a new story demonstrated that they understood the context and the roles of the characters from the original story. Because they understood the structure of the text, they were able to recognise the key concepts in the story. When we read the story together, they understood the nature of the problem and also developed the appropriate vocabulary. Therefore, they could develop additional vocabulary to use in their writing. Understanding these aspects of reading enabled them to think and use the knowledge gained from the original story to create a new one.

5.3 Learners' activity

After rewriting the story, I divided learners into groups of five, and each group talked about the career they liked. I then requested that one learner from each group present the occupation they had chosen and why they loved it. Presenters dressed up to represent the job role they would love to be and in front of the class they described it. They were keen to talk about what they would love to be when they grew up. They told their stories as I had demonstrated how to use gestures, facial expressions and voice variation to make their story interesting.

Figure 22. Learners presenting their chosen careers

I recorded the following excerpts while they were talking:

Learner 1

Igama lami ngiwuLungani, uma <u>sengimdala</u> ngiyoba uthisha. Ngithanda ukufundisa ibanga lesithathu. Izingane ngiyozifundisa <u>kamnandi</u>, ngizinike amabhodi okubhala isibizelo. Ngiyozifundisa nokuya ebhodini ziyobhala indaba. Ngiyobe ngigqoka izingubo ezinhle nezicathulo ezibizayo. (My name is Lungani. I like to be a teacher when I grow up. I like to teach Grade 3. I will teach interesting lessons and I will give my learners small chalkboards to write spelling. I will also teach them to go to the teacher's chalkboard to write stories. I will be wearing nice clothes and expensive shoes.)

Learner 2

Mina ngiwu Senzo, Ngizoba yiphoyisa <u>lomgwaqo</u>. Ngithanda ukugada izimoto <u>emgwaqeni</u>, ngibophe abashayeli abangawulandeli <u>umthetho</u> yomgwaqo. <u>Umsebenzi</u> wami ubalulekile ngoba uvikela abantu ezingozini zomgwaqo. (I am Senzo and I will be a traffic police officer. I would love to control traffic on the road and arrest drivers who do not obey the rules. My job is important because it prevents people from getting into accidents.)

Learner 3

Mina ngiwu Lethu, uma sengikhulile ngiyoba isicishamlilo. Ngiyobe ngihamba ngeloli elikhulu elinepayipi lamanzi. Ngiyobe ngicisha <u>umlilo</u> emizini yabantu nasezikoleni. Ngiyobe ngigqoka izingubo zokungivikela ukuthi ngingashiswa <u>umlilo</u>. (My name is Lethu. When I am old I will be a firefighter. I will be driving a huge truck with a water pipe in it. I will be putting out the fire from the households and schools. I will be wearing a protective costume.)

While the children were presenting, others noted the words that omitted the vowel 'u' used by their classmates in their descriptions. I had some of the words on flashcards and I added others as the learners mentioned them in their descriptions. After the lesson, learners stuck the words in their order on the word wall. Their presentations demonstrated knowledge of vocabulary that we had learnt (words that omit the vowel 'u'), and those who were listening could identify those words from the spoken language. In putting the words up on the wall, they were demonstrating the skills of recognising similar sounds. The next section discusses the strategies for scaffolding that I used to support learning in my classroom. As mentioned in Chapter four, learning can be scaffolded to develop social and cognitive aspects. This chapter describes the cognitive dimension of scaffolding.

5.4 Through the lens of scaffolding

This study was rooted within the concept of scaffolding, which is the metaphor developed by Bruner et al. (1976) to describe how a learner-adult interaction influences learning. The development of the term "scaffolding" emerged as Bruner et al. (1976) observed the strategies used by adult guardians to support children in their performance of different activities. These strategies could be applied to any learning environment (discussed in detail in Chapter four).

Scaffolding was used as a framework to understand the classroom events and to evaluate the extent to which I used scaffolding strategies in my classroom and in my engagement with learners. Using this concept was informed by the understanding that learners acquire knowledge through social interaction within a group of peers and the teacher's scaffolding and that learning is shaped and influenced by the context (Smagorinsky, 2007). Moreover, the development of the Reading to Learn methodology was drawn from the same understanding that language acquisition and understanding is embedded within a social context and that scaffolding could assist learners to perform successfully on their own, regardless of their abilities (Halliday, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978).

5.4.1 Strategies for scaffolding

Bruner et al. (1976) explain that scaffolding as creating a healthy classroom environment, settling learners into a certain kind of routine and guiding the teaching and learning. They advise that the teacher does not become an authoritarian who manages the learning process. Instead of presenting a lesson and expecting the learners to understand and perform the task, the teacher scaffolds them through engaging them in discussion and allowing them to express their ideas and feelings regarding the topic. Then, the learners can embark on the task and use the knowledge that they have received while the teacher monitors their progress and helps them to focus on the purpose of the task and the desired outcomes. Praising motivates the children and stimulates their interest to perform the task with meaning. Similar to the R2L strategies, the teacher uses continuous affirmation to sustain learners' interest and confidence to participate in learning (Mawela, 2018, Steinke, 2019). Bruner et al. (1976) agree with R2L in breaking down the tasks into parts that are manageable for learners. The R2L process consists of the scaffolding cycle in which learners deal with tasks in smaller manageable parts to avoid overwhelming situations and to sustain their interest. Another strategy suggested by Bruner et al. (1976) is prompting and supporting the learners to discover various means of problem-solving. Because some learners learn quicker than others and become excited, while others

become frustrated by the task, the teacher applies close supervision to scaffold the behaviour that might be caused by either excitement or frustration.

5.5 Scaffolding cognitive aspects

Scaffolding cognitive aspects of reading refers to how reading is tackled concurrently across the levels of letters, word, sentence, paragraph and the bigger text (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Scaffolding the development of cognitive aspects extends learners' knowledge, skills and understanding that they would not be able to acquire by themselves (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Furthermore, supporting this dimension of learning stimulates the processes and functions that take place in the mind during reading which incorporates the readers' awareness and ability to interpret concepts, knowledge about language and concentration on certain aspects of information. Learners need to be able to decode the words and assimilate concepts and be able to use them on their own, and to search for meaning by connecting the text to their existing knowledge of the world or a knowledge of the text they have dealt with previously (Pretorius, 2010; Wolf, 2008). The quality of support and the guidance that teachers provide can move learners from what they can do and advance them to more challenging tasks. In this way, learners acquire more understanding and accelerate their learning beyond their current skills, abilities and understanding (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Rose & Acevedo, 2006). In addition, learners' attitudes and confidence towards learning play a crucial role by meaning being created through the application of text comprehension strategies such as story retelling, giving a summary, questioning and prediction. At a practical level in the classroom, the teacher facilitates learning by providing material and effective methods to scaffold the learning and development and together with learners, construct meaning of the text through interaction.

The Reading to Learn methodology is premised on the belief that reading is a basic skill that determines academic success in all school subjects (Acevedo, 2020). As a highly scaffolded methodology, it emphasises scaffolding learners' reading from the level of the text where they learn to recognise what the story is about and the sequence of events in the story and then to recognise the sequence of words or word groups that present the chunks of meaning. The teacher then scaffolds learners to recognise the meaning of words and the arrangement of letters that form the word. Assisting learners to recognise these patterns facilitates their development of reading fluency and comprehension. After having gone through the process of reading, learners' comprehension is demonstrated through story retelling, summarising, questioning and

then progressing to writing. Having described this cognitive dimension of scaffolding, in the next section I discuss how I used these strategies in my classroom to support reading comprehension.

5.6 Strategies that I used to scaffold cognitive aspects in my classroom

The whole cycle of R2L is characterised by interactive learning in which the teacher scaffolds learners through interaction so that they gain confidence to perform tasks independently (Acevedo, 2020; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). This process supports the view of interactional scaffolding that has been proven to produce better results, as it is applied by the teacher promptly to address the needs of learners in achieving the learning outcomes (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016).

5.6.1 Modelling reading

As a teacher and a knowledgeable adult, I could not expect that my learners would receive knowledge, understand it and immediately be able to use it on their own. It is my responsibility to support and guide them to perform the tasks with meaning. Thus, I explained and demonstrated the reading behaviour, explained what we would do after each activity and settled them into the routine and strategies of R2L. This encouraged a meaningful interaction, as learners understood what was expected from them as the learning progressed. Effective teachers apply interactional scaffolding (described in Chapter four) to encourage learner contributions to class discussion (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). I summarised the story using the skills of storytelling, gestures and facial expressions to stimulate their attitudes and emotions about what happened in the story. This activity supports the Rosenblatt's (1994) idea that the act of reading does not disengage from individual personalities and identity. Then I engaged with them in shared reading of the story, which engaged us all in social interaction and the reading exercises, where learners develop their reading fluency, by observing punctuations, reading tone and automaticity. The R2L strategies of scaffolding learners in reading fluency support the views that scaffolding facilitates learners' understanding of the sequence of words in the sentence and their relation to each other (Acevedo, 2020; Bruner et al., 1976; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016).

5.6.2 Vocabulary development

In the R2L methodology, scaffolding the understanding of concepts and development of vocabulary takes place through the teacher's elaboration on unfamiliar words and phrases from

the text during shared reading (Acevedo, 2020; Mataka et al., 2020). Therefore, I supported my learners to acquire knowledge of phonics by teaching the sounds and syllables within the words and giving them the opportunity to sound them repeatedly, forming and decoding new words with the same sounds. I explained the meaning of unfamiliar words, giving their synonyms to develop their knowledge of vocabulary. This strategy is similar to Reynolds and Goodwin's (2016) idea that knowledge of vocabulary is facilitated by understanding the meaning of the words and giving examples. Providing a text and pictures was significant, as R2L and the principles of scaffolding suggest that learners learn vocabulary and meaning through understanding the context in which the words are used (Guthrie et al., 2012; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017).

5.6.3 Knowledge of vocabulary and comprehension

As the year 2021 progressed, I noticed that my learners were gradually developing a knowledge of vocabulary, and I noted that there are different views concerning the correlation between the knowledge of vocabulary and comprehension of the text. While some authors believe in knowledge of vocabulary as the predictor of comprehension (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016), others, such as Pretorius (2010), argue that knowing the meaning of a certain number of words might not indicate having a complete understanding of the entire text. Knowledge of vocabulary may be the building blocks of meaning and facilitate fluent reading, but this is not enough to enable comprehension. However, as a result of the scaffolding strategies, my learners did demonstrate knowledge of vocabulary by matching words with pictures, filling in the gaps in the sentence and in their achievement in spelling exercises and during the presentations of their chosen careers. In that context, I agree with Rose (2017), that scaffolding learners' knowledge of vocabulary enables them to make meaning of the story and they develop skills for reading other texts.

5.6.4 Language use

According to the curriculum, learners had to learn about careers and how to use pronouns in sentences. This was planned scaffolding, as it was provided by the CAPS curriculum. However, teaching the pre-determined curriculum becomes more effective through application of scaffolding strategies, as children's learning is better when it is related to their familiar situations and environment (Bruner et al., 1976; Rose, 2017). I applied this perspective as an additional scaffolding strategy and used the poster and the story as the context on which I based all the lessons that I taught and thereby supplemented the teaching of language. The poster that

I provided was relevant to the story and promoted purposeful reading so that learners were able to answer comprehension questions. Reading to Learn suggests that integrating language components with the teaching of reading facilitates knowledge of grammar while increasing reading skills (Rose, 2018). Therefore, reading that story achieved the outcomes stated in the CAPS of achieving knowledge of how to use pronouns and of different careers while achieving reading fluency and comprehension.

Reading to Learn is underpinned by the theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) that recognises that reading and writing involves using the patterns of language in three levels. The strategy that I used to scaffold language development is supported by the model in Figure 23. It demonstrates teaching of language as "text in context" derived from the theory of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Martin & Rose, 2007).

Figure 23. Functional model of language in context

In the functional model, the context is where learners are taught to recognise the content of a text. Thus, from reading the whole text, I explained the essence of the story and we talked about the characters as well as the sequence of events. At the level of the text paragraph or sentence is where learners should understand how words are arranged in chunks of meaning. Hence, in my classroom, I moved on to the sentences extracted from the story where learners identified words and word groups that gave meaning of the story, such as those corresponding with who, where, and what. At the level of word, readers learn the patterns of syllables that make up the

spelling system of the particular language. Scaffolding learners to understand the story at these levels is one route to improved comprehension (Rose, 2005).

The teacher possesses knowledge of the subject that is different from that of the learners, and learners themselves come to class having different levels of abilities (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, I had to use learning material to scaffold learning for all learners' abilities. The learners consciously or unconsciously go through the process of understanding and internalising the concepts. Besides learning vocabulary from the poster, they learnt about names of different careers, uniforms and the qualifications required for the particular job. While learning about the pronouns and words omitting vowel 'u', development of reading was the focal point of the research.

In the joint rewriting of the story, I used the original story to stimulate learners' thinking and interaction. I scaffolded their learning by allowing group tasks in which learners would support each other in brainstorming and sharing ideas for the new text. Through brainstorming ideas, I was scaffolding them to use their imagination about the new situation and share their thoughts (Silver, 2011). While learners were writing the story on the chart, I stood next to them to remind them of the correct spelling of new words we had never learnt and to use punctuation. I also created a feeling of safety by allowing them to support each other by reminding the scribe what to write on the chart while I monitored the writing process (Guthrie et al., 2004).

5.7 Quantitative analysis showing reading improvement

As the year 2021 progressed, my Grade 3 learners had improved in reading, had gained a large amount of vocabulary and were enjoying reading a variety of reading material. I administered the EGRA in my classroom in the first term of 2021 as a baseline assessment to diagnose my learners' reading levels. Again, towards the end of the same year, I did the post-tests to ascertain their level of improvement in reading and comprehension. The EGRA is a diagnostic oral reading assessment that is individually administered to Grades 1 to 3. It assesses letter-name and letter-sound knowledge, familiar and non-familiar word reading, oral reading fluency and reading comprehension (see detailed description in Chapter two). I tested my learners (N=44) in the four subskills. (The results are shown in Figure 24 and Table 9). In word reading, learners had to read 80 words correctly per minute and in fluent reading, they had to read a story with 56 words fluently with comprehension.

The development of reading and comprehension was evident in their improvement in the EGRA reading scores (described in Chapter two). Figure 24 indicates their level of reading and comprehension in the pre-test, which shows low reading achievement, particularly in word reading (where the average mark is 26%) and reading fluency (where the average mark is 35%). By the end of the year, the marks for all four subskills had improved, with particular improvement in word reading, where reading level improved by 34% and reading fluency by 38%.
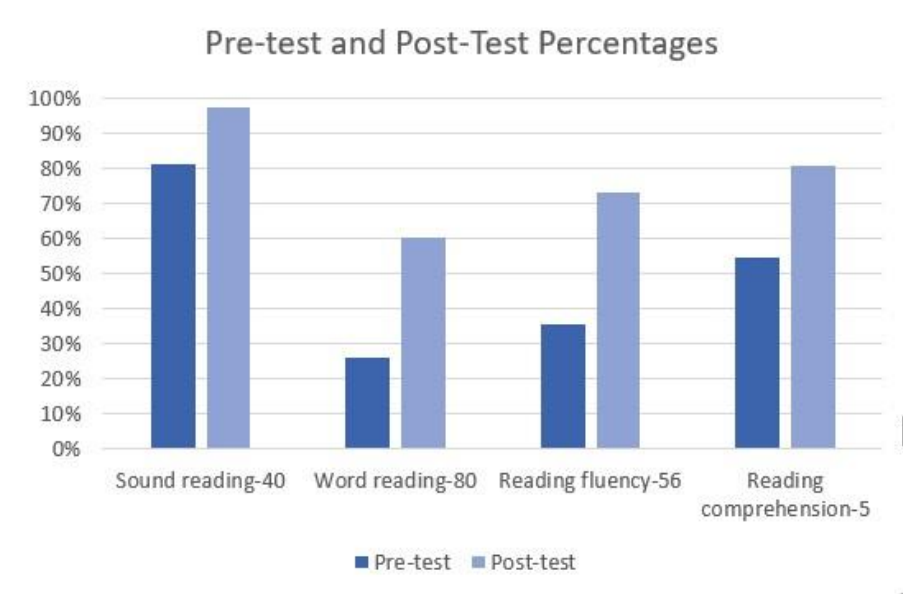
Figure 24. Pre-test and post-test percentages on the four EGRA sub tasks (n = 44)

Table 9. **Results of the paired t-test**

	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement	t-test p value
Sound reading – 40	81%	97%	16%	2,94395E-08* p< 0.001
Word reading – 80	26%	60%	34%	1,54149E-20 p< 0.001
Reading fluency – 56	35%	73%	38%	1,52411E-18 p< 0.001
Reading comprehension – 5	55%	80%	26%	2,33269E-13 p< 0.001

*The p values are p< 0.001, because the E value is the scientific notion for powers of 10, that is 2.9×10^{-8}

The paired t-test was used to ascertain whether the differences between the pre-test and post-test data are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This means that the probability of learners achieving these improved results by chance, are very small. However, I cannot claim that the reason for the improvement can be attributed only to the R2L pedagogy, as there would be normal developmental maturation across the year.

5.8 My learning

This section explains my learning about using R2L to develop my learners' reading comprehension. The data from which I am drawing my learnings is my journal entries. From the reflection on this data set emerged the key themes discussed below. In this section I only present the themes. (See Appendix G for an explanation of codes and categories of the analysis of my data set.)

The following journal entry was a reflection on the third cycle of lessons conducted during term three in 2021. It includes the presentation of my feelings about the improvement I had made in my teaching. The text highlighted in red indicates that I created a positive teaching and classroom environment, yellow indicates how I intensified support for my learners and green highlights improvement in constructing learners' knowledge of the language concepts.

Journal entry: 17 September 2021

My second lesson using Reading to Learn was successful and I was happy about my learning and the improvement I made from the first one which did not go well. Nevertheless, the third one was fantastic as I made it more fascinating by letting children talk about the careers they

liked. Their participation was sustained until the end of each lesson. I was pleased to see them listening to the speakers attentively to hear the words they needed to identify. Recognising the words similar to those they found in the story demonstrated knowledge of vocabulary and understanding the meaning of words. It was interesting to see them writing

those words down as quickly as possible competing with each other which showed their enthusiasm to learn. Discussing careers in groups encouraged learning from each other and developing confidence from peers. The ability to talk about what they liked to be,

demonstrated that they understood the careers and responsibilities in the specific line of

work, which displayed the comprehension of the story. The activity of putting the correct pronouns to replace the nouns indicated that they comprehended the grammar they had learnt. I was impressed with the manifestation of comprehension through these activities.

Figure 25. Journal entry reflecting on the overall lessons taught in the third cycle

Retrospective reflection-------17 September 2021

I realised the capabilities of my learners and gathered that supporting and affirming them builds good relationships. After this lesson I was confident that I had improved my teaching, taking from learners' participation and demonstration of comprehension. This was evident from the responses they provided during different activities. Both the original and shared written text hung on the wall and when there was no teacher in class, I would find them reading stories and words in small groups. I realised then that I had inspired and motivated them to love reading. I hope that will grow and help them succeed in learning in the intermediate phase. However, I acknowledge that I still need to improve my teaching and share with other teachers the knowledge I acquired through this study to enhance the level of literacy teaching in my school.

Figure 26. Retrospective reflection

The journal entry in Figure 25 recounts what occurred during the presentation of the lessons and expresses my associated feelings about how my teaching had improved. The retrospective reflection in Figure 26 outlines the causes of the learners' achievement in learning. I portray what I did to stimulate learning. The three themes that emerged from an inductive analysis of these reflections are described in the following sub sections.

5.8.1 Creating a positive teaching and classroom environment

This theme depicts the positive attitude I portrayed in the classroom and the healthy environment I created during the third cycle of lessons. As mentioned earlier, the R2L methodology is grounded in Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse, which regards the classroom as the field in which the curriculum is interpreted and knowledge is transferred explicitly to learners (Bertram, 2012). Pedagogic discourse concerns the instructional discourse which is about the transmission of the knowledge which is embedded in the regulative

discourse. The regulative discourse concerns the moral and social order in a classroom regarding the conduct that is expected by teachers (Bernstein, 1990).

With regard to the regulative discourse, I created a positive learning environment where children would feel safe to communicate with me and with each other about the lessons. According to the pedagogic discourse, in agreement with R2L, the setting of the rules promotes a relaxed classroom atmosphere where the teacher has an open communication with learners (Hoadley, 2017; Rose, 2017). Thus, scaffolding my learners through interaction created democratic discussions and a positive relationship and they were free to express their opinions and feelings and explained the reasons for their views.

Teaching in a new school context required me to consider that learners had never been taught with R2L strategies before, unlike my former school, where the method was implemented by all teachers in all grades. Therefore, my learners needed more scaffolding to understand the R2L routines. Having realised how much support they needed in learning through the R2L methodology, my attitude towards them changed. I understood that they were not lazy or ill-mannered, but were lost because they needed to know what was expected from them. Creating a safe and conducive learning atmosphere and building a good relationship with my learners established an interactive learning space where I encouraged them to share their ideas and I gave them constructive feedback on their work, all of which contributed to their understanding of tasks (Millin & Millin, 2014; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Moreover, having a routine prevented the loss of teaching and learning time, as the children knew about the order of events.

In Chapter four I explained that during the first cycle of lessons, my classroom was dominated by a regulative discourse in which I was an authoritarian teacher, snapping at my learners, so they demonstrated fear and withdrawal. However, social order and power relationships changed as I learnt to communicate with learners, allowed them the opportunity to speak and guided them through all the tasks. To illustrate the atmosphere in the classroom, one girl spoke to the boy seated across from her and argued about the first picture on the poster of occupations I had displayed on the chalkboard. It was the picture of a teacher and a chalkboard with numbers one to six (see figure 18), and my learners concluded that those numbers were suitable for a Grade 1 class. Then their argument was about which grade the picture indicated as it has Grade 1 numbers written on the chalkboard. Then the boy raised a hand and commented: "Ma'am, we are Grade 3 but you are teaching us about a picture of a Grade 1 class." Although they caused some disruption I was glad their discussion was about the lesson and impressed that they were free to communicate their feelings and thoughts and that their attention was on the

lesson. Then I explained that what was important in the picture was the person pointing at numbers, the teacher.

Self-study goes beyond proposed or imaginary processes for improving education. It is a reality in which teachers rethink their teaching and behaviour, study and then apply newly constructed knowledge to their work (Samaras, 2011). I witnessed this when I examined my behaviour and professional practice and worked on it, resulting in my relationship with learners improving, even outside the classroom environment. When I arrived in the morning they would come to the parking area to help me carry my bags to the classroom. At the beginning of the year, when I walked along the corridors during the break, my learners would see me and turn their backs. During this research, I realised they even feared me outside the classroom. Working on my attitude and teaching changed my learners' attitudes and they started to come and greet me in the mornings and asked to take my bags from the car. They talked to me during break and when the afternoon bell rang, they asked to take my things back to the car. The change in attitude demonstrated the balance of personal and professional relationships in my classroom.

I remember one afternoon a boy came to me and said, "Ma'am, can you please select people who would take your bags to the car every day." Another added, "But, ma'am it should be boys only because girls do not know much about cars, they cannot even open the boot." After that, there was a lot of noise as the girls were trying to defend themselves. I was flushed with joy to see them speaking so freely, but with respect. Then I told them that cars are not for boys only: "I know that even girls can open the boot, therefore everybody will get their turn to carry my bags to the car and I will be there to monitor you."

5.8.2 Intensifying support for my learners

R2L as a pedagogy is underpinned by both regulative and instructional discourses with regulative being constantly affirming the learners (Acevedo, 2020). Due to affirming them, my learners were impressively motivated to respond to questions about pictures on the poster and enthusiastic to read the story. Their interest in discussing the poster promoted their understanding of occupations and knowledge of the vocabulary. Their understanding enabled some to talk about careers and others to show their interest by listening attentively to presentations and making meaningful remarks. In some cases, they disagreed with each other and caused chaos, and I devised the strategy of drawing their attention so that we could proceed. I pointed at them and counted *1, 2 nang' umfundi* meaning, "1, 2 there's a learner*,"* and learners would respond thus, *3, 4 nang' uthisha* meaning*,* "3, 4 there's a teacher." I had heard English

teachers use some expressions to draw learners' attention and observed that learners liked those expressions, and to them it was like a game and it worked for me. My learners' interest in learning was sustained by acquainting them and preparing them for upcoming activities. Aligning my work with collaborative learning (Vygotsky (1978) promoted learners' involvement in brainstorming, solving problems, discussions and presentations and the availability of resources stimulated their interest and intensified my support.

5.8.3 Construction of learners' knowledge

The third theme explains my improvement in constructing learners' knowledge of phonics, vocabulary, pronouns and develop reading comprehension skills. The optimistic teacher is likely to focus on the teaching approaches that support learners' knowledge construction and develop their understanding of concepts rather than only focusing on the content to be taught (Frenzel et al., 2021). The evidence of improvement in my teaching behaviour was demonstrated in the third cycle of lessons, as I allowed my learners the opportunity to communicate their ideas and emotions. My focus was not only on the content, but I was determined that my learners gain knowledge and understanding of the concepts. Learners demonstrated their knowledge and understanding by identifying words that omit the vowel 'u', writing the words in their books on their own, putting the word cards on the wall and presenting their ideas in front of the class. The knowledge and understanding that learners demonstrated in different activities were socially constructed through the support from the teacher and among the groups within a positive learning space (Vygotsky, 1978). Pretorius (2010) states that reading is a highly complex system. However, it is entangled with language and these two elements cannot be separated, as reading codes such as sounds, alphabet, syllables and words represent language. Therefore, my learners' understanding of grammar rules exhibited my success in teaching both reading and language. For instance, I even observed my learners replacing nouns with pronouns in sentences.

5.9 Summary of my learning

In summary, through the five stages of R2L explained in detail in Chapter four, I explicitly taught the text structure and language patterns, intending to improve learners' reading and comprehension from the level of the text. This gave the learners an idea of what the text was about and how it was structured. Working with the sentences, cutting up the words from the sentences, aimed to teach them how words were arranged in phrases and what each phrase

meant. I did not ask questions about the story directly, but I gave learners some cues such as position cues that directed them where they could look for an answer in the text. I also used the meaning cues to ask who, when, where, why and how questions. These cues give the meaning of words to identify individuals, places, things, time or reason. At the level of the word, I taught learners the meaning of words and the arrangement of letter patterns that form the word (Acevedo & Rose, 2007; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017).

From doing this research I realised that as a teacher, I am a significant role player in effectively teaching reading and developing learners' reading skills. I was pleased to work with my learners to improve my teaching and my relationship with them. I realised that their ability or inability to perform tasks are determined by the level of support I provided and my behaviour during classroom events. As stated earlier, one of the R2L principles is to address learners' diverse learning abilities and minimise the learning gap between children. I learnt to support my learners by integrating the important aspects that lead to learners' reading fluency and comprehension such as: including them in the same activities regardless of their backgrounds and abilities, providing background knowledge of the text and linking text to their experiences, introducing learners to new concepts and scaffolding them through all the activities (Mataka et al., 2020).

5.10 My continuous professional development, personal and collaborative

Teacher development can be related to learners' academic improvement (Day, 2002). Day argues that teachers cannot organise effective learning opportunities for their learners unless they perceive themselves as lifelong learners who need to develop their competence and expertise as professionals. My learning that is discussed in this chapter motivated me to further improve my classroom practice. I made a collage to represent how I am willing to continue to develop myself personally and professionally.

Figure 27. Collage representing my learning and motivation for continuous development

My teaching practice using R2L has been restored through understanding teaching in different school contexts. Nevertheless, my learning is not limited to this research, but, as a lifelong learner, I am determined to continue improving my behaviour in class and my professional development.
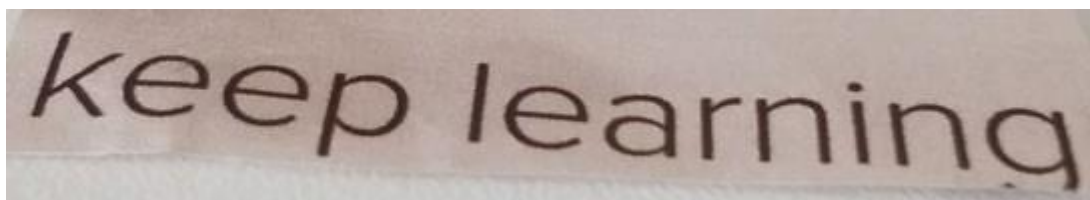
Figure 28. The image from the collage "keep learning"

The image of "keep learning" extracted from the collage indicates that I will independently continue making personal inquiries, even without formal research. After my lessons, I will reflect on my attitude to my learners and my emotional expression during lesson presentations. I will always be mindful of preparing my lessons thoroughly and supporting my learners in performing class activities. The phrase "keep learning" inspires my desire to read for leisure, as teachers' attitudes, beliefs and reading habits are crucial in either constraining or accelerating learners' literacy levels (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016).

In addition, the phrase "keep learning" encourages me to continue initiating conversations with colleagues from my school and in other schools to improve my teaching and improve my learners' achievements. In the first cycle of lessons, that I did not do adequate lesson planning, caused an ineffective lesson presentation. By working collaboratively with critical friends and being receptive to their criticism and advice, I improved my attitude towards my learners and my teaching practice. Then I learnt to give myself enough time to prepare teaching material according to the learners' needs. My learning from the self-study research was noticeable, even to other Grade 3 teachers in my school. That fact allowed me an opportunity to engage them in conversations about improving ourselves as our knowledge and quality of teaching can be possible factors that might influence our learners' achievement (Pretorius, 2015; Spaull, 2016). I acquainted them with my acquired information about initiating one's own professional development, and explained that they could interrogate their teaching and become the agents of their development, even if it is not done for degree purposes.

Using the scaffolding techniques such as valuable hints, clues, and clear instructions enables learners of different abilities to learn to participate successfully in the tasks (Yildiz & Celik, 2020). From this insight, I learnt to scaffold my learners by clarifying the purpose of each task to create a safe learning environment where they could acquire new knowledge and skills and improve their understanding. With reference to my improved teaching, my learners' involvement in the third cycle of lessons, and their achievement in reading scores (Figure 24), I realised that indeed I had improved my behaviour and teaching, and that motivated me to develop further.

The continuous professional development that I am intending to pursue will not be solely for myself as an individual teacher, but will hopefully influence successful teaching in my school (Knight, 2002). Hence, I plan to continue sharing my learnings with other teachers and encourage the practice of reflecting on our teaching to improve personally and professionally, as learning in the workplace is a social phenomenon (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004).

5.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the set of lessons that I taught in term 3 in 2021 to respond to the research question: *What can I learn about using Reading to Learn to develop my learners' reading comprehension?* I started by describing the lessons according to the stages of R2L. The description of lessons included the listening and speaking activity learners did to demonstrate their comprehension of the concepts I had taught. Then I described

scaffolding as the concept I used to understand my teaching and elaborated on how it was demonstrated during classroom activities to support learners' participation and comprehension. Finally, I discussed my learnings from conducting self-study research in terms of understanding myself, knowing my learners and the strategies to respond to their needs and my plans for further development. In Chapter six, I describe critical friendship and discuss my collaborative work with critical friends.

CHAPTER 6: Challenging my teaching practice by using the Reading to Learn methodology and engaging critical friends

6.1 Introduction

Undertaking self-study assists the researcher to uncover their working environment which influences their daily practice and identity (Lynch et al., 2018). As stated in previous chapters, the purpose of this study was primarily to improve my teaching of Grade 3 isiZulu home language reading using the R2L methodology. Self-study research is conducted to challenge one's understanding about teaching and learning. Exploring one's personal challenges requires interaction and openness and therefore I had to establish a trusting relationship with critical friends so that I would work with and be open to their critique (LaBoskey, 2004). When I moved to a new school it had not meant a change in my role identification as a teacher, although the new classroom environment differed tremendously from my previous school. Learners in the new school were not familiar with my R2L teaching strategies, which compromised effective teaching and learning. Thus, moving schools presented the challenge of implementing R2L (discussed in Chapter two). This indicates that effectiveness in teaching can be unpredictable, since any practice is dependent on the context in which it is used (Ritter & Hayler, 2020).

I chose to initiate this study to improve my teaching and the learning of my Grade 3 class. I used multiple methods, one of which is life history that allowed me to revisit my past, my attitudes, and my beliefs, so that I could examine myself and change (Samaras, 2011). As much as I was at the centre of the study and potentially an agent in the construction of knowledge, this study was undertaken collaboratively with critical friends to demonstrate trustworthiness (Ritter & Hayler, 2020). Looking at myself and examining my teaching closely was an important way that I could grow and develop my teaching practice.

As discussed in Chapter four, I video recorded my lessons, the purpose of the video in my research being to capture, and later reflect on, my teaching and my learners' involvement in the lessons. In my data, I was exploring the kind of interaction I had with my learners and related my teaching to the way they responded. I watched the video clips to reflect on how I presented my lessons and to look for the incidents that would demonstrate the level of scaffolding I provided.

In Chapters four and five I described the three cycles of lessons that I taught during the year and explained both the what went well and the frustrations that I experienced during the first lesson. I revealed the mistakes that I made as the reasons the first lesson did not continue to the end. I then described the activities in which I was engaged with my Grade 3 learners in the second and third cycles of lessons. I described the concept of scaffolding and explained how I used this concept to improve my learners' participation in learning and support their reading comprehension.

The purpose of this chapter is to respond to the fourth research question: *What can I learn about using the Reading to Learn Methodology from engaging with critical friends?* I recount how I challenged my teaching practice using R2L and learnt through engaging critical friends in discussion after my lesson presentations and during the video reflections. As mentioned previously, the focus of the study was on R2L, thus I preferred to work with people from the R2L community to improve my teaching using this methodology. One of my critical friends was a retired teacher and a member of the R2L community, who sat in my classroom as an observer while the cameraman was recording my lessons. Other critical friends were teachers who were implementing the R2L methodology in their schools. Working with critical friends required me to be emotionally prepared to share my personal and professional uncertainties and vulnerabilities with honesty and to show my willingness to accept criticism (Ritter & Hayler, 2020). Conducting this study in collaboration with critical friends became fascinating to me as I was able to challenge and develop my professional practice while progressing with my research.

The chapter begins by describing critical friendship as one of the components of self-study in which the teacher-researcher makes their practice explicit to themselves and to others in a supportive environment to improve their practice. I outline how I established my critical friends with whom I shared my concerns and worries about my teaching practice. This is followed by the highlight of how I generated the data that we reflected on together and the working structure that I created for our critiques and support meetings. I discuss the reflection with the observer critical friend, which took place immediately after the lesson presentation. The chapter continues to my own reflection through the collage that represents what was happening in the classroom. Then I present the dialogue with teacher critical friends with whom I viewed the video recordings and reflected with. The conclusion to the chapter is a discussion to illustrate my learnings through self-study and critical friendship.

6.2 Critical friendship

A critical friend is the trustworthy person who gets involved in the research as a partner to serve as a confidant and support to the researcher in the collection and analysis of data (Lynch et al., 2018). Having a critical friend is a requirement in self-study, as the researcher needs someone to whom they disclose the reality about their situation. The critical friend critiques the researcher's work constructively as a friend, challenges the researcher's interpretations of the situation, supports the understanding and interpretation of events, and supports and joins in the professional learning experience, encouraging reflection, challenges and critiques. They work with the researcher throughout the research as the advocate for the success of the research (Lynch et al., 2018; Schuck & Russell, 2005). As research partners, the researcher and critical friends work together to learn from each other's experiences during the process of research (Samaras, 2011; Samaras & Roberts, 2011; Schuck & Russell, 2005). Working with critical friends means that the investigator works with partners who challenge them to think more critically about their practice and experiences (Lynch et al., 2018).

One of the challenges that could be encountered in a critical friendship is when some or all critical friends have a lower education level than the researcher. Schuck and Russell (2005) argue that the differences in education level could create uncertainty about whether the critical friends' involvement in critiquing and challenging the researcher is valuable. Moreover, the researcher might not feel that they are gaining insights from critical friends. I felt that colleagues from the R2L organisation would be a good choice as critical friends in my study (see Chapter two). One of them, the observer of my lesson, was a retired, experienced primary school teacher and trainer in the R2L programme, the other two were teachers who had experience in implementing the methodology at various levels in primary school. We were not at the same level in qualifications, as although one of my critical friends had a Master's degree, another had a Bachelor of Education degree and had never been exposed to research. However, I was convinced that their deep insight and experiences in the R2L methodology would enable them to comfortably and honestly support me, and our personal relationship would assist in maintaining confidence, openness and trustworthiness (O'Dwyer et al., 2019).

I explained to my critical friends the context of my research and the goal that I was working towards of improving my teaching, to allow them to critique my work constructively and provide support and learn with me through this professional learning experience (Schuck & Russell, 2005). As I worked with them, I was aware of the challenges I was going to encounter

in discussing my own identity and practice. Nevertheless, change in my practice depended on disclosing my personal and professional challenges with honesty.

6.3 Establishing critical friends

After I had decided to do self-study research, I thought of the people who would be both available and trusted, to support my study. The necessity for having critical friends is that, over time, one's practice develops in conjunction with beliefs about oneself, leading to staying in a comfort zone. This presents a difficulty for the researcher to examine and change their own practice and determine whether the changes have affected improvement (Russell, 2002). Therefore, I arranged a meeting with the administrator and the cameraman from the R2L organisation. One of them would sit and observe my lesson presentation and share her comments and opinions with me afterwards, while the other took the video of my classroom practice. The second group of critical friends were the teachers from other schools who were implementing the R2L methodology in their classrooms. They were vital in providing support, as they understood the context of my work. I trusted that they would ask me provocative questions about my practice and critique me constructively as friends. I also believed that they would maintain a positive attitude, as we would work together towards achieving the same outcome of learning and understanding our work (Schuck & Russell, 2005). I arranged a meeting and presented my work to them. I shared my worries and concerns about my teaching and my learners' behaviour. We then developed the same understanding of critical friendship, which involves honesty and trustworthiness. We also discussed the benefits, because, as teachers, while we reflected on my teaching, they might learn from my experiences (O'Dwyer et al., 2019; Schuck & Russell, 2005). Table 10 shows the profile of my critical friends and their pseudonyms.

Table 10. Profile of critical friends

Names	Highest qualification	Role in research	Grade taught	Years of teaching experience
1.Nancy	Master of Education	Classroom observer	Retired (former primary school teacher)	37
2. Thabo	Master of Education	Video reflection	Grades 4-6	11
3. Veli	Bachelor of Education	Video reflection	Grade 3	27

6.4 Data sources

In this section, the data sources for my study are highlighted as the sources of my discussion with critical friends. One of my data sources for this study was a journal in which I made entries every week or at any time when something unexpected occurred. In the journal, I described the process of teaching and learning in my classroom, including my feelings about the lessons I presented and my learners' responses to the activities. I began writing my journal on 1 February 2021, two weeks after the school opening, and continued until November 2021. I mainly focused on how I taught reading through the R2L cycle, how my learners participated in lessons and how they developed reading comprehension. I also did the pre-tests at the beginning of the year and the post-test at the end of the year to examine learners' reading progress in 2021. My lessons were video recorded to capture the events that took place during the lesson presentation. The journal entries and collages, along with the learners' reading pre-test and post-test and video recording of my teaching, generated the data for the study. My critical friends and I engaged in discussing the collages that I made, my reflections in the journal, the recorded lessons and the learners' improvement in the EGRA post-tests at the end of the year.

Reflecting on my professional practice with critical friends, rescued me from the risk of being confined to my past experiences, and looking at myself closely and reflecting on my teaching facilitated my growth and development (Eraut, 1994; Loughran & Russell, 2007). Although I was at the centre of the study and potentially an agent in the construction of knowledge, working with critical friends demonstrated my trustworthiness in generating and analysing data.

6.5 Working structure with critical friends

The teacher's personal practice develops alongside their beliefs about a particular practice and they frequently become comfortable with their daily teaching. Therefore, they often may need support from a critical friend to examine their practice and ensure their constant improvement. Involving critical friends in self-study minimises individual introspection and encourages collaborative work, as it is difficult to understand one's practice, make changes and ensure improvement alone (Lynch et al., 2018; O'Dwyer et al., 2019; Schuck & Russell, 2005).

My two critical friends and I established some guidelines on the time, place and duration of our meetings. Lacking clear guidelines for collaboration creates uncertainty, as others may not understand their roles in the partnership. I arranged face-to-face meetings with my critical friends with the understanding that seeing each other builds relationships and allows the group

to explore the issues which will benefit everyone in the research team in depth (Schuck & Russell, 2005). We had ten meetings and met every last Friday of the month to discuss my reflections in the journal. My critical friends asked me provoking questions about the way I presented the lessons and the reasons for my choices (see sections 6.6 and 6.7). We also discussed the events that took place in the video recording, and while they critiqued my practice, they suggested some alternative ways of improving my teaching. Working with critical friends benefitted me, as it would have been difficult to assess my own work and understand what was happening in my classroom. I started by reflecting on my teaching of the first lesson and I recognised how I snapped at learners and the negative emotions I expressed towards them during the lesson. This behaviour was the same as the teachers who taught me when I was a child (see Chapter three). However, when I was with critical friends, they showed me positive elements in my teaching that I would not have discovered on my own and they suggested the changes I needed to effect to realise myself. What follows is a detailed discussion of how I engaged with each of my critical friends.

6.6 Engagement with Nancy

During my first lesson, I told my learners to open their workbooks on page 82 and I started asking them questions about the pictures that summarised the story. Some learners could not see the pictures clearly and they were pointing at the wrong pictures and giving me irrelevant answers (see Chapter four). Due to the learners' behaviour and responses, I became angry and snapped at them. As a result, they were terrified and could not even raise their hands and answer the questions, which resulted in a negative classroom environment embraced by fear and frustration.

Nancy asked me the following question when the lesson ended:

> *Have the learners read this story or have you talked about it with them before? Looking at what you did, it seemed as if you were referring to something that you had told them about now you are expecting them to remember what they had learnt. Unsurprisingly, learners were so lost and frustrated and could not follow what you were trying to do.*

I explained to her that it was my way of preparing them for reading. I was expecting that the story would unfold while we discuss the pictures. And to my surprise, learners could not recognise the pictures, although they had been using the departmental workbooks since Grade

1 and they were aware that all the stories had pictures that provide the summary of the story. Nancy continued:

> *Of course, learners are familiar with the workbooks, but they are not familiar with how you are teaching them stories from the books. You were supposed to tell them the story first and make sure that they knew it before you showed them. After that you show them the pictures to support their knowledge of the story, thereafter you would have asked questions based on their inferences about the story. But instead, you just asked them questions about the pictures as if they already knew the story.*

Honestly, these comments did not sit well with me, as I had always been telling myself that I knew how to effectively do preparing for reading. In my planning, I thought that in preparing for reading I would summarise the story using pictures and never anticipated that learners would have any challenge in recognising the pictures. However, the lesson recording indicated that there was a fault in my planning and presentation. When planning for this activity I had not considered learners' prior knowledge. I did not use the scaffolding strategy that differentiates the levels of knowledge and abilities brought by the teacher and brought by the learners into the subject (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). These differences are mediated by the skilful use of teaching aids to improve interaction. Then the learners acquire knowledge and skills through interaction and can demonstrate their improved abilities. Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) describe types of scaffolding (see Chapter five), and I used the pre-determined scaffolding, which is pictures from the book provided in the curriculum, but I did not supplement that with proper interactional scaffolding to address the immediate needs of the learners.

Another discussion with Nancy was about my learners' seating arrangement and the way I attempted to involve them in the activities. During shared reading in the second cycle of lessons, I called all the learners to the front and we read the story together. I noticed that some learners, especially at the back of the group, were not listening as they could not respond to the questions. Others were showing restlessness and being disruptive. While we were reading, I saw Nancy approaching to stand behind the learners as if she was interested in the story. Then, during tea time, we had a chat about some incidents that took place during the lesson. She asked me:

> *Why did you choose to let all the learners come to the front? I do not think it was a good idea. Having them all here hindered the flow of the lesson. They were focusing on the*

camera and poking one another to look at the movements in the camera. That was the reason I came closer to draw their attention back to reading the story.

Rowe (2009) suggests that in the classroom the video camera be left planted where it would not attract the attention of learners and shift their focus from the teacher. However, in my case, it was a handheld camera not a mounted portable one. Hence, learners behaved differently on that particular day, as we had strangers in the classroom (Nancy the observer, and a cameraman). They became excited and played to the camera and did not focus on the lesson. Nevertheless, I explained to Nancy that in my previous school, I used to have the children at the front during shared reading because it helped me to observe the learners closely and to see that they were all reading. But then I realised that in my previous school I used to have a class of 30 learners and it was easier to keep them under control, unlike in the current school where I had 45 learners. However, in this case, the classroom set up did not work, as having all the children at the front did not allow for the reciprocal process of teaching and learning that would allow for quality teacher intervention (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). So, Nancy's observation encouraged me to think carefully about improving my skills in managing that group of children (Schuck & Russell, 2005). I had planned to continue to the next activity after the break, but, due to our discussion I decided to take another five minutes to do the shared reading again. In my journey to improve my teaching, I learnt that one acquires a lot of information through discussion and dialogue with others who share a common goal (Bruner, 1996). Thus, I willingly accepted constructive criticism from critical friends to learn about using the R2L methodology to improve my practice.

When the children returned from break, I told them to sit down and that we would read again to remind ourselves what the story was about. At that time, I was paying more attention to all of them to ensure their focus on reading. During reading, I used gestures and asked them questions to sustain their attention and facilitate understanding of the language used in the story. Then I continued to sentence making. I had seated my learners in pairs of mixed reading abilities. As I moved around in the rows, I found that they were already helping each other read. An example of that is an incident where a boy was holding his peer's finger, showing her the correct way of pointing at words. After the sentence making, Nancy commented about my learners' seating arrangement thus:

This kind of sitting arrangement is brilliant, besides your scaffolding, it promoted peer support in that activity.

While I monitored their reading, none struggled to read, as they were already helping one another. That kind of scaffolding occurs as the teacher supports learners' cognitive development through organising classroom activities and processes in which learners will engage and interact. Engagement in activities facilitates knowledge acquisition because cognition results from social activities and interaction with adults and peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Nancy made a further comment during the second cycle of lessons after I had taught all the language grammar I intended to teach (described in Chapter four). I had followed the R2L cycle very well and supported my learners through all the activities. I continued to use the sentence strips for detailed reading as the source for the learning of everything I wanted to teach. Then I did the spelling lesson. The discussion with my critical friend went as follows:

> *Please remind me of the phonics that you were teaching in this story. Although I do not understand much of isiZulu but I could see what you were teaching. I was able to figure out when you were teaching language and when you taught spelling I saw that you broke the words into syllables. My concern is that it was not clear to me which one of these sounds were you aiming to teach.*

When I heard this comment, I went to the spelling list and showed her the sounds I wanted to teach. Then she explained to me that it was unclear which phonic sound I was going to teach because I had simply taught learners spelling and had not emphasised the particular sounds. In the R2L cycle, there is no stage of teaching phonics, but during the spelling activity the teacher breaks the words into syllables, particularly in isiZulu, for children to master the words. Then, that is when the teacher emphasises the phonic sound prescribed in the curriculum. Being conscious that I was being recorded was frightening and I became nervous. As a result of this my lesson was not like a typical lesson. Hence, I taught a variety of spelling words from the sentence strip and broke them into syllables and made a mistake by giving all the words equal attention instead of specifically emphasising those with the targeted sounds.

6.7 Engagement with other critical friends: Thabo and Veli

Discussing my teaching with Thabo and Veli enhanced my learning through them and helped me understand myself and my learners from a different perspective. They were not present in the classroom, but observed the recorded lessons with me later. The views of my critical friends facilitated and advanced the understanding of my practice and the strategies I needed to

improve on. I audio-recorded our discussions at each stage of the R2L cycle and transcribed the recordings at a later stage.

6.7.1 Reflection on the first cycle of lessons: Preparing for reading

I was teaching a story titled "Visiting Pilanesberg game reserve" from the departmental workbook. The rationale was to teach fluent reading and comprehension, punctuation such as using capital letters, commas and full stops, synonyms and the phonics *chw* and *khw*. Our discussion started at the first stage of the R2L cycle which is preparing for reading. The story was about news that was broadcast on the radio about school children who visited a game reserve. This lesson did not go well because a number of learners could not see the small pictures in the book. As a result, when I asked them questions, few participated, while others gave wrong answers. The lesson ended up as teacher-centred because I had to explain everything to them without getting their input. As I continued teaching, I realised that the lesson was not progressing smoothly, so I decided to discontinue it.

During the video reflection, we first noticed that when I asked the learners to point at the picture of the radio newsreader, a boy at the front pointed at another picture. I shouted at the boy. As I snapped, he became scared and confused. He no longer pointed, but instead, he looked around at the other children.

The critical friends commented:

Thabo: *You asked that child to point to the news reader, and when he pointed at the wrong picture you shouted and said "is that a news reader, you are not listening" and the child looked around the classroom terrified and not in the book at all. Now I am just thinking about the impact made by your tone of voice on that child.*

Veli: *It is obvious, the child is so embarrassed and I think he perceives himself as stupid. Because you were standing next to him, I think you should have maybe shown him with your finger or just grab his finger and put it on the correct picture and continue with the lesson without other children noticing that he could not see the picture. Perhaps you can tell us what made you raise your voice.*

From looking at the video, I realised that my shouting was like an attack, making the boy lose confidence and trust in himself. My explanation to them was that because the boy was sitting at the front, close to me, I expected him to see clearly what I was talking about. The tendency of learners to point at the wrong pictures continued as the lesson progressed, and my reaction

was the same. I was embarrassed to realise, in front of other people, the behaviour that I had never noticed about myself. As I shouted at one learner, the one sitting next to him or her also became scared and doubted themselves. This indicates poor communication and the expression of unpleasant emotions towards learners. This kind of communication contradicts the interactional scaffolding through which the teacher creates an opportunity to interact with learners around the particular activity, as this is when problems are resolved and solutions are constructed (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Moreover, as I had asked the learners to open their books, I continued to teach without noticing a learner who was still struggling to find the page that we were reading. Seemingly, my shouting did not affect only one child, but the whole class, and in my teaching, I did not cater for learners who had particular challenges, such as seeing page numbers quickly. Then I received the following comments and advice from my critical friends:

Thabo: *You did not move around in the rows before you started talking about pictures, to see if all learners have found the story, there is a girl who is still looking for the page. Learners like that one would be left behind in reading as by the time they found the page they would have lost a lot of information. Hence, they would never be able to participate throughout the lesson or in other stages of the cycle.*

Veli: *Snapping at learners seems to be your tendency when correcting mistakes. I can advise that to support the learners give them guidance as to where to look for the picture, such as, "the picture we are talking about is on the top right or at the centre of the page". This would support slower learners and maintain a healthy learning environment. Moreover, at the foundation phase we are encouraged to use the big books which is the enlarged version of the book for sharing a story with the whole class.*

The story that I was required to teach was from the departmental workbook, and I did not have a big book. Reading from the big book helps in a shared reading of the story because the teacher discusses the pictures that all learners can see and from which they develop vocabulary. They can see the words clearly and are able to read (Department of Basic Education, 2011). But I had the story written on a big chart as well, hoping that my learners and I would discuss the pictures from the book and then read the story together from the large print. The strategy I used to start my lesson was first summarising the story through discussing the pictures, which did not work because learners could not see and understand the pictures from the small book. From the understanding of the interactional scaffolding suggested by Reynolds and Goodwin (2016), I should have been alert and able to see all the learners and instantly provide support according

to their individual needs. Watching the video made me realise the damage my strategy caused to the learners, and I began to understand that according to the R2L principle of scaffolding, and to encourage learners, I was supposed to first ask learners relevant questions that would relate to the story, then summarise the story for them before looking at the pictures. This would have given learners background knowledge to help them understand the text in general terms and support them in following the text in its sequence. This strategy also supports learners to work with challenging texts that are beyond their reading and comprehension levels (Acevedo & Rose, 2007).

As I continued with the lesson, I asked the learners a question about an animal that in the story the group of learners had seen at the Pilanesburg zoo. According to R2L, the teacher scaffolds learners' understanding by giving them clues to allow them to find the answers or solve problems by themselves (Rose & Acevedo, 2006). When I asked the question, I gave them the clue by describing the smallest animal with a bright colour. All my learners raised their hands and gave the correct answer, "the green frog", and that was an exciting moment for me and my colleagues.

> Veli: *That was very good I am also learning from it. Describing the frog using the gestures   drew learners' attention to you and it was easy for them to get the answer. However, I still recommend that in lessons like these, you enlarge pictures from the book for all learners to see so that you do not hold the small text up and expect all of them to see. Whenever you give them instruction, move around and make sure that you and the learners are on the same page.*

The techniques she suggested were not new to me, but I think I relied on my teaching experience and did not consider the learners' needs. Unintentionally, I made the lesson teacher-centred and driven by my emotions, and I let the tone of my voice determine the classroom environment and learners' participation. That was evident too in the instances where I was calm. The atmosphere became healthy, and learners learnt, but as soon as I found something wrong, I yelled and the atmosphere changed, with the learners becoming scared and withdrawn. We even noticed from the video that some of the learners who had raised their hands, then put them on their shoulders, which is a sign of fear and doubt. Veli laughed and said:

> *You know as we see what is happening here, I realise my own mistakes, you know sometimes we do things unaware that we are compromising our children's feelings. I am only realising now that sometimes this is what I do to my children, I never thought about what impact it has on them and my relationship with them.*

From my own reflection (Figure 12) and the reflection with critical friends, I started to worry about my anger that was easily triggered in the classroom. I then spoke with my niece, sharing my disappointment about what had transpired in my teaching. My niece blushed with shyness and said:

> *Yeah, maybe we need to take a closer look at this, because even to us as children in the family, you are short-tempered, you sometimes scold us over minor issues.*

This comment insinuated that I had a problem with social interaction that affected my relationship with other people. After the conversation with my niece, I admitted to myself that I needed intervention and I decided to see a psychologist and had continuous sessions with him which then led to psychiatric intervention. Through these therapies, I discovered that I had anger issues and depression. Both these professionals helped me work on my anger and taught me to always pre-think before I went to class and consider how I might respond constructively to situations.

6.7.2 Discussions on the second cycle of lessons

After the meeting with critical friends, I planned another cycle of lessons properly, considering the challenges that I had encountered, and taught it again the following week. I was going to use the same story but teach different aspects of language. For that preparation, I went to the internet café to enlarge the book page and made pictures bigger for all the children to see clearly from a distance. Before I went to class, I was conscious that I should support learners who could not quickly find the page numbers because some lacked knowledge of number recognition. Although I had planned to use bigger pictures, I would still talk about the pictures in the book when I explained homework to learners.

Preparing for reading

With my pictures enlarged, the presentation of the lesson and the learners' response was different from before. I started by summarising the story while involving learners by relating the story to their experience, rather than asking them questions based on the pictures without knowing the story. That time, some of them raised their hands, wanting to add more information. The stage of preparing for reading includes the shared reading of the story, which I had written on a big chart. I prepared the actions that learners would do to imitate the animals at the zoo. Learners were fully involved in the lesson and their interest was sustained throughout. Thabo commented:

> *Wow, the teacher looks calm and confident this time, it was helpful to view your lessons and talk about strengths and faults. This kind of study is interesting; it is enlightening even to us that we need to discover the truth about ourselves.*

This comment proves that self-study involves the researcher and critical friends working together to achieve shared goals (Samaras, 2011). Learners' participation was promoted by my attitude and a better strategy for presenting the lesson. Reading to Learn encourages teachers to elaborate on the meaning of the story and give learners information to develop their vocabulary (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). It also allows children to think and find out more information on top of what they have been given. That is the kind of support I provided to my learners, rather than asking questions about something I had not taught them before. Critical friends then advised me to use a long pointer when we read and point to words so that my body does not block other children from seeing the chart, which would result in saying the wrong words.

After shared reading from the chart, I had to refer learners back to the story from the book and explain their homework. It was easy for most of them to see the pictures, as we had discussed them in a large format and had read the story together.

> Veli: *Mmm, look at those two children, a boy at the back still could not see the picture, and before you even got to his table, the one next to him was already helping, that is impressive, the way they are working together.*

Indeed, I noticed the learner who was challenged by the activity as I was moving around and I calmly showed him where we were and continued to explain. That part of the video showed some improvement from my previous behaviour and also promoted peer support where learners work with the teacher and one another within a safe environment.

Sentence making

At this stage I gave learners two sentences selected from the original story:

"Zibone izinkawu zishwibeka ngemisila ezihlahleni. Zabona nezindlovu zithwele imiboko zilwa ngayo." (They saw the monkeys swinging their tails in the trees, they also saw the elephants fighting with their trunks).

From these sentences, I was going to teach the language structure, phonics and spelling words specified in the CAPS. The rationale for this R2L stage is to help learners discover the meaning

of words from the story and understand the language structure as I taught it from the context of the story. This activity encourages learners to work in pairs and support each other and it helps the teacher to monitor their reading levels (Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). I gave learners their sentence strips and as soon as they got one, they started reading even before I had instructed them to read. During our interaction, I kept on affirming them as they responded to questions correctly and encouraged them to keep trying if they had wrong answers. Thabo commented thus:

> *I like this activity because it is where much learning takes place. You were affirming your learners hence they are confident to read and even support one another even in cutting out the words. You can see here they are showing a positive attitude towards reading. This happens when they had got adequate support and affirmation from the teacher during the previous stages of the cycle, they become prepared for the next activity.*

The above comment indicates the improvement in the classroom environment and that I had been giving my learners clear instructions, occasionally, I even told them to help each other where necessary. The above comment is in line with the R2L principle of affirming learners, an emphasises continuous affirmation after the learners have answered questions correctly to encourage them to participate with confidence in learning. The comment also corresponds with the sociocultural dimension of scaffolding (see Chapter five) that involves the overall context where reading activities happen. The teacher attends to the motivational needs of learners and arranges group tasks and allows peer support in discussions and sharing of ideas. A teacher who understands the sociocultural dimension of scaffolding sets her learners up for success in learning, because they develop an interest in reading and confidence to participate which contributes to comprehension (Guthrie et al., 2004; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). This kind of scaffolding creates a feeling of safety in the classroom.

I continued to guide learners to understand the meaning of words and how the sentences fit together by paraphrasing each sentence before reading. First, I read the sentences to demonstrate how to read with flow and not count words, as the meaning of the sentence is lost. I emphasised using capital letters and full stops in sentences as part of the language to be taught that week. I moved around as they were reading to monitor that they took turns pointing at words. I shared my concern with critical friends about fast-learning children. As I was busy helping those struggling with reading, others shouted out the sentence without even looking at the words as if they had memorised it. I got the following response:

> Veli: *Learners already know the sentence and words and they end up saying it from memory, which is part of learning, and therefore the chaos they are causing is constructive. To add on that, working with the sentence strip covers the different learning styles as required by CAPS, as it says teaching should consider that some children learn by touching the material, others learn easily through seeing the material closer to them and some learn by hearing what they are being told.*

I started asking learners questions referring to the sentences that I gave them. For the duration of the activity I used position cues and synonyms to help them identify the keywords and then I continuously affirmed them to encourage their participation and develop their confidence. The video showed a learner who had her hand up when I had not asked any questions and I ignored her. I did that because it was almost break time and we had run out of time, and the comment was:

> Veli: *Why was that child's hand up?*

> Thabo: *Clearly, she wanted to say something. One of your research questions is about developing your learners' confidence to participate. Now a child is wanting to participate but the teacher ignores her. You should have given her a chance and heard what she wanted to say, maybe she wanted to ask something or add more information interesting about that part of the story.*

I realised that I made a mistake by not letting her share her idea. I could have told her that I would give her a chance when we came back to class after break. What I did was contrary to the principle of scaffolding that encourages the flow of communication, that provokes learners' motivation which contributes to their successful learning (Yildiz & Celik, 2020). Additionally, the R2L principles of scaffolding emphasise allowing children to think extensively, to be able to link the stories to their existing knowledge and infer from the text (Rose, 2005).

Spelling and phonics

From the story that I taught, I had found words with the sound that I wanted to teach that week: *zishwibeka and zithwele* to teach *shw* and *thw*. In the first lesson, I just taught learners the spelling of words by breaking them into syllables, but I did not emphasise the sounds that I was targeting. During our critical friends' discussion, one of them raised the same issue as Nancy did:

Veli: *I understand that here you are teaching spelling, but at this stage you should be introducing the phonic sound. After breaking up the words you should have let the children practise the words and sound them out repeatedly, written the sounds on the chalkboard and given them the chance to add vowels to make syllables. Then let them think of other words with the same sounds.*

This comment indicates that I did not explicitly introduce phonics and the suggestion supports the scaffolding technique that effective teaching and learning of language is achieved through practice in a safe environment with support from the knowledgeable other, which I did not provide in this lesson. I learnt from this comment and improved the teaching of phonics in the subsequent lessons. The video demonstrated this improvement as I focused my attention on the sounds better than I had before, although they were different sounds and spelling (sounds that omit the vowel 'u') for example, *msh*, *mph*, *mng* and *mny*. I wrote the words on the chalkboard, allowed learners to sound them out repeatedly, asked them to give me other words with the same sounds and made a list of words with the same phonic sounds.

Joint rewriting

I explained to the learners what we were going to do and drew a mind map together with them. This gave children clear guidance of what was expected from them and it paved the way for thinking about ideas for the new story. Reading to Learn suggests that in the foundation phase learners brainstorm ideas and the teacher writes the story. After having discussed the faults from the first video clip, I improved the presentation of the lesson so my learners were able to come up to the front of the classroom in turns to write sentences on the chart (see Chapters four and five). This indicates that from the beginning of the cycle I had given my learners enough support to allow them to develop thinking and communication. My instructions were clear and learners were fully supported, so the lesson was successful and the children participated. Seeing improvement in the teaching and learning in my class a critical friend asked:

Thabo: *I can notice the change of behaviour in your teaching, what helped you to control your tendency of shouting?*

Veli: *Yes, very noticeable and the children look so relaxed, really how did you manage to be so calm and not scare the children?*

These remarks are evidence that as my study progressed I managed to improve my behaviour towards learners and to create a free and healthy teaching and learning environment. My response to their questions was that each time we watched my lessons on the video I felt so

embarrassed to realise that sometimes I go to class without being thoroughly prepared, relying on teaching from experience. The way in which the lesson presentation was affected proved that successful lesson presentation is determined by thorough preparation. I also explained that whenever teaching and learning did not go well, I blamed the learners and got angry at them. Therefore, from watching the videos I learnt from these mistakes and started to regard myself as a novice teacher who needs to learn. I knew I should always give myself time to prepare the lessons and teaching aids. Moreover, I was mindful of my emotions and was determined to promote smooth and meaningful communication with my learners, as positive interaction is one of the principles of R2L and scaffolding techniques are a significant foundation for successful learning (Rose, 2011; Yildiz & Celik, 2020).

> Veli: *I wish I could do a self-study for my own professional development. Your study taught me that some of us as teachers are not aware that we are capable of hindering children's learning through our approaches to teaching and our attitudes towards learners. We tend to be pleased about learners who are achieving in learning not knowing about the emotional damage we may have caused to them.*

This assertion indicates that my study did not only contribute to my professional development, but was also beneficial to my critical friends because I was able to generate and share knowledge that could be useful to their teaching and to building relationships with their learners (Samaras, 2011).

6.8 My learning

My learning from this study was an interactive and a social process whereby I acquired knowledge through being critiqued by others to improve my professional practice. Working with critical friends in self-study research corresponds with the sociocultural perspective on learning that recognises the significant role played by social and cultural context in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Doing this self-study facilitated my learning because working collaboratively with critical friends extended the knowledge and skills I required for my teaching practice. They encouraged me to consider the learners' educational background when planning the lessons and emphasised that lesson preparation is crucial as it can determine the success or reveal gaps in lesson presentation. They suggested that in my planning I should consider that, as a teacher, I possess more knowledge and understanding of the lesson than learners. Therefore, I should provide teaching and learning material that supports their acquisition of knowledge and facilitates understanding of the task. For example, when planning

the first set of lessons it was easy for me as a teacher to understand the pictures in the book and relate them to a story because I had read the story. But I did not consider that the learners had never seen or read the story before and so the pictures were not obvious to them, which is the reason they could not respond positively to instructions. In that context, the classroom interaction improved during the second and the third cycles of lessons as I had done thorough preparation and improved my scaffolding strategies (see chapters 4 and 5).

Through interactive and social learning from critical friends, my teaching was transformed into what is understood as the sociolinguistic view of learning (Vygotsky,1978). I learnt that reading, writing and language learning are social interactions shaped and influenced by context. I began to support my learners properly as they read and performed all the lesson activities because subjecting them to the constant struggle with tasks at the edges of their capabilities could affect their motivation to read. Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) advise that supporting learners in reading turns their frustration into exciting reading experiences. Feedback from critical friends on my lessons reminded me to treat learners as unique individuals rather than simply using my years of teaching experience and familiarity with R2L. Therefore, I started to always consider the context and understand the needs of the learners that I am teaching.

I also learnt from the sessions with the clinical psychologist. I was acquainted with the ways of controlling my emotions. Before I go to class, I think about the challenges that I might encounter regarding learners' understanding of the lesson and prepare the strategies of supporting them. I acknowledge the possibility of some learners' inappropriate behaviour to avoid impulsive response to situations. At the end of the year 2021, I reviewed my learnings from critical friends and my learners' improvement in participation and reading. Restoration of my love for teaching prompted me to make a collage and structure my learning so that I would always share with other teachers at school. This and more of my learning from critical friends is illustrated in Figure 29.

Figure 29. Collage that depicts my learning from critical friends

Table 11 illustrates the three themes that emerged from the collage to explain my learning from this research. It explains the worries that I had before working with critical friends, the nature of their support and what I learnt from collaborative work with them and the attributes I managed to develop.

Table 11. My learnings

Theme 1: Explore and learn	Theme 2: Support from others	Theme 3: Achievement
Who am I?	Viewpoints	Reshape
What if I feel guilty?	Networking	Reframe
I need to overcome	Conversation	Renew
	Friendship	Sharpen my skills
	Sharing good and hard times	Finding new purpose
	A place of seeking wisdom	Master the art of planning
	Never judged me	It has worth everything
	Important of having trust	

	I need to stop making excuses	Know your strengths and weaknesses to be emotional is dangerous

6.8.1 Explore and learn

I embarked on this self-study because I wanted to explore and learn about my classroom situation and learn the knowledge and skills required to improve the teaching of reading. I was concerned about my teaching not being effective to produce satisfactory learners' achievement in reading. I was also not satisfied with my learners' participation during lessons. I developed the desire to understand and find answers to my concerns. The question 'who am I?' depicts that before I started this research I was not aware of what kind of a person I was. I was always getting admiration for my teaching from other teachers and my superiors at work. I knew myself as a strict teacher and parent, until I learnt from doing self-study, that my behaviour was affecting other people negatively. What I thought and believed I was, was different from what I was actually doing in the classroom (Whitehead, 1989).

Although exploring my practice was driven by a desire to learn and develop knowledge and skills, self-study exposes the researcher to a vulnerable situation (Loughran, 2005). Therefore, the thought of working with critical friends terrified me, as I had questions of feeling guilty or them finding me guilty of causing the problem. I had this feeling before I read that using the self-study method involves embracing critical friendships in which we would work together constructively as colleagues and as partners, pushing each other to think critically about our classroom experiences (Lynch et al., 2018). The sentence: "I need to overcome", reminded me of one of the components of self-study, that it is transparent and systematic (Samaras, 2011). The collage I made explains that despite the fear of being embarrassed to disclose myself and my teaching to the public, I was eager to uncover the issues that influenced my teaching, understand who I was and to change. And therefore, I developed the quality of being receptive to questions and critique.

6.8.2 Hearing from others

I learnt that self-study is an improvement-aimed kind of research, undertaken collaboratively to ensure trustworthiness, and I established a collaborative relationship with my critical friends.

Our meetings were a good place for seeking wisdom and acquiring knowledge. Making connections with them gave me different viewpoints about my teaching and encouraged thinking about positive actions that I would not have discovered and improved on my own. Self-study is a two-way journey; besides exploring challenging experiences, one can also explore successful events to discover the reason for the success (Samaras & Freese, 2009). In that context, I learnt that while our conversations revealed my mistakes, I trusted that the critical friends would provide alternative ways to transformation. We would also identify and discuss my strengths and learn from them. I learnt that they should be trustworthy people, as their role is not to judge but to support the research through questioning and constructive criticism. Samaras (2011) mentions that teachers are accountable for their children's learning, and from this self-study, I learnt to stop making excuses and shift the blame to learners, but take responsibility to build up my teaching professionalism and improve students' achievement. Critical exchange of ideas with critical friends enhances possibilities for further improvement (Ritter & Hayler, 2020).

6.8.3 Enough passion and belief shape our lives

Self-study is a purpose-driven research, and I did it having the professional goal of working on my personal and professional development, because that mattered to me and for the benefit of my learners (Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2011). The phrase 'enough passion and belief shape our lives' explains that my passion for teaching made me realise that I was not happy about the unhealthy situation in my classroom. And it is my passion that stimulated the desire that drove me to do this research. I believe that embarking on this study would become the best endeavour towards my professional development. The journey towards this needed collaborative learning, and I learnt that self-study requires transparency and openness in presenting one's concerns and wonderings to work partners. Acquainting my critical friends with my challenges prompted dialogue. Through our ongoing conversations, I managed to reframe my perception of my learners, realising I had been blaming them for ineffective learning. Effective improvement happens because self-study is a shared task. Schuck and Russell (2005) argue that self-study is not only for the researcher, but involves mutual benefits because critical friends expect a benefit from the study. As a result, reflecting on my teaching with colleagues sharpened my skills as well as theirs. Despite exposing myself to my critical friends, this self-study allowed me to reshape my teaching by planning my lessons thoroughly and always considering the context in which I am working. Exploring myself was worth finding a new purpose in continuously improving my teaching, and changing my attitude towards learners, learning that expressing

unpleasant emotions is dangerous and creates a distance in relationships with people (Frenzel et al., 2021).

6.9 Conclusion

Teaching and doing research can be a lonely exercise. However, self-study is characterised by collaborative work in which the teacher-researcher involves colleagues as critical friends to provide their different perspectives and support (Samaras, 2002; Samaras & Freese, 2006). I conducted this self-study for my personal and professional accountability. The reflection with critical friends in various spaces and capacities revealed my self-awareness which improved my teaching. From working with critical friends, I acquired personal knowledge as well as the knowledge of practice which improved my teaching practice (Kelly, 2006). These two types of knowledge were socially constructed through my collaboration with critical friends who also learnt during the process of my study (Vygotsky, 1978). Although I felt embarrassed and vulnerable disclosing my ideal self to others, it was the instrument to assess the quality and validity of my research. My learning also involved a clinical psychologist who worked with me to improve my temper and my interaction with learners.

I felt disappointed when considering that my behaviour in the classroom replicates the frustration and pain I experienced when I was a learner in primary school (described in Chapter three). Then I remembered that I had promised myself that, should I become a teacher, I would never treat my learners in the same way as my teachers had treated me. Nevertheless, self-study allowed me the opportunity to change and to constantly reflect on how I contribute as a teacher to my learners' personal development and academic achievement. Conducting this study encouraged me to always strive to become a better teacher who listens and works collaboratively with my learners to support the development of their interests and motivation to learn.

CHAPTER 7: Reaching my growth zone

7.1 Introduction

This study was driven by the concerns and wonderings about my practices in my Grade 3 classroom in 2018 that emerged from my reflections. Having observed my learners' responses to my teaching, I desired to do this study to examine and better understand myself, my teaching and how my learners learn (Samaras & Freese, 2006). I was using the R2L methodology to teach isiZulu home language at the time and I wanted to explore whether my beliefs about implementing the methodology corresponded with my practice to effect change in my teaching. The desire to improve my teaching practice was mainly to develop my learners' reading skills and share my learnings for the benefit of my colleagues and the broader field of education.

In the previous chapter, I described my collaborative work with critical friends, explaining the concept of critical friendship in self-study research and how I disclosed my teaching practice to my critical friends to receive their feedback and improve my teaching. The process of selecting my critical friends was explained and my reasons for choosing them. Then, I outlined my methods of generating the data that I reflected on with my critical friends, and the working arrangement we agreed on as research partners. Following on that was my discussion and reflection with critical friends in various settings and capacities. The chapter ended with a collage illustrating my learnings through reflections and dialogues with critical friends.

I titled Chapter one "Stretching my traditional comfort zone" because it is where I started pushing and challenging myself to discover the reality about the frustrating teaching and learning experiences in my class. Here, at the end of my research process, I title this chapter "Reaching my growth zone" because I have achieved my goal of improving my teaching by supporting the development of learners' affects and their reading comprehension. In this concluding chapter, I provide an overall review of the thesis, summarising how my thinking was transformed by using various self-study methods, a personal history and arts-based methods to recall my past. I also explain how I acquired knowledge and gained different perspectives on my teaching practice. Some provocative questions and the enlightening feedback provided by critical friends shed light on the fact that I was in a comfort zone in my familiarity with R2L. Sawhney (2020) argues that teacher change in practice brings about more

understanding of students' identities and abilities and is needed to support their competence. Thus, developing certain ideas together with others empowered me to achieve my own professional goals of advancing my teaching and my learners' reading development. Moreover, the discussion with my niece was a disclosure about my tendency to easily become angry in contexts other than the classroom. That embarrassing revelation inspired me to seek professional psychological help. Learning more about my anger issues made me cautious about how I express my emotions, particularly in the classroom.

In reviewing my thesis, I start by discussing my personal and professional learning, describing the more profound understanding I gained about using R2L and what I learnt from engaging with literature about self-study and other educational issues and the teaching of reading. Following that, I discuss my learning about using the self-study methodology to improve teaching practice. The theories and concepts that I learnt and how they relate to my study are touched on. I explain how this study contributed to my critical friends and make recommendations for other teachers. I conclude with an assertion of how I will continue to improve my teaching as my learning is an ongoing process.

7.2 Personal and professional learning

At the time of this research, I had been implementing the R2L methodology for six years and was convinced that it effectively developed learners' reading abilities. Unexpectedly, my beliefs about my teaching changed in 2018 when I moved to a new school. I experienced a challenge with learners who, seemingly, could not participate confidently and willingly in the lessons. This classroom experience triggered my temper and stimulated my anger. Thus, my personal reasons for doing this self-study were to understand and explore these challenges to advance my teaching practice.

Professionally, this study emanated from the literature I read during my master's degree. The research states that many learners who use their African home languages as the LoLT in the foundation phase encounter problems when they switch to English as the LoLT in Grade 4 (Department of Basic Education, 2023; Pretorius, 2015; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Sibanda, 2017; Spaull et al., 2020). Similarly, in my teaching experience I have heard many teachers from the intermediate phase complain about learners from the foundation phase lacking reading skills and understanding. I decided not only to explore this challenge, but to also take

responsibility to explore my own teaching practice, since the low level of literacy skills in the foundation phase is associated with teaching and learning approaches used by teachers in the classrooms (Hoadley, 2012; Ntuli & Pretorius, 2009).

In my teaching experience, teachers often receive professional development workshops regulated by the Department of Education or provided by non-governmental organisations to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, from doing this research I discovered that teachers can be agents of their own change; they can initiate their own professional development and investigate themselves and their teaching practice (Hamilton et al., 2008; Samaras, 2011). From this kind of self-study, I learnt that my beliefs about my teaching differed from my actual practice. But I learnt from doing the self-study that one could be a researcher in the classroom and self-evaluate by reflecting on one's teaching practice regularly. Moreover, through working with critical friends, one could discover those areas of teaching that need to improve. This gave me the power to work towards my personal and professional development.

Throughout this process, I learnt to use journal entries to record the events during the lessons and to express my feelings about what happened. I had never used a diary before, but using the journal in my study educated me to generally use a diary to keep my daily records of events and emotions. Additionally, the strategy I learnt from this study is to video record the lessons and later reflect on the aspects of teaching never noticed during the classroom event. Reflecting on one's teaching could be difficult due to subjectivity, so I learnt that the quality of the reflection is enhanced by working with critical friends to whom the teacher-researcher would be able to disclose strengths and weaknesses. I learnt that critical friends should be trustworthy people who stimulate the researcher's critical thinking and provide support while learning from the research. The other knowledge I acquired from this self-study is representing my emotions about events through the arts such as the collage. Using the collage stimulated my thoughts about my shouting, which irritated learners and brought fear and withdrawal. While I was putting together pictures and phrases, I even imagined what might be happening in their minds and then displayed my imagination through the pictures. I realised that the arts-based methods could also represent happy moments and I created another collage to demonstrate the skills and attributes I acquired from this self-study.

Conducting self-study revived my passion for teaching and encouraged me to continuously evaluate myself and further improve my professional practice. Acquiring from this study the

significance of collaborative learning encouraged me to ask for an opportunity to explain self-study to my colleagues in a staff meeting at my school. I encouraged us all to work together and examine our daily practice, even if not for degree purposes, but to ensure quality teaching in our school. This suggestion was well received, particularly by the school management team and we all agreed to undertake this kind of professional development the following year. From my self-study, I realised that being too familiar with implementing R2L had compromised my attention to the background of my learners, who were unfamiliar with the strategies. Thus, I learnt not to rely on my experience, but to always consider the context in which I use the methodology and create a healthy classroom environment by establishing a routine and providing constant guidance.

In Chapter one, I mentioned that the R2L methodology is based on the following theories: the principles of text in context from Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and his theory about how people make meaning in language, from Bernstein's pedagogic discourse concerning the exchange of power over knowledge distribution in the classroom and Vygotsky's theory of social learning and scaffolding students' learning until they reach their independency. In line with these theories I learnt to involve learners in setting the classroom rules and the routine. I reduced the level of control by changing the classroom environment into an interactive space where everybody easily shared ideas and emotions. The creation of a more supportive regulative classroom discourse allowed the learners to take charge of their learning. As the study progressed, I connected more meaningfully with my learners through our interaction during the lessons and in other aspects of their lives. The connection that we had further promoted teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships which facilitated cognitive development and learning abilities.

I was introduced to the term scaffolding in the R2L training workshops in 2012. However, I learnt about this concept in more detail from this research. I discovered that the curriculum provides scaffolding through books, pictures and text features that are pre-determined to provide learners with the necessary knowledge. Moreover, I realised that as a teacher, I provide interactional scaffolding in the classroom to detect the challenges during the actual teaching and learning. This kind of scaffolding occurs immediately at the time of need and depends on the particular needs of the class or the individual learner (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Similarly, according to Bernstein's pedagogic discourse, the classroom is the space in which the scaffolding of learning is demonstrated and evaluated, even

in terms of sequencing and pacing. These two terms refer to managing how the sequence of activities is arranged to build upon each other and how much time is required to cover the particular work. In fact, R2L uses the interaction cycle, that is designed to reduce the boundaries of time limits and order from the curriculum and allow faster learners to accelerate, while others who might have fallen behind get an opportunity to catch up (Steinke, 2019; Steinke & Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2021). From the time of this study, I was mindful of planning my lesson presentation thoroughly and that I should teach my learners to distribute the material required on a particular day. I was conscious of the scaffolding strategies that support the development of social aspects and those that support cognitive aspects of learning. Therefore, since then, I have tried to always scaffold my learners' participation in learning to read, in language acquisition and comprehension.

Initially, this self-study research was meant to develop my educational practice. However, I discovered that I was not aware of negative emotions that I expressed in the classroom, which I needed to change. When I started the research, I thought that my conversation with critical friends would be around the challenges faced by the learners. Surprisingly, I learnt that the learners' behaviour was the response to my inadequate planning of the lesson and my anger towards them that I could not control. Children get excited and find the subject meaningful if presented by a happy teacher. As my study progressed, I learnt that as I was often an angry teacher and it was typical for learners to withdraw from learning my subject (Frenzel et al., 2021; Fried et al., 2015).

Reflecting on my lessons with critical friends made me realise that I needed to be mindful that using the R2L strategies to teach learners who are not familiar with the methodology can be a challenge that needs proper guidance. As our reflection continued, I tried to scaffold my learners by providing clear teaching aids and improving interaction in all the activities. I related the lessons to their real life experiences and allowed them the opportunity to work in groups to gain the confidence to participate and construct knowledge together. Learning about my shouting from the video was upsetting. Therefore, I shared my feelings with my niece. Discovering that the same behaviour was also noticeable in the family, I decided to address it by seeking professional help. Since I conducted this study, my teaching has improved and so has my social life. The learners that I have taught since then are developing a positive attitude towards learning and their academic achievements have improved.

7.3 Methodological learning

In my self-study, I used a personal history method to explore how my personal and professional experiences informed my current teaching. My writing involved memory drawings that evoked my earlier memories. Reliving my past was very hard, as I recalled memories that I never thought still existed in my mind. Recalling certain experiences made me laugh with joy, and others brought me heartache. When I was writing about my experiences from my first year of school and the beatings by teachers in the higher primary school, I felt pain and burst into tears.

Moreover, I was heartbroken to discover from this study that I was a harsh teacher in my classroom and a difficult person to talk to in the family.

Although it is a truism that the quality of teaching within the field of education is of great value, strategies to inspire teachers to pursue development in their field of work are neglected (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). In that context, I learnt that self-study is the methodology that could allow me to take charge of my professional development by questioning and seeking understanding about my personal and professional self. I realised from doing self-study that although the methodology focuses on the self where the voice of the researcher matters, collaborating with others is crucial and the voice of critical friends adds quality to the research (Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2011). I realised the significance of the voice of others during my reflection with critical friends, discovering some facts about myself which I would never have discovered on my own. This kind of collaboration with others indicates that self-study involves social interaction and learning through crosschecking with others. Being receptive to their feedback and criticism supports the reflective nature of the self-study methodology.

In the beginning, I thought that self-study research was used to inquire only about the areas that one needs to improve, but as I continued to read about it, I found out that I could also use it as a critical inquiry to investigate my success and its causes (Hamilton et al., 2008). In my study I generated both qualitative and quantitative data and like any other research, it was possible with self-study to analyse qualitative data from my reflections and collages as well as quantitative data from the learners' tests (Pithouse, 2004). I discovered some methodological components that would guide my research process. My research was personally situated as I initiated it and I became the author of my investigation. It also involved my learners and the issues that were taking place in our classroom. As an improvement-aimed process, my self-study research aimed at improving myself and my learners, while also benefitting the research partners and the whole school. Thus, this component of self-study guided my research towards

my own improvement which resulted in my learners' development in reading and my critical friends' realisation of their own behaviour in their classrooms (see critical friend's comment, in Chapter six). This study enlightened me to the notion that assessing the quality of self-study relies on the interplay of ideas between the researcher and the critical friends (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). Thus, the knowledge and understanding were shared throughout the research process.

As I had always considered myself a good foundation phase teacher, it was very hard to expose my vulnerability to others. It was even more challenging after making a collage revealing the embarrassing events that took place in my classroom. However, as I shared that collage, I noticed that my critical friends were not judgemental and I felt more confident to continue working with them. Making a collage was not easy because I had never done it before and I had never been good with art practice, even at school. After some guidance from my supervisors, it became clear how I might go about it, and then I managed to put the pictures and phrases together and explain what they meant.

As my study aimed at contributing knowledge to teachers, I shared with my colleagues at school the significance of reflecting on our teaching as the means of our own professional development. Instead of waiting for professional development from the Department of Education, we could initiate our own inquiry and reflect on the issues that matter to us. I explained that they could initiate and be part of the planning, together with critical friends to determine how they would acquire the knowledge and skills they require to improve their teaching practice and understanding of how their children learn. My explanation was based on Calvert (2016) argument that teachers would value the kind of professional development in which they are part of planning and where their specific needs would be regarded. Calvert (2016) further explains the value of learning within a group of trustworthy people and to share common goals. And thus I informed my colleagues about conducting a quality inquiry by working with other colleagues and receiving support from them. In that way, they would have to establish critical friends who would be trustworthy enough to provide meaningful criticism and honest feedback. I clarified that one does not need a defensive attitude, but requires openness with critical friends about the issues and receptivity to criticism in order to learn. Some of my colleagues had never conducted research before, so I acquainted them with ethical issues, as the inquiry would involve learners. I explained that learners are worthy of all respect and dignity. Thus, they would have to consider learners' well-being and respect their rights. They must honour fairness, honesty and confidentiality during their inquiry (Samaras, 2011).

7.4 Conceptual and theoretical learning

This study was informed by some concepts that were relevant to my practice, such as literacy and reading. My study focused on reading, but some authors entangle reading and literacy, as reading is one element of literacy (Frankel et al., 2016; Luckasson, 2006). While some scholars limit the definition of literacy to the individual's ability to read and write within an educational context (DEETYA, 1998; Louden et al., 2005), others expand it to developing these skills within any context where there is collaborative work of a particular community or society (Smagorinsky, 2001; Street, 1996; Zimmerman, 2011). The general agreement for all is that literacy equips children with knowledge and skills that enable them to participate in society, which is the reason literacy expands beyond the classroom (Spaull & Hoadley, 2017). Thus, my teaching of reading was linked to language, the learners' knowledge about the world and their social context.

Engaging with the academic literature on the concepts of literacy and reading was significant to me as a teacher and a researcher because I learnt how my learners and I should take active roles in the teaching and learning process. Reading about these concepts from doing this study helped me to learn more about my research topic. I discovered that reading is a continuously developing skill that requires the readers' development of both cognitive and social aspects of learning. I became aware of the conflicting ideas that suggest how reading is developed in African languages. Spaull et al. (2020) suggest the basic phonic knowledge or alphabetic knowledge (letter-sound knowledge) and vocabulary building as the foundational skills, crucial for fast tracking learners' early literacy development. Thus, the strategies to enhance learning of these skills should be at the forefront, as the mastery of alphabetic code determines learners' ability to read at their early stages. Additionally, the knowledge of the letter-sound relationship develops learners' awareness of individual sounds and the ability to pronounce unfamiliar words and therefore facilitates automatic decoding (Nieto 2005; Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). When alphabetic code and vocabulary have been developed, more attention is given to the more advanced skills that enhance comprehension. These suggestions contradict R2L, the methodology in question for this study. It recommends the same approach to teaching in all languages and across the curriculum. That is, to teach and learn the curriculum through reading the whole text from which learners are scaffolded to reach fluency and comprehension from the level of the text, the sentence and the words, including phonics. I also became familiar with principles that should guide the process of successful reading that understand reading as a

social process and the transmission of knowledge equally to learners in a form of social interaction (Acevedo, 2020; Anderson et al., 1985).

Conducting this research intensified my understanding gained from R2L, that learning to read within the social environment may stimulate the desire for learners to look for opportunities to read more. Pretorius (2010) attests that more opportunities to read may facilitate the achievement in cognitive linguistic skills of decoding, comprehension, and response, which explains the readers' attitudes and feelings towards what they are reading. Therefore, I tried to explicitly engage my learners in teaching and learning and scaffold them to develop reading skills that would influence their motivation and attitudes to read. In addition, the deeper insight into the concept of reading and literacy from this study corroborated the knowledge of genre I received from R2L and that acquainting learners with knowledge of the types of text helps them understand the specific purpose of the texts they read in order to process information and make connections as they engage with a particular text.

This discussion explains the interconnection between social interaction and the development of cognitive-linguistic skills. From doing this study, I realised the extent of the impact made by engaging children in reading activities at home, which stimulates positive attitudes towards reading, and their emotions about what they are reading, thus contributing to their learning at school (Rosenblatt, 1994). Then, I was inspired to continue and enhance the development of those learner affects to improve their reading behaviour and support them to develop confidence and love for reading, differently from what my teachers did when I was a learner. As I scaffolded learner affects, their knowledge of vocabulary and the development of word recognition skills were also facilitated through social interactions. Using the suggestion of Mol and Bus (2011) on promoting classroom interaction, I encouraged class and group discussions, asked learners questions and allow them to respond to open-ended and cognitively demanding questions that promote abstract thinking and comprehension skills.

Learning literacy and reading should not be merely teacher-driven or school-based. Parental involvement is required for learners to do homework and practise reading at home (Graven, 2013). However, I was aware that the possibility of learning reading at home is determined by the educational level in the family, parental employment status and social conditions. Family perceptions and beliefs about reading are also a significant factor as parents' tendency to read books, magazines or newspapers models reading behaviour in children (Graven, 2013). Considering the socioeconomic status of my learners, I assumed that some were lacking a stimulating home learning environment due to a shortage of resources and books, which is

common in the South African context due to a large number of orphaned children living in child-headed households (Spaull, 2016).

Conducting this self-study motivated me to encourage parents in the parent-teacher meetings (see Chapter one) to help their children to practise reading at home so that we might shift literacy development from being teacher-driven or school-based and take it beyond the classroom environment (Mophosho & Dada, 2015). Regarding the lack of resources in some families, a solution I suggested besides using reading books, is using environmental print as a resource for practising reading. Environmental print includes words or letters found on food packaging, pictures from newspapers and magazines, words from logos and signs that children are familiar with from their surroundings. Neumann (2014) argues that using environmental print has had commendable results in promoting print awareness, print knowledge and sound knowledge in children. Other than appealing to children's senses, environmental print is a practical and useful resource that can be used by all parents or caregivers during daily routine activities.

Another concept that informed my study was scaffolding, which I used to describe and understand my teaching practice in my classroom. Over the years of my teaching experience, although I was always dedicated to my work, I nevertheless wish I had been aware of the extent to which learners' motivation and attitudes contribute to developing reading skills. I used to deliver the subject matter and never noticed my attitudes towards learners and their motivation towards the subjects I was teaching. This became the obstacle to my teaching in 2018 and the reason for embarking on this self-study. Moreover, I was aware that the term scaffolding refers to providing support in learners' academic work but unaware of its role in developing their interest and confidence to participate in learning. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the ability to read contributes to learners gaining new perspectives about themselves (Freire & Macedo, 1987); this study enlightened me not to limit my teaching to transferring the curriculum or presenting the subject matter to learners but extend it to influence learners' attitudes about themselves, learning and society.

Scaffolding is one of the principles that underpins the R2L approach and therefore using this concept to reflect on my practice helped me realise that I was not sufficiently supporting my learners. I learnt that the curriculum and the text features are other forms of scaffolding as they provide what is pre-determined as what learners need to learn. However, those are not enough to support the learners' acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding.

Successful learning requires a dedicated teacher to supplement the curriculum by creating a healthy, safe teaching and learning environment (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Then I learnt about types of scaffolding that I had not known about before starting this research and acquired a deeper insight into the concept of interactional scaffolding, which assisted me in improving my learners' motivation and confidence to read. I was unaware that my teaching was relying on my experience not on learners' needs and this self-study made me realise that I needed to focus more on learners' academic achievement. This realisation revived me to strengthen the application of scaffolding more proficiently to promote meaningful classroom interaction and provide ongoing support for all learners regardless of home background and learning abilities. The change of attitude enhanced my implementation of R2L, and my learners' scores from the EGRA test demonstrated improvement in reading and comprehension skills.

Through this research process, I was able to compare my beliefs to several scholars' views on how reading and comprehension develop. Some suggest that successful reading is based on letter-sound knowledge and vocabulary building as the knowledge of letter-sound relationship enables reading unfamiliar words and thus develops automaticity (Nieto, 2005; Spaull et al., 2020; Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). However, the R2L teaching methodology that I use is underpinned by the model of language as text in the social context where reading and writing involve recognising language and using patterns of language at the level of the whole text, sentence and word (Halliday, 1994). Teaching from this perspective teaches children that the story includes the phases of meaning arranged in the form of paragraphs not just a set of sentences, and the sentence is made up of word groups that carry the meaning about who did what, where and how, while the word is made up of syllables or letter patterns (Acevedo & Rose, 2007; Mataka et al., 2020; Mawela, 2018).

Towards the end of my study, I initiated regular meetings of subject committees in my school to emphasise self-reflection as I suggested in section 7.3. I explained self-reflection as an ongoing process and a part of continuous professional learning (Sawhney, 2020). The aim of those developmental meetings was to promote teacher learning through interaction with each other and acquire more knowledge in our field of work. I did this with an understanding of the sociocultural theory of teacher learning which claims that learning is an ongoing process that goes beyond teacher courses or workshops, but takes place through different activities that involve society and the context of the work place (Desimone, 2009; Kelly, 2006; Kennedy, 2014). Another reason for the developmental meetings was that I had developed a burning desire to share the knowledge I had acquired from doing self-study.

The subject committees met two days in a month, which gave us enough time to plan the issues we were going to discuss. Using the information that I had learnt from the R2L teacher training, I acquainted my colleagues with the knowledge of genre. The CAPS for isiZulu specifies four types of texts to teach in the foundation phase: narrative in which learners engage in telling, reading and writing fiction or non-fiction stories; procedures, in which they describe doing experiments or recipes; recount, in which they recount on something that happened; and evaluation (book review) in which learners describe and evaluate different aspects and react to events in the text (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The topic of genre stemmed from the fact that although I knew what text I was expected to teach, I was not aware of the features of each text that would enable the learners to read with meaning and fully understand the purpose of the particular text. I assumed that this was the case with some of my colleagues. I explained to them that all the texts that we teach have a different purpose and the text is structured into its particular stages and phases and contain specific language patterns. Most importantly, for any type of text, the teacher should summarise and allow discussion and sharing of experiences relating to the text to stimulate learners' background knowledge before modelling reading. And I highlighted the stages of R2L and the kind of scaffolding they provide for effective teaching and learning to develop learners' reading and writing skills. In our meetings we also shared and extended our knowledge of administering assessment in our classrooms by engaging with departmental documents. This collegial distribution of knowledge among us would continuously develop our expertise and our identities as teachers and improve the quality of teaching and learning in our school.

I then shared with colleagues that the R2L methodology I used for teaching reading does not classify between learners' social background and academic achievement. The teacher supports learners equally and explicitly allows them to play an active role and take responsibility for their learning (Steinke, 2019). I did a lesson demonstration for my colleagues, starting by deconstructing the story and elaborated on the meaning of the unfamiliar words and the rationale that it helps children to understand the sequence and meaning of the phrases or sentences. I made use of the 'wh' questions, such as who, where, when, what, why and how, to promote interaction and facilitate understanding of who or what the story is about, where did the event happen, when, why and how did it happen. I explained that in this kind of interaction, the teacher guides learners to discover the nature of the problem in the story and the reactions of characters. I went on to explain that scaffolding learners' understanding of the story enables them to reconstruct it again, firstly jointly in the class and gradually they develop

the skills of constructing the story independently. The kind of teaching I shared with my colleagues emanates from the theory of the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), which refers to the distance between the task that a learner can do with the support from the teacher or peers and the task they can perform independently. From conducting this study, I learnt that scaffolding does not only apply to teacher-learner interaction, but teachers need to encourage and support each other in lesson planning, assessment and in understanding the content taught.

7.5 Contribution and recommendations

My primary school experiences, among other possible factors, unconsciously educated me that teaching involves rage and punishment. Doing this self-study helped me to discover my ill temper and anger. My behaviour compromised my relationship with learners and negatively influenced their reading development as I could not provide adequate scaffolding during teaching and learning. This discovery demonstrated that my perceived beliefs about my teaching differed from my actual teaching practice. Therefore, this study may contribute to the field of knowledge that meaningful learning can be enhanced by a healthy classroom environment. As Frenzel et al. (2021) explain, creating a positive classroom environment facilitates meaningful learning making learners likely to always look forward to their highly engaging lessons. In contrast, in a negative environment, they feel distant and withdrawn from learning. Therefore, learners' negative or positive responses to learning displays the kind of reading strategies that they were taught to use and the support provided.

While Samaras and Freese (2009) explain that embarking on self-study in response to the issues teachers are concerned about in their practice, Calvert (2016) argues that to act constructively towards professional growth, teachers require some form of reference or motivation. Although I had no evidence whether my colleagues had concerns or wonderings about their teaching practice, with a view to motivating them to reflect on their practice, as mentioned previously, I used my self-study as a frame of reference. I explained to them that my self-study had set out to improve my teaching practice, and that reflecting on my teaching revealed my emotional and behavioural traits such as anger issues and emotional expression that did not support learning. These realisations facilitated improvement in my emotional expression, lesson planning and learner reading development scaffolding. Based on these improvements, I recommended that we all reflect on our teaching, as we may discover facts that we are not even aware of.

It took me several years to change from teaching reading in the way that I was taught as a learner, not realising that my learners were not learning a great deal. The reason for this lack was that I did not understand what reading was, what it entailed and how children learn to read, until I was introduced to R2L. I learnt that reading is the main skill for learning all subjects in school. As a pedagogy, R2L includes a carefully designed teacher-learner interaction through a cycle of steps to allow all learners to engage with text at the level of their grade, which may be beyond their reading abilities. The methodology is designed to start by reading the whole text and then interrogate detailed parts of it by engaging with the "wh" questions to develop comprehension of the story (Rose, 2019). That kind of engagement with the text provides learners with the language resources they need for constructing their own texts. This study contributes to foundation phase teacher understanding, that reading is not simply memorising sounds and alphabets or reading a list of words, but is a complex process that develops from a wide range of knowledge acquired from connected systems. Thus, it cannot be treated in isolation or be confined to a separate reading period on the class timetable. Instead, reading is incorporated within the language, because the listening skill, and the speaking, reading and writing processes are all integrated. Therefore, my recommendation for foundation phase teachers is that they realise the importance of the genre they are supposed to teach because this would help them unpack the text and make meaning explicit to learners. Thus, knowledge of genre helps the teacher to provide learners with knowledge of language patterns they require to write similarly structured stories.

Additionally, learners require quality interaction during the act of reading to promote abstract thinking and develop comprehension. The very specific cycle of steps in R2L promotes interaction and encourages social learning and the shared construction of knowledge. Thus, my study shares the knowledge that, as a pedagogy, R2L is structured to scaffold learners' participation and increase their reading skills through interaction, elaboration of meaning and continuous affirmation (Rose, 2019; Steinke, 2019). Therefore, I recommend using these strategies to facilitate learners' academic achievement.

7.6 Moving forward

As a consequence of this self-study I pledge to always ensure to keep my classrooms organised and to encourage my learners to follow a daily routine. Managing my classroom will create more positive relationships and encourage participation with greater confidence. This study has shed some light on being cognisant of developing my learners' comprehension of the text. Therefore, I will attempt never to rely on my experience of using R2L, but always endeavour to be conscious of supporting my learners' learning by activating their prior knowledge, relating the text to their experiences and teaching them about genre to enhance their learning of language structure. In addition to their literal comprehension acquired from interaction during activities like sentence making, strategies like these will promote their inferential comprehension that requires the learner to think and interpret. To ensure continuous development I am determined to apply the strategies I have learnt from this study to keep on reflecting on my practice.

On a regular basis, I aim to record in my journal what has transpired in my classroom during teaching and learning to continue to reflect on my teaching. For continuous improvement, I plan to encourage my colleagues to become involved as critical friends to provide honest feedback on my teaching and provoke my thinking about how I might strive to improve. I plan to enhance my strategies of scaffolding for learners that I teach, and even for my colleagues as they seek to improve their teaching practice. Furthermore, as a consequence of this self-study, I will always strive to control my emotions by expressing them constructively. Should I enter into a new career in the future, I will always attempt to be mindful that controlling one's emotions gives power to reason, taking decisions and solving problems (Fried et al., 2015).

Continuous professional development is a step closer to bringing educational transformation in classrooms (Sawhney, 2020). Therefore, I would encourage ongoing collaborative learning with my colleagues through co-teaching, where we will work collaboratively in an all-inclusive professional activity. These activities include planning and implementing teaching strategies and informal discussions about the subject matter and learner assessment activities. This interactive process is highly likely to promote social learning, developing our skills and improving our teaching practice (Kelly, 2006).

7.7 Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, I had a desire and motivation that drove me to learn. Then I acted on that desire by initiating a self-study to explore my teaching practice to improve. As this study has reached its end, my perspective on teaching and professional development has transformed. Through my personal introspection, engagement with critical friends and being receptive to their criticism, I have learnt to consider the teaching and learning context as I plan my lessons, resources and presentation. Being honest with myself and accepting that I was having interpersonal difficulties encouraged me to seek professional help, which improved my relationship with learners and other people. Working with critical friends to improve my teaching and with psychoanalysts to deal with my mental health issues will continue indefinitely, as Taylor (2020) explains, teacher learning is a never-ending cycle, it continues and becomes recursive, as learners' performance informs the teacher's motivation for further development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Department of Education gatekeeper permission

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref.: 2/4/8/41178

Ms B Ntombela
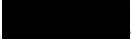13 Royal Gardens
Pelham
PIETERMARITZBURG
3200

Dear Ms Ntombela

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"USING THE READING TO LEARN METHODOLOGY TO TEACH ISIZULU READING IN A GRADE 3 CLASS: A TEACHER'S SELF-STUDY"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 07 December 2022 to 31 October 2025.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT

Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 08 December 2022

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

Appendix B: UKZN ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

27 June 2023

Bongiwe Ntombela (982201405)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear B Ntombela,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001198/2020
Project title: A case study of literacy instructional practices and Grade 3 learners' reading development in English First Additional Language
Amended title: Using the reading to learn methodology to teach isiZulu reading in a Grade 3 class: A teacher's self study
Degree:

Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 22 June 2023 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully
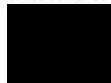
_____
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/
Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

Appendix D: School principal gatekeeper permission

The principal
Inzuzwenhle Primary School

Dear Sir

My name is Bongiwe Ntombela (Student number 982201405) a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of the requirement for this degree, I am required to conduct a research project. I request your permission to conduct my study in this school and in my classroom. The title of my research study is: **Using the Reading to Learn methodology (RTL) to teach isiZulu literacy in a Grade 3 class: A teacher's self-study.** The focus of my study is on exploring the progress of Grade 3 learners' reading competences in isiZulu Home Language, Learners will be tested on their reading fluency, reading speed and reading comprehension using the EGRA in February 2021 to ascertain their reading level at the beginning of the year. They will be tested again in November 2021 to determine their progress through the year. The aim and purpose of this study is to explore my own teaching practice and investigate whether using the RTL pedagogy can influence Grade 3 learners' reading development in isiZulu Home Language.

The lessons that I teach using the RTL cycle of steps will be video recorded to capture how I use this methodology to teach isiZulu literacy in Grade 3. The video recordings will be taken three times in the year 2021 (Term 1,2 and 3) covering the Reading to Learn cycle. Thereafter I will watch the video and write a research journal during and after watching to reflect on my teaching and my learners' participation.

This study will not involve any risks and/or discomfort for the school and participants. Also, it will not provide direct benefits for the school or participants. In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact my supervisor or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

My contact number: 082 512 6080
Email: ntombela.bongi@yahoo.com
My supervisor: Professor Carol Bertram
Email address: BertramC@ukzn.ac.za
Tel: 033 260 5349

UKZN Research Office

Private   Bag X 54001
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Durban
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participants will not be penalized. There are no consequences for participants who withdraw from the study.

No costs will be incurred by participants as a result of participation in the study and there are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study.

The name of the school and learners will be changed and pseudonyms will be used so that the school and participants remain anonymous. Data generated and learners' reading scores will not be shared with anyone else. It will be stored in my supervisor's office at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg, campus for five years, and thereafter be destroyed.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully

Bongiwe Ntombela

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I_____ (Full names of the school principal) have been informed about the study entitled: **Using the Reading to Learn methodology (RTL) to teach isiZulu literacy in a Grade 3 class** by Bongiwe Ntombela.
I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL _____

DATE: _____

Appendix E: Parent consent form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent for your Child to Participate in Research

Project title: Using the Reading to Learn methodology (RTL) to teach isiZulu literacy in a Grade 3 class: A teacher's self-study

Date: 24 March 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

Igama lami ngingu **Bongiwe Ntombela**, umfundi we PhD eUniversity of Kwa-Zulu Natal, School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

Ucwaningo lwami ludinga ukuba ngisebenze nabantwana bebanga lesithathu abafunda ekilasini lami. Ngizokwenza ivideo ekhombisa indlela engifundisa ngayo kanye nendlela abafundi abafunda ngayo ekilasini uma kufundwa isiZulu.

Ngaphezu kwalokho lolucwaningo lufaka ukuhlola abantwana ekufundeni isiZulu. Bazobe befunda ishadi lemisindo, ishadi lamagama kanye nendaba. Ngemuva kokuzifundela indaba bayobuzwa, baphendule imibuzo emaqondana nendaba. Njengoba umntwana wakho esekilasini engizocwaninga kulo, ngicela imvume yakho ukuba abe yingxenye yakho konke lokhu.

Ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi akukho okuyobeka umntwana wakho engcupheni noma engozini yanoma iluphi uhlobo maqondana nalolucwaningo. Igama lesikole kanye namagama abantwana akuyukuvezwa. Kuyoqanjwa amanye amagama ukuze bonke bavikelwe.

Uma kuvela izinkinga noma ezaluphi uhlobo noma imibuzo ungathintana nami kulemininingwane ntombela.bongi@yahoo.com or 0825126080, noma uthintane nosolwazi oqaphe ukufunda kwami kulemininingwane, Professor. Carol Bertram, BertramC@ukzn.ac.za, ungathinta futhi nalelihhovisi, UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details below.

UKUZIBOPHEZELA KOMZALI/UMBHEKI NGOKUVUMELA UMNTWANA UKUBA YINGXENYE YOCWANINGO

Mina (igama) ……………………………………………….…………………… umzali/umbheki ka

…………………………………………..…………..……………... (igama lomntwana)
osebangeni lesithathu, ngazisiwe ngalolucwaningo oluthi "Using the Reading to Learn methodology (RTL) to teach isiZulu literacy in a Grade 3 class: A teacher's self-study" luka *Bongiwe Ntombela.*

Ngiyayiqonda yonke inqubo yalolucwaningo, nginikiwe nethuba lokubuza imibuzo uma kukhona engingakuqondi.

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ukuba yingxenye komntwana wami akuphoqelekile futhi angahoxa noma yinini uma kuba nesidingo salokho.

Uma kwenzeka ngiba nemibuzo noma izikhalazo ngiyothintana nalaba abalandelayo Bongiwe Ntombela 0825126080 or ntombela.bongi@yahoo.com noma Professor Carol Bertram (033) 260 5349.

Uma ngiba nenkinga ngokunakekelwa kwamalungelo omntwana wami, noma inkinga ngomcwaningi, ngiyothintana nalelihhovisi.

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609   Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Ngiyavuma ukuba umntwana wami abe yingxenye yalolucwaningo ngesikhathi:

Umcwaningi ethatha ividio yesifundo sesiZulu   Yebo/Cha

Kuhlolwa izinga lokufunda   Yebo/Cha

_____   _____

Ukuzibophezela komzali/umbheki   usuku

_____   _____ **ufakazi**

Appendix F: EGRA subtasks

Sound reading

Ukuhlola koku - *l*

Ukuphimisa imisindo yezinhlamvu

Ishadi lemisindo*l.l*

Isibonelo: b   s

V	I	h	g	S	y	Z	W	L	N
I	K	T	D	K	T	q	d	z	w
h	w	z	m	U	r	j	G	X	u
g	R	B	Q	I	f	I	Z	s	r

Word reading

Ukufundwa kwamagama

Ishadi Lamagama 2.1

Isibonelo: usisi   icici

umama	ikati	ubaba	itiye	vela	qoba	veza
sika	cula	lala	unana	ipeni	idada	usisi
umoba	ugogo	ufana	irula	amadolo	ixoxo	iwele
hlela	khala	ihleza	ibhodi	isivalo	indoda	abantu
ingane	imfundo	isicathulo	amanzi	ishumi	iqanda	ukudla
izolo	ugodo	isikole	inkomishi	umshununuzo	indlebe	isinkwa
iqolo	iyoyo	umfana	isikelo	isicabha	isihlahla	impama
insipho	ukuhlanza	ummese	inkinobho	isicabucabu	ibhubesi	impukane
iphepha ndaba	umsindo	insizwa	isitsha	isigqoko	incwadi	ibhentshi
inqgathu	ingxabano	izitsha	inhlwathi	umgqomo	intshonalanga	ikhekhe
inkomo	iwolinthsi	intshebe	kuncane	ukuthi	iqhwa	gxuma
isikhwama	igatsha	gcina				

202

Story reading

Ukuhlola koku - 1

Ukuhlola kokuqondisisa

Ishadi 3.1

	Inani lamagama umugqa ngamunye
Igama lami nginguNjabulo. Ngineminyaka eyisikhombisa.	5
Ngithanda ukusiza umama uma egeza izitsha.	6
Umama uhlala engitshela ukuthi kubalulekile ukusizana, kanye nokuhlanzeka.	8
Ezinye izingane zicabanga ukuthi amantombazane kuphela okufanele ageze izitsha, kanti akunjalo.	11
Uthisha wangitshela ukuthi wonke umuntu kufanele azigeze izitsha.	8
Ngiyathanda ukwelekelela umama uma egeza izitsha.	6
Izitsha ziba ziningi kakhulu uma umama epheka ekhishini.	8
Umama uyakuthokozela ukusizwa ekhishini.	4
ISAMBA	56

Comprehension questions

Ukuhlolwa kwesifundo sokuqondisisa

Ishadi 3.1

Imibuzo		Impendulo okuyiyona	Impendulo okungeyona
1.	Ngubani igama lomfana?		
2.	Uneminyaka emingaki umfana?		
3.	Ngabe uthanda ukwenzani umfana?		
4.	Umama wamtshela ukuthi yini ebalulekile?		
5.	Ucabanga ukuthi kungani ezinye izingane zicabanga ukuthi amantombazane kuphela okufanele ageze izitsha?		

Appendix G: Data codes and categories

Codes and categories from the data from the journal entry and retrospective journal

Categories		
Red -was successful and I was happy -fantastic -fascinating -I was pleased -It was interesting -I was impressed -I was motivated -I had inspired and motivated them -Still need to improve -Share with other teachers	Yellow -letting children talk -Their participation was sustained -listening to the speakers attentively -enthusiasm to learn -learners' participation -responses they provided --I was supportive and affirming	Green -understood the careers and responsibilities in the specific line of work -learning from each other -comprehended the grammar -comprehension. -knowledge of vocabulary -understanding the meaning of words