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UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

Eastern Cape Education Department

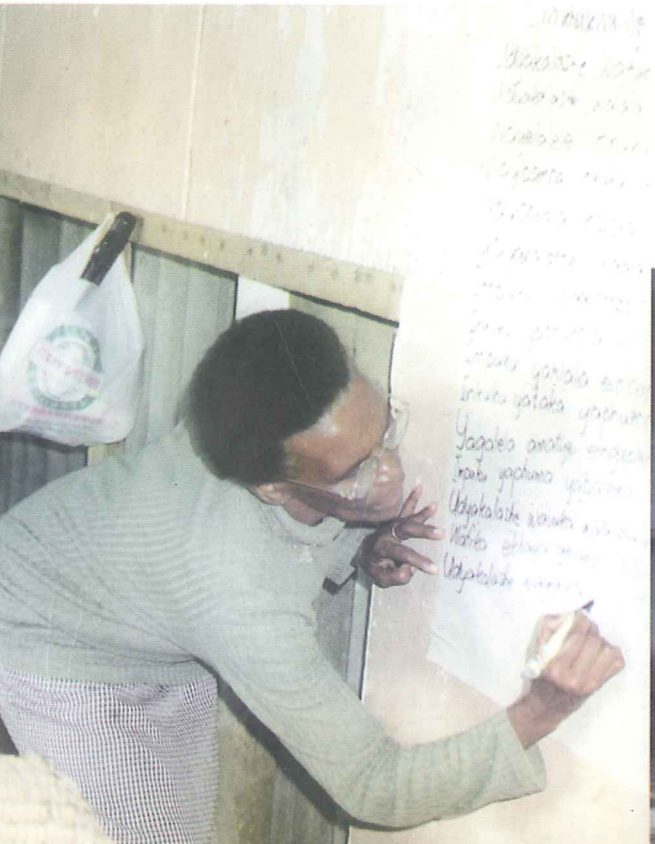
Distance Education Project

Core Learning Areas Course

Language, Literacy & Communication

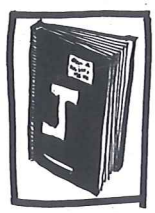
Umthamo 4

Towards critical literacy

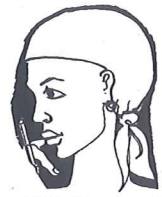


(Pilot Edition)

March 2000



Journal

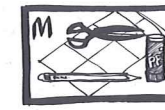


Thinking and Reflecting

Written Report

Classroom or School

Key Activity



Making materials

Reading and Thinking

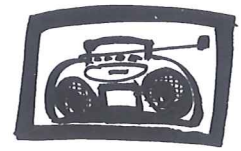
Discussion

Face-to-face umkhwezeli

Concertina File for Portfolio

Time

Very Important – take careful note



Tape-recorder

Multigrade

Plenty of real, relevant writing to read!

Children get the level right when they write for each other.

It's a 'real' book when your friend has written it for you to read.

Work both with teachers and pupils, has convinced me that there are two models of literacy on offer in our schools: a utilitarian one aimed at giving people the ability to write little more than their name and address and to fill in forms, and a supercharged model which allows its possessors to choose and control all that they read and write. This powerful literacy includes the ability, the habit even, of being *critical*, that is, of making judgements, especially about the writing of others. My belief is that, until most, indeed all, children in school have access to, and are empowered by, critical literacy, including the understanding that reading and writing are more than simply useful, then we are failing to educate the next generation properly. (page10)

Margaret Meek. 1991.
On Being Literate.

Lost in thought?
or
Finding yourself in a book!

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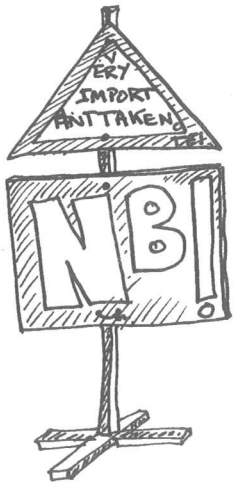
Contents

Introduction

What you will find in this umthamo

- The first Unit in this umthamo focuses on the strong role families play in helping their young children become part of the local speaking community. It also shows how when teachers involve families in the education of their children, the children's education is enriched and developed.
- In the second Unit there are two activities. These activities build on the work you did in Umthamo 9 and focus on stories, and the making of books. You will need to carry out the first activity and get started on the second during your first week of working through this umthamo. This will allow you enough time to prepare for the **Key Activity.**
- The third Unit describes an activity we carried out at the workshop for abakhwezeli in January 2000. It involves *critically reading* a picture book. You will experience this for yourselves at the face-to-face session where this umthamo is introduced.
- You will find some extracts to read in the fourth Unit. These extracts show how teachers have carried out different critical literacy activities with their learners.
- In the fifth Unit, you will carry out the **Key Activity.** This will involve helping your learners work on a *critical reading* of their own texts and pictures, which they have made in Activity 4 in Unit 2.



Intended Outcomes

When you have worked through this umthamo, you and your learners will have

- thought about and discussed what makes a 'good story'
- co-created some stories and turned these into picture books
- read the books and asked *critical* questions about them.

Until very recently, if you had walked into any primary classroom, you would have probably found the teacher talking, and the learners sitting quietly at their desks. It was assumed that teachers were the keepers of knowledge and that children were waiting to receive that knowledge from teachers. Teachers asked the questions. Learners were expected to give the answers which the teachers had previously taught them. Learners were expected to give the answers which the teachers already had in their heads.

The content of the curriculum had been decided by 'experts' far away. Primary school practitioners were hardly ever included in the committees who drew up those syllabi. The 'experts' included some secondary teachers, but mostly

people who had long left the secondary classroom, if they had ever been there. Curriculum documents were written which set out the bare bones of what should be taught in classrooms across the country. These documents, or syllabi, were then handed down to provincial officials, who handed them down to regional officials. The regional officials handed down the syllabi to district officials, who in turn handed them down to principals. Principals saw to it that the syllabi were handed down via their heads of departments to teachers. And finally the teachers handed down what was written in those documents to their learners.

If children had their questions, they soon learned to keep their questions to themselves. And if teachers had questions, they were expected to keep *their* questions to themselves. Their job was simply to carry out what had been written in the syllabi.

So what made these curriculum committee members 'experts'? What qualified them to write out syllabi for primary school teachers all over the country, no matter what the circumstances of their schools and communities? (Who were the **real** *experts?*) How could these 'experts' be sure that what they wrote in the syllabi was appropriate for all learners everywhere? How could they guarantee that the knowledge they suggested should be taught was relevant, useful, and beneficial? Did that knowledge really take the children *"from the known to the unknown"?* But in those days, we were not expected to ask such questions, and those of us who did, were quickly silenced.

In the early 1980s, when we were living just outside Fort Beaufort, we used to give a young lad a lift into town daily to get to a high school in Tinis township. One day he was discussing a problem he had in a particular subject. We suggested he should ask his teacher. When he came back from school, he told us his teacher had said, "You don't ask the questions here. Here, I am the one who asks the questions. You are expected to give me the correct answers!"

Where did such a 'top-down' approach come from? Was it part of cultural traditions, that adults are the *knowers* and children are to be taught or inducted into the traditional ways of behaving? Was the hierarchical approach part of cultural traditions? Or was it something to do with the influence of men who had been in the army during the South African War, and afterwards made a career change and went into education? Perhaps it was something to do with the fact that South Africa became increasingly isolated during the dark days of Apartheid, and we continued with a Victorian style of education which was so entrenched in our schools? Whatever the reason, we know that asking questions was not considered proper or desirable.

Interestingly, John Nkalitshana himself is a primary school teacher today. Let's hope he encourages the learners in his class to ask questions!

Think of your own experience of being both a learner and a teacher. What has changed for *you* in your classroom? Do your learners ever have a chance to ask questions? What sort of questions do they ask? How do you feel about the new curriculum? What opportunities do you and your learners have to study things which are relevant, appropriate and of

interest to them? Are there opportunities for them to reveal what they *already* know? In what ways are you able to build on the knowledge and experiences which they bring with them? What space is there for you to **negotiate** the curriculum with your learners?

Activity 1 - If I could choose the books I would like to have in my class .....

Let's think of the books which can be found in most classrooms: text books. Who writes those books? What makes the authors authorities on the subjects or topics about which they write? Why do teachers and learners need textbooks? What materials might be more relevant, appropriate and useful?

Think carefully about this. If you, as a teacher, were able to choose between either textbooks or a combination of posters, pictures, cassette tapes, crayons, paper and other books, which would you find most useful? What if you were allocated a certain amount of money to buy materials for your class, what would you choose to buy? Open your Journal, and make a quick wish list.

A wish list is rather like a brain storm. You think of all the good things you would like to happen, or things you hope for, or might like to have.

How do we prepare children for the future? If there is going to be a need for them to be entrepreneurs, to create their own means of making a living, they will need to be able to ask their own questions. They will need to be able to judge a situation, and to see what they can do and what they can offer. How can they do this if they have only been taught to follow? We need to think about these questions in order to provide a "nourishing curriculum".

On the back of Umthamo 24 there is a quote about the need for a nourishing curriculum in our classrooms.

When children are quite young, we know that one of the most common questions they ask is "Why?" In their search for meaning in the world, they try to discover explanations for why things are the way they are. Parents and families know this and respond to their children's questions. They try to help their young children learn about the world and how they fit into it. And yet when children come to school, we have discouraged them from asking their questions.

But it is through asking questions that we discover our world. Asking questions like "What if.....". Thinking about possibilities. Asking who has power, and why? Asking other questions about the way things are and whether or not this is fair. Questioning situations and circumstances. Questioning behaviour. This is *'critical reading'* of the world.

The task of a theory of critical literacy is to broaden our conception of how teachers actively produce, sustain, and legitimate meaning and experience in classrooms. Moreover, a theory of critical literacy necessitates a more profound understanding of how the wider conditions of the state and society produce, negotiate, transform and bear down on the conditions of teaching so as to either enable or disable teachers from acting in a critical and transformative way. Equally important is the need to develop, as a central assumption of critical literacy, the recognition that knowledge is not merely produced in the heads of experts, curriculum specialists, school administrators, and teachers. The production of knowledge .... is a relational act. For teachers, this means being sensitive to the actual historical, social, and cultural conditions that contribute to the forms of knowledge and meaning that students bring to school.

If a concept of critical literacy is to be developed in conjunction with the theoretical notions of narrative and agency, then it is important that the knowledge, values, and social practices that constitute the story/narrative of schooling be understood as embodying particular interests and relations of power regarding how one should think, live, and act with regard to the past, present, and future. At its best, a theory of critical literacy needs to develop pedagogical practices in which the battle to make sense of one's life reaffirms and furthers the need for teachers and students to recover their own voices, so they can retell their own histories, and in so doing "check and criticize the history [they] are told against the one [they] have lived."

This means more, however, than simply the retelling and comparison of stories. In order to move beyond a pedagogy of voice, that suggests that all stories are innocent, it is important to examine such stories around the interest and principles that structure them, and to interrogate them as part of a political project (in the widest sense) that may enable or undermine the values and practices that provide the foundation for social justice, equality, and democratic community. In its more radical sense, critical literacy means making one's self present as part of a moral and political project that links the production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action.

(Giroux. 1987:14-15)

The ideas in this extract are very important. We suggest you read the extract through once. The we suggest you re-read it. Later on, come back and read it again.

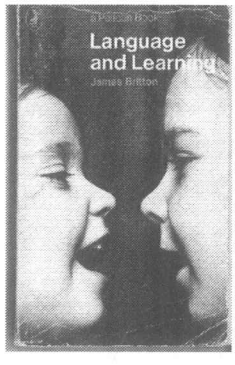
Unit 1 - The role of families in the development of language, literacy and communication in young learners

In Umthamo 17 we asked you to carry out some research in order to form your *own* theory of how we acquire our first language. You will have seen from that research that the members of a family play an extremely important part in apprenticing a child into communicating through language.

Go back to your research for that umthamo. Re-read your Research Report. When you were carrying out your research, did you collect any examples of an older person or family member extending one of the children's language learning? What did your own learners tell you? When we were trialling the activities in that umthamo, the learners in all the classes said that we learn to talk from our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and other family members.

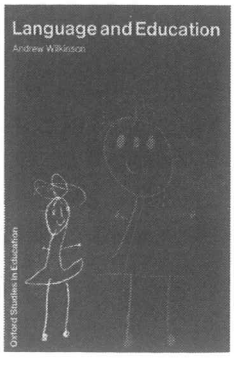
If you have continued to observe the three young children you began to observe at the beginning of this second year of this course, your theory might have developed even more.

With Umthamo 17, we gave you a collection of readings which you needed to read in order to write your Research Report. Look at the third Reading in the collection, *Language and Learning* by James Britton. James Britton starts that chapter with the following sentences.



> The homes into which most babies are born are places where people talk. They will talk about the baby and a great many other things as well, and before long - long before they expect any response - they will talk to the baby. (Britton.1970:33)

It is through the people in the home and context into which the baby is born that s/he learns to communicate. S/he learns to 'join the oracy club' of people. Through listening to the people around her/him speaking, the young child learns the sounds and 'tune' of the words they use. As the baby grows and develops, these people increasingly include the young child in their conversations. They begin to speak more and more *directly* to her/him. They play with her/him. They include her/him in day-to-day activities. And the more language the young child hears, and the more s/he is included in activities and conversations, the more s/he learns and is able to participate in different language events.



As Andrew Wilkinson pointed out in *Language and Education* (chapter 18 of the second Reading), we don't learn to language by imitation only. And it is also unlikely that we would learn to talk, even with a Language Acquisition Device, *if we didn't hear other people in our communities speaking.* The language events which surround a young child are essential to her/his acquisition of her/his first, primary, home language.

How do parents, brothers and sisters, and grandparents, who have had little if any schooling, know what to do? Unlike teachers in schools, they have not completed a course on teaching a young child how to talk (or *language*). And yet, almost every child learns to speak. How?

In the Appendix of Umthamo 17, we gave you an example of a six-year old boy extending and developing his sister's language. Turn to pages 30 and 31 of that umthamo. Re-read the conversation between Caleb and Cloud. Then look at the top of page 31. We made the point that researchers have found that there are **3 essential characteristics** of the speech of those who care for a young child when they interact with her/him:

i) The sentence structure is simple, and there is more redundancy and repetition.

ii) They talk about whatever is going on at the time (the "here and now").

iii) Their talk is real communication.

Now look at the conversation between the two children. Firstly, although Caleb is only 6, he seems to know that he needs to use simple sentences and he needs to use repetition. Secondly, he has focused on what the two of them see together. And, thirdly, what is going on is real communication. Caleb is sensitive to what his sister is interested in, and he responds to what Cloud wants to talk about. When she puts a stop to the language lesson she is having, her brother doesn't persist. He stops.

And this example is not unique. In almost every home, in every district, in every region, in every province, in every country all over the world, such conversations happen between young children and the people in their families and communities.

In their homes, they are learning what Applied Linguists call 'Communicative Competence'.

But it isn't just the words and grammar of the language of their home, that children learn through interacting with their families. They also learn *what* is **appropriate** to say to *whom, when* and *how* (Hymes: 1970). Through participating in day-to-day activities in their homes, in conversations, in games, and in any other spoken language events, young children learn what it is to be a member of their particular speaking community. Some children participate more than others, but most take part.

After you've gone back and re-read things from Umthamo 17, you might find it valuable to write down your thoughts and reflections in your Journal.

So families are very successful in teaching their young children how to talk. If they are so successful in inducting their children into the speaking community, why have teachers kept parents and other family members out of the

school and classroom in the past? Isn't this perhaps a resource which we, as teachers, could tap? This is what James Britton wrote thirty years ago:

> .....in school we cannot afford to ignore all that has gone on before. So often in the past we have tried to make a fresh start, at the risk of cutting off the roots which alone can sustain the growth we look for. It is not only that the classroom must more and more merge into the world outside it, but that the processes of school learning must merge into the processes of learning that begin at birth and are life-long. We can no longer regard school learning as simply an interim phase, a period of instruction and apprenticeship that marks the change from immaturity to maturity, from play in the nursery to work in the world. School learning must both build upon the learning of infancy and foster something that will continue and evolve throughout adult life. (Britton. 1970:129)

30 years ago, James Britton was taking for granted the idea which is only now taking root more widely - that is, the notion of life-long learning.

During the last thirty years, schools and teachers in certain other parts of the world have begun to seriously involve families in the schooling and education of young children. And they have done so with remarkable results.

In the 1970s, in London, two researchers carried out an experiment in a school in a poor neighbourhood. The children at this school performed poorly on reading tests. One of the researchers, Jenny Hewison, was dissatisfied with the explanations which were offered for this poor performance. Teachers claimed that the poor reading was a result of the fact that the children came from homes where there weren't any books. They thought that the parents weren't interested in their children's schooling.

Jenny Hewison found that there were some children who read well, and that there were books and there was a reading culture in their homes. So she and her colleague, Jack Tizard, arranged with the school to start a project to help the children who did not read well, so that their reading would improve.

Every parent was contacted, either at a meeting at school, or on a subsequent visit to the home. All the parents agreed to help. Jenny Hewison found that it was possible to involve **all** the parents, whether they themselves could read, or not. She also found that she could involve parents who did not speak the language of the school. The parents were asked to listen regularly to their children reading aloud at home. The project ran for two years, and at the end of the two years, every child's reading ability had improved significantly (Hewison: 1982).

The results of this project inspired many teachers in other parts of England, particularly those teaching in low socio-economic neighbourhoods. In Rochdale, a city in the north of England, the teachers embarked on a project to involve parents in their children's learning to read. It became known as the Belfield Project.

In this community, although parents participated in the day-to-day running of the school, they were not involved directly in language or numeracy activities. So, at the beginning, when the teachers approached the parents, some parents were not happy about the proposed project. Some of the parents felt that the teachers were passing the job of teaching onto them. However, within a short time of being involved in supporting their children's progress in reading, the parents asked if they couldn't be involved in other curriculum areas (Jackson and Hannon:1981).

Involving parents in a school in Mdantsane

In Mdantsane, there is a school catering for learners from Pre-school to Grade 4. In the early 1990s, this school looked like any other neglected primary school in Mdantsane. It was in a very poor area. Some of the windows were broken, and had pieces of cardboard inserted to keep out the 'weather'. The grounds around the school were overgrown, and looked just like the veld. But this school had one very special, important feature: the Principal and Staff were very enthusiastic and committed.

In 1998, Tillie and Miss Nama were asked to find some primary schools where pre-schools could be built on, and where the families of the learners would be prepared to get involved. They visited many schools. The Staff of many of the schools they visited were suspicious, and did not want to be a part of this initiative. But when Tillie and Miss Nama, from Rubusana College, visited *this* school, the staff welcomed them. They were keen to have a pre-school built on to their existing buildings.

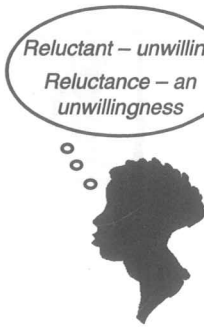
Tillie explained an idea she had of how the staff at that school could get to know the parents of their learners better. She suggested that a teacher could divide her class into manageable groups according to where the learners lived. Then she should write letters to the parents of a group and agree on a date on which they could meet. Each person, whether parent or teacher, was to bring to the meeting a mug, a tea-bag and one spoon of sugar. At the meeting they would pool their tea-bags and sugar. Then they would make a pot of tea and share the sugar.

Tillie advised the teachers to dress so that they 'kept to the background'. At the first meeting, she suggested that they should just chat, and only speak about school matters if the parents raised a point. Then at a follow-up meeting they could raise school matters themselves. In this way, they would begin to build a relationship between themselves and

the school's local community. It would also lay the ground for a meeting with the parents of a particular class, after which the staff would be in a position to call a meeting with the whole parent body.

Tillie and Miss Nama attended the meeting with the whole parent body. Tillie brainstormed with the parents how they could do something about the school's grounds. She suggested that the parents should find a fair way to divide up the grounds around the school. Then each family should take responsibility for the cultivation of one piece of land. They could grow vegetables. They could plant flowers. It was up to them.

One of the side-effects of this has been that the school is protected. Whereas once the windows were broken, these days, the buildings and grounds are cared for by the community. There is a large area which is devoted to the growing of vegetables by people from the surrounding neighbourhood. It is unusual *not* to see a parent or community member working in the school grounds or walking between the buildings at any time of day. Parents also work alongside teachers in the classrooms.



Some teachers and principals may be reluctant to involve parents. This was certainly true in the past. Parents were expected to support the school as far as fund-raising and special events were concerned. But they were not invited to participate actively in their children's learning. Researchers have found that some teachers are reluctant to accept the idea that parents are an important factor in their children's growth and development (Branston and Provis:1986). But good teachers know that parents are very important allies in the teaching of young children.

Families are able to interact with children for longer periods of time, and in a much smaller group than a typical primary school classroom. Maybe some teachers are afraid that if they invite parents into the classroom, the parents will see their weaknesses? Maybe these teachers want to create a mystery around what they have learned in their initial teacher education courses? But if they could overcome their lack of confidence, they would discover an important way of making their job more successful and rewarding.

Perhaps some of this reluctance to involve parents in South African schools can be explained in other ways. Long ago, parents were responsible for the education of their children. Like families in other parts of the world, children learned whatever was considered necessary by learning from their parents how to be a woman, a provider and a nurturer, and how to be a man, a provider and a protector. When schools were established, the curriculum included things other than those about which the parents knew and were experts. Instead, the focus of schools was on academic learning. Parents felt inadequate and left the responsibility of their children's "formal" learning and teaching to teachers in schools (Harrison and Coles:1992).

But perhaps another reason why some teachers have been reluctant to involve parents is that teacher education colleges have not prepared student teachers to involve parents and communities in the curriculum (Cyster et al:1979). It is not an easy thing to be a young teacher in your first year of your teaching career. Most of the parents are some years your senior. How can you tell them what to do? How can you admit to your lack of confidence? Who wants parents to see any little mistakes? You have to be a confident teacher to invite parents into your classroom. Or you need a very supportive principal who also believes parental involvement is important.

When you were at college, was parental involvement ever included in the College course?

Mrs Zenani – a phenomenal storyteller

In Umthamo 9, we asked you to invite an older person in the school's local community to come and tell your learners *iintsomi.* You involved a community member in your learners' formal education. Perhaps you thought, *"Oh, this is only to tell a story. That doesn't matter!"* But as we pointed out at the Moderation, it is terribly important that learners experience and know their culture. Older people in our communities are the custodians of the culture. They hold memories of the past. They have important knowledge, knowledge we should be incorporating into the curriculum. And they can play an important role in our classrooms.

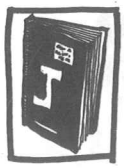
A psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim, wrote about the role of such stories in children's psychological development. He said that if children don't hear the iintsomi of their culture, when they reach adolescence they cannot deal with the problems life presents (1976).

In Umthamo 23, we wrote about how a teacher of a Grade 7 class involved the parents of her learners when they were carrying out a research project on the processing of fruit. A number of children had parents who had worked at some time or other in canning factories. These parents knew first-hand about the process of canning fruit, and they were able to share what they knew with their children in a wonderful way.

Parents have much to offer teachers. They know their own children. They know what their children can do outside school. As teachers, we need to discover what our learners already know and can do, and then we need to build on their existing knowledge, experiences and ideas. A very real benefit of involving parents in our primary schools, is that parents begin to feel valued. They also begin to take more of an interest in what is going on at their children's schools. And this results in them being more supportive.

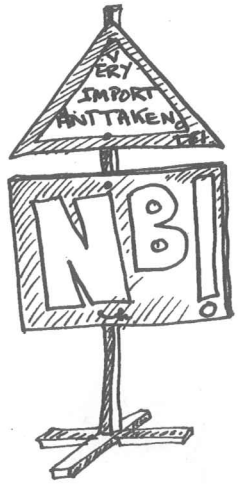
Activity 2 - How could I involve parents more?

Think carefully about what you have read. You may want to go back and re-read part, or even all, of this Unit. How free do the parents of your learners feel when they are with you? In what ways could you improve the relationship that exists between yourself and them?



Think of one or two parents or grandparents who you find you can talk to easily. How could you involve that person more? What skills and strengths does that person possess that you could use to benefit your learners and yourself? What steps would you have to take to involve somebody from the community in your classroom *more?* Then open your Journal, and write down your thoughts.

Unit 2 - What makes a story a *good* story?



In this Unit we will ask you to do quite a lot of work with your learners. In Activity 3, you will try to find out which stories they like best. And you will see what reasons they give in support of their choice. You will also be pushing them to think about the characteristics of good stories. In Activity 4, you will be getting your learners to compose their own stories, in order to make them into books.

We would recommend that you complete Activity 3 during the first week of working on this umthamo. You will also need to **start** Activity 4 *before* the end of the first week. This will mean that your learners have at least two weeks in which to work on and refine their stories, and to make them into books.

Before you carry out Activity 3 with your learners, you will need to do one or two things. You will need to make sure that you have some large sheets of paper, and some fat wax crayons. You will also need to read through the Activity carefully to see what adaptations you need to make so that it is suitable for your particular group of learners.

If you work with younger learners, it might be a good idea to make sure that either the day before, or earlier in the day on which you plan to carry out the Activity, you have told or read them a story. Then your discussion will not take place in a vacuum.

If your school does not have box libraries in each classroom from READ, try to contact your local READ representative. Ask if there is some way that your school could get such resources. The most important supplementary materials for Primary classrooms are 'real' books or access to a working Library.

If you work with older learners, we hope that you set aside time regularly to share stories. But we think you will find that by the time children are in Grade 3 and upwards, they probably have heard a number of stories. They will also have seen some books. So they will be able to draw on their experiences to participate in the discussion actively.

Activity 3 - What makes a story a *good* story?

Gather your learners around you. Make sure that you have two large sheets of newsprint and some wax crayons ready. Make sure that your learners are sitting comfortably and are ready to take part in a serious discussion about what makes a good story.

Start off by asking them to shut their eyes to think about the different stories they know. Pause to give them time to think. Then tell them you want them to think about their favourite story. Pause again. Tell them to go over that story in their heads, and to try to picture in their imaginations the events from the beginning to the end. Pause to give them time. Ask them to picture the main

characters. What do they look like? Again, give them time to make pictures in their heads. Then ask them to think of the place or places where the story happens. What is it like? What about the events in the story? Are they interesting or exciting? Why? What about the end? What makes it a good ending? Pause between each question.

When you have taken them through this guided visualisation of their favourite story, ask your learners to turn to the person next to them. Tell them you that they have 2 minutes each to tell the other person something about their favourite story, and why it's a **good** story. Ask them to try to talk quietly so that they don't disturb others.

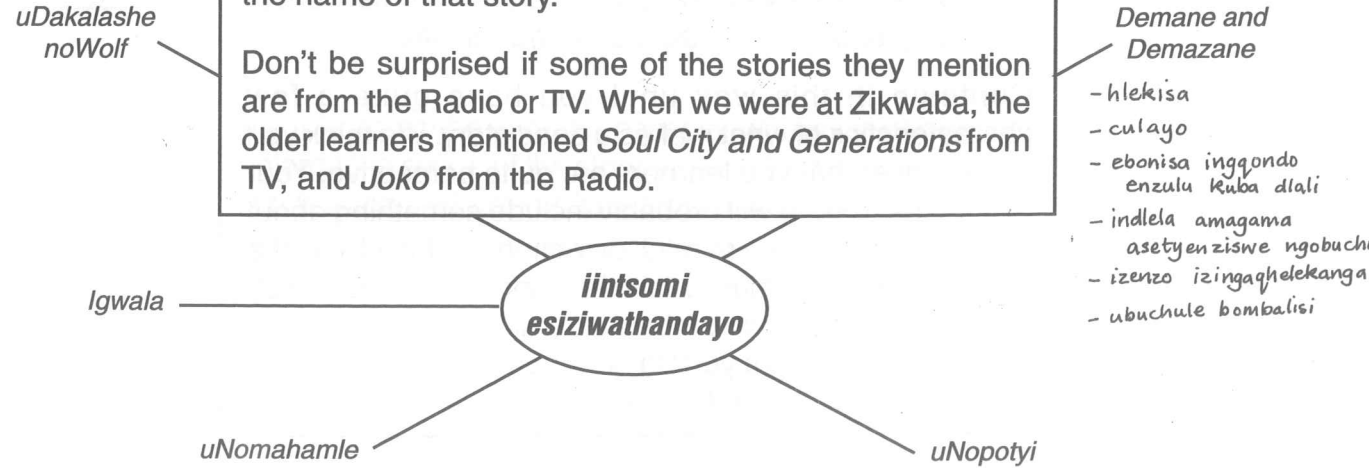
While your learners are talking to each other, use this time to observe them. Notice the way they sit, how they move their hands, their facial expressions, and they way they listen to one another. Make some notes in your Journal of what you notice. Don't worry too much if there is a bit of a noise. When you are doing Language, Literacy and Communication work with your learners, they *should* have opportunities to talk.

After 2 or 3 minutes, tell your learners it is time for them to swap, so that the listener can become the talker, and vice versa. Again, observe your learners and make some notes of their body language for your Journal.

After the second 2 or 3 minutes, stop your learners. Tell them that you want them to tell you the names of their favourite stories, and why they think they are good stories. Write, *iintsomi esiziwathandayo,* in the middle of one of the sheets of newsprint, and draw a circle around this phrase. As your learners tell you the name of a story, write the name of the story clearly in a space, and join it to the circle in the middle. Then, write the reasons your learners give why the story is a good story, underneath the name of that story.

Don't be surprised if some of the stories they mention are from the Radio or TV. When we were at Zikwaba, the older learners mentioned *Soul City and Generations* from TV, and *Joko* from the Radio.

Some of your learners' reasons may not be quite clear to you. When this happens, trust them and ask for more clarity.



The number of stories they give you will depend on several factors:

- the number of learners in your class
- whether or not they have been exposed to lots of stories
- the popularity of certain stories.

If you find that some learners also like the stories that other children have mentioned, ask them why they like that story. They may have different reasons. Add these reasons to the mind-map you are building up.

The lesson is clear

It's amusing

There is suspense

Now put up the second sheet of newsprint, and write in a circle in the middle of the paper, *What makes a good story?* Make sure that the mind-map is still clearly displayed and within your reach. Then say to your learners, *"We've talked about the stories we like and we've said why we like them. Now we want to think about* ***what makes a story a good story?*** *Why is (and mention one of the stories they have named) a good story?"*

Good people win

Bad ones learn a lesson and repent

Hero doesn't die

They may repeat the reasons which you recorded on the first mind-map. Again, you want to push their thinking and reasoning. If they say that they like the people or characters in a story, ask your learners **why** they like them. When they give you a reason, you could push them a little more by asking, *"How do you know that? Tell me more."*

Then ask the same question about another story. Again they may repeat the reasons which they gave you before. Keep pushing them to give you more details about why they like something about a particular story, and how they know what they tell you.

Learner: It shows how people live.

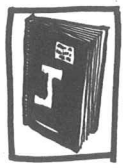
Teacher: Tell us more? Support your answer.

Learner: The people are real.

Teacher: Okay. So the characters are true to life.

Summarise each explanation and record the characteristic they have mentioned on the second mind-map. You could do this by saying something like, *"So, a good story has (good, kind people,* or *the characters are true to life)."* And write on the second mind-map *good, kind people,* or *the characters are true to life.*

Continue in this way until you have quite a few characteristics of what makes a good story. We think you will discover that you learners are quite perceptive. Your second mind-map will probably include something about the characters, the events or action in the story, the ending, the fact that justice is done, and humour. But each class's mind-map will probably be different. You should be ready to compare your mind-maps at the face-to-face session where this umthamo is monitored.



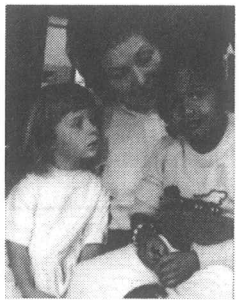
Later in the day, open your Journal and write a description of what happened when you carried out this discussion with your learners. What surprised you? Why do you think you were surprised? Who did most of the talking, you or your learners? Why was that? How well did you listen to them? What did you learn from what they said? If you were to repeat this activity with learners of the same age, what would you choose to do to improve it? Why? What do you feel you have learned or gained from this Activity?

For the next Activity, **first** we want you to work *with* your learners to create and write a story, and to turn it into a book. Then your learners will need to make **other** books in order to carry out the **Key Activity.** You will need to decide how you help them to do this. If you work with younger learners you will need to provide support and help them create other stories, and turn them into books. You will need to act as *scribe.* Older learners can work more independently to write stories themselves.

You will remember that we told you that in Mdantsane there is a Junior Primary school which is already involving parents in the day to day working of the school. The result has been that the local community feel that the school is theirs, and they are keen to participate and to help in whatever ways they can. And parents can been found in a number of classrooms supporting the teacher during the school day.

If you work with learners in either a pre-school or Foundation Phase class, we would suggest that you invite a parent, someone from the community, or a retired teacher whom you know to help as a volunteer, to supervise the rest of the class while you work with a group.

You may need to negotiate this with your Principal or your Head of Department. If you need to support your request, we suggest that you turn back to Unit 1. Re-read how schools in other parts of the world involve parents as part of their regular practice.



In several of the previous imithamo, we have referred to the work of a truly remarkable Kindergarten teacher, Vivian Gussin Paley. Vivian Paley had a table in her Kindergarten room which she called 'the Story table'. She made time to sit at this table every day. While she sat at the table, the children would take turns to dictate their stories. Vivian Paley recorded their stories on her tape-recorder, as well as writing them down for the children to see the spoken words turn into print.

> My role as scribe is never passive; wherever possible, I enlarge the scope of the story, looking for points that need clarification and asking questions that might lead to new twists in the plot. My goal, however, is as much to give children practice in exposition as to improve their stories.
>
> (Paley, VG. 1981:220)

Later on the same day, at a special time, the stories which had been dictated were acted out in a part of the room used

specially for the acting out of stories. The child who had dictated the story took the role of Director of the dramatisation, and participated in the selection of the actors.

Vivian Paley had always got her children to act out stories. But it was only when Wally joined her Kindergarten class and dictated many, many stories that she got her learners to act out their *own* stories. Until that time, they had made space in part of the classroom to act out stories from Picture Books, and fairy tales. But when they began to act out their own stories, Vivian Paley arranged for a large circle to be painted on the floor so that they would have a special place, or a stage, in their room to act out their stories.

> A day without storytelling is, for me, a disconnected day. The children at least have their play, but I cannot remember what is real to the children without their stories to anchor fantasy and purpose.
>
> I listen to the stories three times: when they are dictated, when we act them out, and finally at home, as I transcribe them from my tape recorder. After that, I talk about them to the children whenever I can. The stories are at the center of this fantasy of mine that one day I will link together all the things we do and say in the classroom.
>
> (Paley, VG. 1990:3)

Later on the same day, after the children had gone home, Vivian Paley listened again to the stories she had tape-recorded. She made notes of issues and points which they had raised. She did this so that she could discuss these points with her children and get them to think more about what they had been telling her.

Vivian Gussin Paley helped her learners to turn their stories into dramas. In the next Activity you will help and support your learners to co-create a story, and turn it into a book.

We know that some of you are already making books of stories with your learners on a regular basis.

When we were in London, Alan used a soft toy in the shape of a mole. The young learners he was working with enjoyed making up a story about the toy mole. You can read about this in the Appendix. Viv found that some of the children she worked with made up really good stories about things that they liked to play with outside school.

Activity 4 - Co-creating a story and turning it into a book

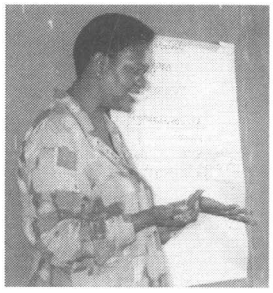
Preparation

You will need some large sheets of newsprint and a black wax crayon. You will also need some small sheets of paper (no bigger than A5) for your learners to draw on. And you will need some pencils, wax crayons, pencil crayons, kokis, or a mixture of all of these. If you have a soft toy at home, or something which your learners can touch, you could have that with you as well. We took a small tame chicken to use with the children at Vanani Farm School.

We would also suggest that you make a big book as we described on pages 43-46 of Umthamo 9. You could either do this in advance of the Activity, or you could cut the paper, and assemble the double-page spreads while your learners are busy making their pictures. The advantage of making the book before you work with your learners is that you will be able to write out their story while they make the pictures.

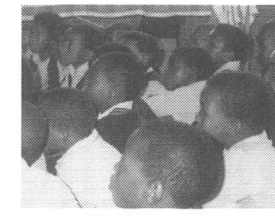
If you choose to work with a group, you will also need to have planned and prepared enough activities for your other groups. These tasks should be challenging but also activities which the learners can get on with independently while you work with a group.

We expect that in time you will get suggestions of how to do this in the Helping Learners Learn strand of this B Prim course.



Step 1 - What will the story be about?

Gather your learners around you. Tell them that you would like them to make up a story together, and then to turn it into a book. If you have brought something from home for them to make up a story about, hold it out so that all the children can see whatever it is.



Encourage them to talk about what you have brought in. Ask them if they have any ideas about a possible story. When we trialled this activity, we found that in each class there was at least one learner who had an idea for a story.

Step 2 - Composing our story

Then talk about the traditional way that an intsomi might begin. What do storytellers say when they're going to tell a story? How does the audience reply? Write down these phrases neatly and clearly on one of the large sheets of newsprint so that everybody in the group can see the words. Say the words as you write them down.

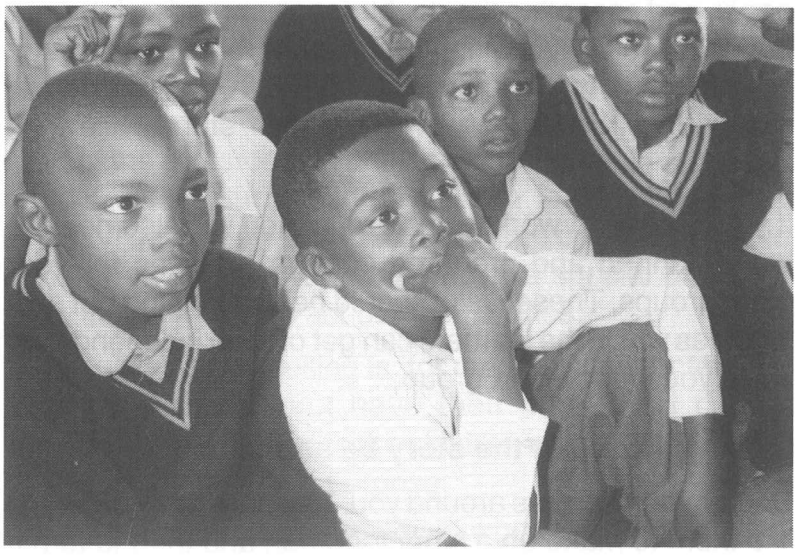
Then ask who would like to begin the story. Listen to each child's idea carefully, and when the group is happy with an idea, write it down in the child's words. If a few children have ideas about a particular part of the story, or how the plot is to develop, give the group time to reach consensus about the idea that most of them want to use.

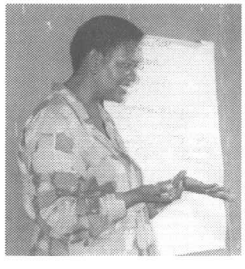
As they share their ideas, encourage the group to develop a story that makes sense, even if it is an intsomi and is about the impossible. The ideas need to follow on from each other in a logical way. If you are uncertain about a particular idea, get the learner to explain why s/he wants to say that. Sometimes when they explain their thinking,

*When a story makes sense, this is known as **coherence.***

*When everything fits together logically, this is known as **cohesion.***

we find that their ideas are very good and that they make a lot of sense. Try to involve and include the ideas of everybody sitting with you. Watch all their faces carefully.





When we were trialling this Activity at Zikwaba, one of the Grade 3s clearly knew many, many iintsomi. Once he started to share his ideas, it was difficult to interrupt. And the story he told was really interesting, so we didn't want to stop him. But Nomonde Mankahla did interrupt here and there so that she could check what he wanted to say, and so that she could have time to record the whole intsomi. We think that if this is the first time your learners are co-creating a story, you may find that one or two or three children dominate the storytelling, and that the others listen. Don't worry. When you repeat the Activity on other occasions, the other children will gradually join in, or you can see that this begins to happen.

We really hope that this approach becomes rooted in your practice. It is a powerful way of being learner-centred.

Step 3 - Editing our story

When they have finished composing the story, read it through. Check whether they want to make any changes. Are they happy with all the words. Would they like to change the way they've said certain things? Does it make sense? **(Coherence)**

As they make their suggestions, take a different colour crayon, and write in the changes they suggest. As you do this, you are showing them what it is like to be a writer. Writers don't write just one finished version of the stories and books they write. They write several drafts. Sometimes they change the order of events so that it is more logical. Sometimes they change what happens. And often they change the words. **(Cohesion)**

Then choose a title for the story.

Some people say that you can divide almost all stories into 7 parts. This would mean that you would need 7 pictures for the book, as well as a picture for the cover.

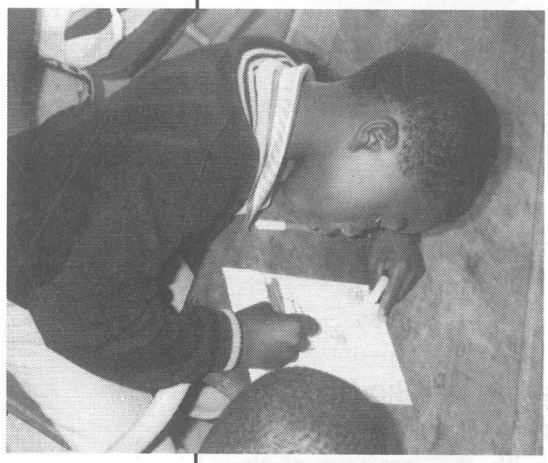
This would also help you as you work out how many double-page spreads you need to make your book.

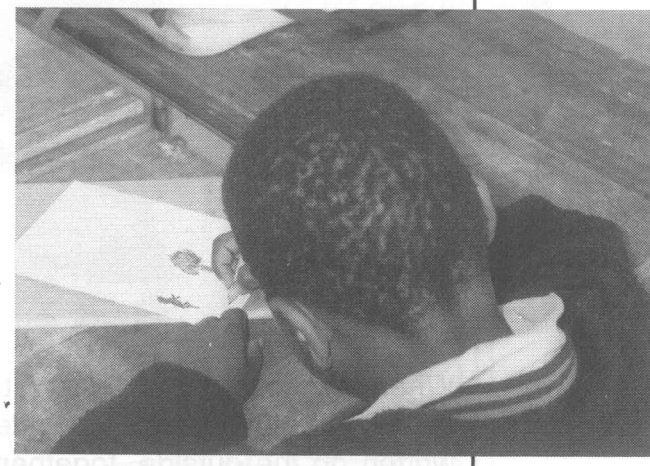
Step 4 - Making our book

Next, remind your learners that you want them to make the pictures to go with the story. Re-read the story with them and, *together,* decide how you can divide up the story, so that each page has an idea which can be illustrated. This could be a phrase, a sentence, or two or three sentences. But try not to put too much text on one page.

Then get each group of children to agree to make pictures for a particular part of the story. Explain that you will need a picture for each part. You may have some very talented artists in your class, and there may be other children whose drawings are not so clear. But it is very important for each child to have a chance to make a picture. Make sure that you get several pictures for each part of the story. Remind your learners to write their names neatly at the bottom of their drawings.

As a child volunteers to make a drawing for a particular part of the story, write her/ his name next to the text which s/he is going to illustrate.



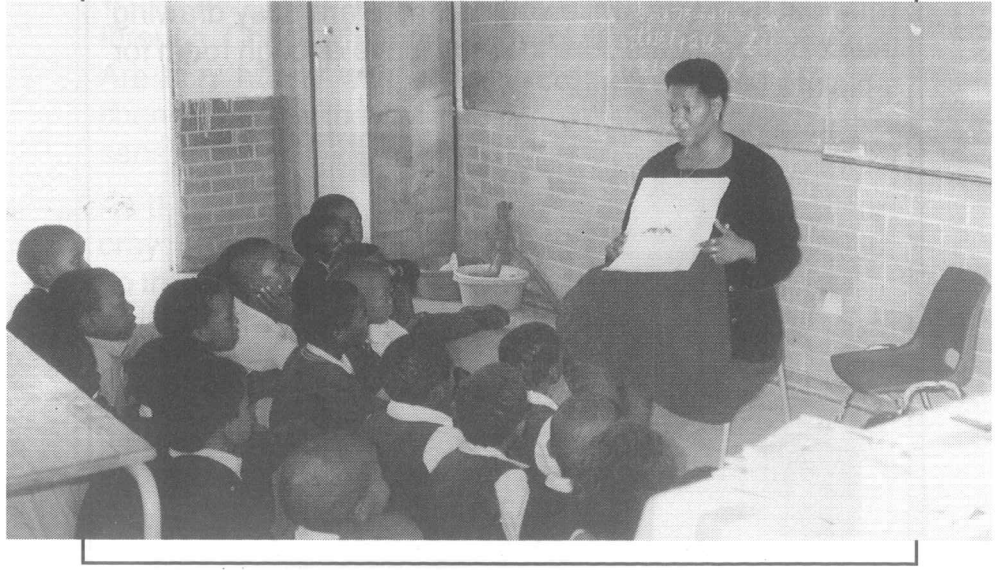


If you have not already made a big book for this Activity, you could put the double-page spreads together now, while your learners are working on their pictures. Then write out the story, while your learners are busy drawing their pictures. Make sure that you leave enough room for a picture on each page.

Then spend some time negotiating which picture from a group is selected to be pasted in. Display the rest on a wall of the classroom. This will make all your learners feel that their work is valued, and is given status. And they will grow in confidence, and their interest in participating will increase.

Step 5 - Sharing our book

When the pictures have been stuck in the Big Book, the text of the story has been written in, the title has been written on the outside, together with the names of the authors, you are ready to share the story with the whole class.

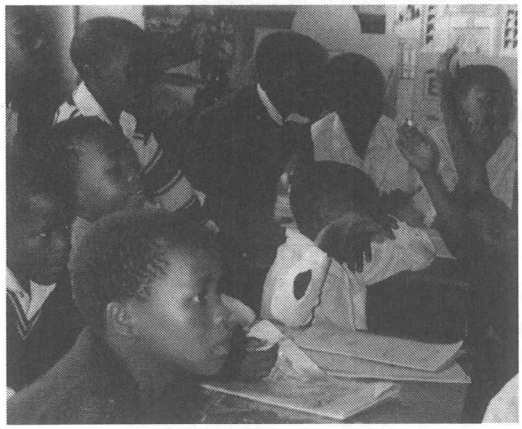


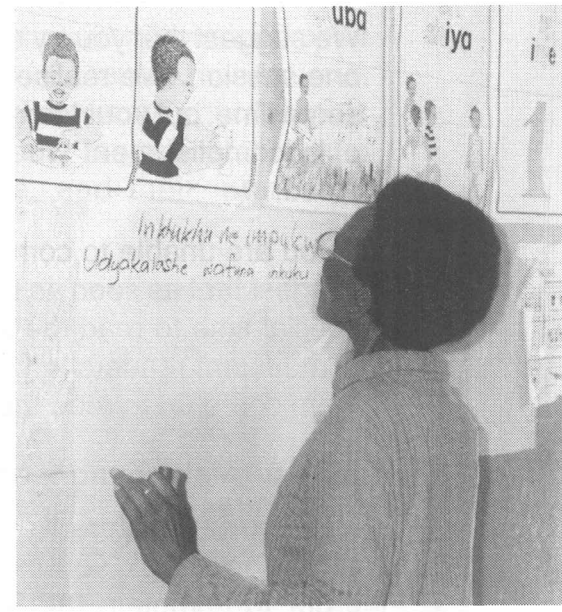
We suggest that you try to complete this whole Activity in one session. We realise that you will need to set aside some time, but your learners will feel a very strong sense of accomplishment when you read the finished book aloud.

If you are unable to complete the Activity in one go, we suggest that as soon as the book is finished, you make a special time to read the story to everybody. If you have some fluent readers in your class, it's a good idea to let them come up to read the story to their peers.

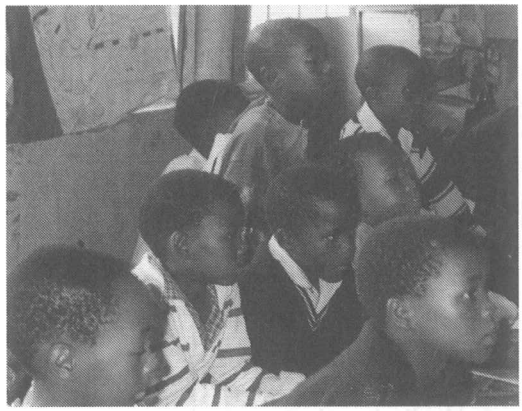
Step 6 - Making more books

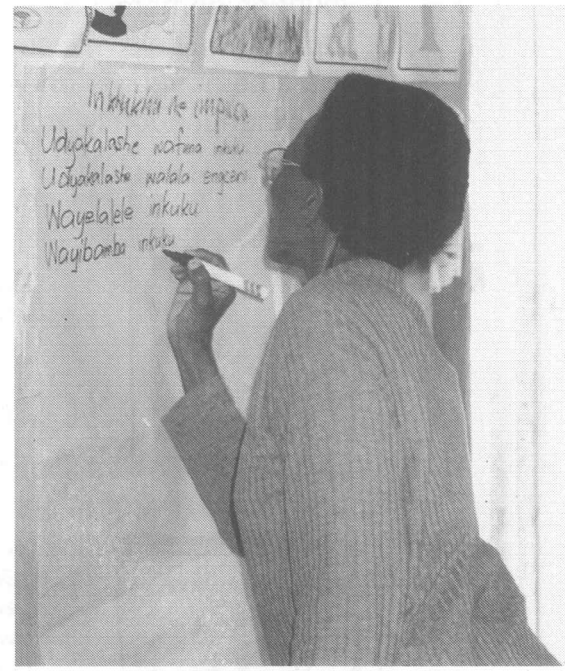
Now you have taken all your learners through the process of making a book, you will need to make several books in order to complete the **Key Activity.** If you work with younger learners, you will need to provide considerable support and help. We suggest that you work with a group at a time. If your learners are older, they will be able to work independently in their groups.



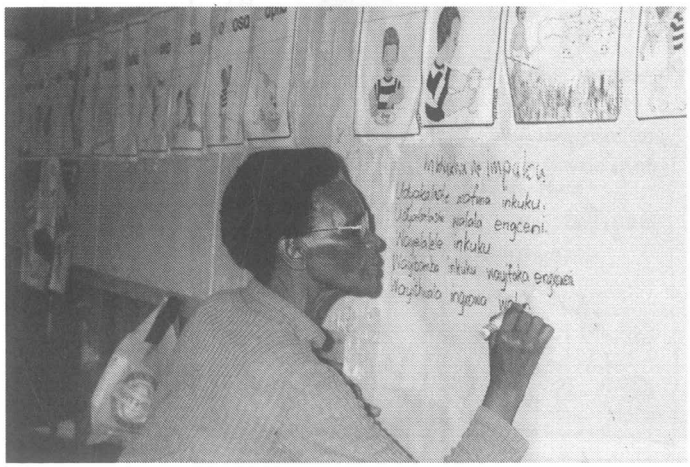


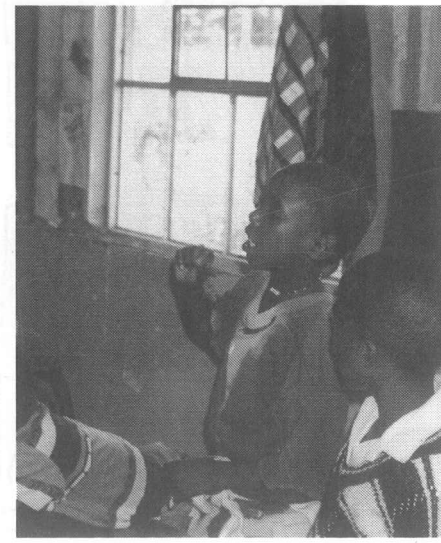
- How shall we start?
  What shall we write first? (set the scene)
- What is the first thing that happens in our story? (event 1)
- What happens next? (event 2)

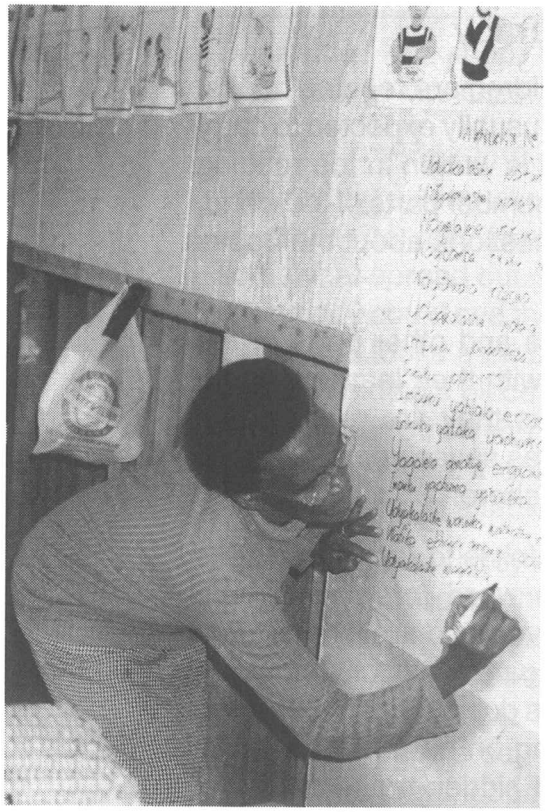


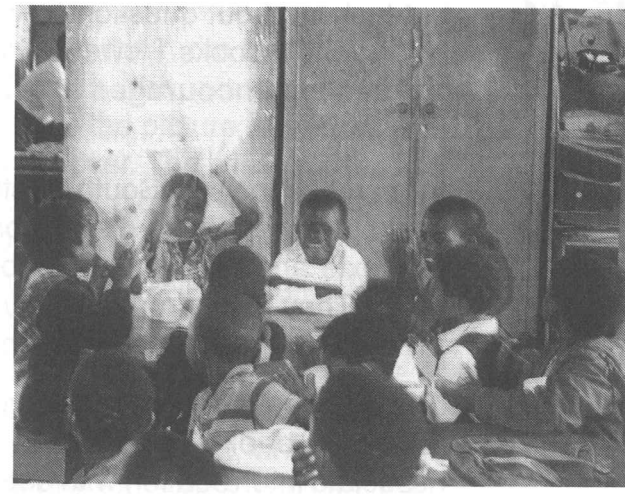


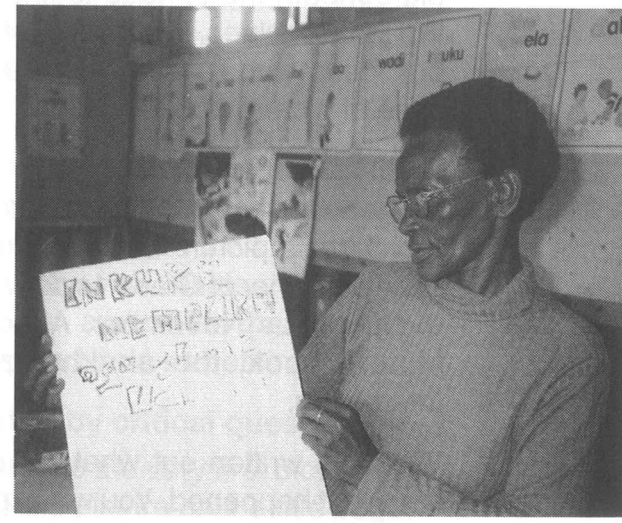
- Is that the best way we can say that?
- Can we think of a better word?



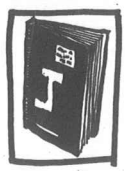








- Have we left something out here? (logic/cohesion)
- Is that what somebody would really do? (sense/coherence)
- How shall we finish our story?
- Let's check that we are happy with our story. (edit)



Reflection

When the Activity has been completed, make time to open your Journal and write a description of what happened when you carried out this Activity with your learners.

Then reflect on what occurred. What surprised you? Why do you think you were surprised? Who did most of the talking, you or your learners? Why was this? Write down some of the interesting things that they said. Think about why they said these things, and write down your explanations. How well did you listen to them? What do you feel you have learned or gained from this Activity? How could you improve this Activity?

Unit 3 - A taste of critical literacy

At present in our schools, when children are reading books, or working from textbooks, they are usually expected to carry out tasks without questioning what is written in the reading books, or textbooks. However, in a number parts of the world, children are **encouraged** to ask questions about the books they work with.

In many schools in South Australia and other parts of the world, teachers have discussions with their learners about the texts and pictures of the books they are reading and using. They get learners as young as seven years of age to *think critically* about the texts they share.

The purpose of the activity in this Unit is to ***interrogate the text*** of a book. Think about the word *interrogate.* We associate interrogation with detectives who are trying to find out about a crime. When we *interrogate* a text, or a story, we are trying to find out what the writer is doing. We are behaving like detectives. What is really going on here? We need to dig beneath the surface to find out hidden truths of things. We look for clues. We think of other possibilities. We support our ideas with reasons from the words of the text. In the case of picture books, we also look carefully at the pictures for clues.

At the workshop for Abakhwezeli in January 2000, Viv took a children's picture book and demonstrated what she had seen a teacher of Grade 1s do with a picture book in Adelaide, the previous November. Although Viv used a children's picture book, the abakhwezeli found the experience interesting.

We also showed two videos (one from the UK and the other from America) which provided clear evidence of children thinking critically about books.

We have written out what Viv did as an Activity for you to see what happened. You will experience this Activity yourself at the face-to-face session where this umthamo is introduced. We believe that if you have this experience yourself, you will be more confident about trying it with your learners. It is also a preparation for the **Key Activity.** If for some reason you are not able to be at that face-to-face session, you will need to read through the Activity very, very carefully.

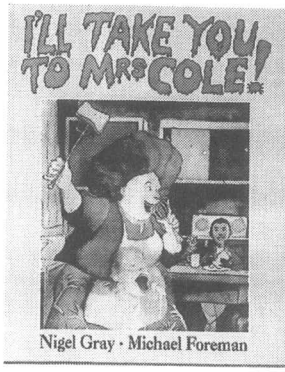
Activity 5 - Sharing a picture book - a critical look

We have written what took place in that activity at the Workshop in the form of a Reflective Report. Read through the report carefully. Make careful notes of the Steps. We suggest you also compare this Report with what happened when you did the Activity at the face-to-face session where this umthamo was introduced.

Before the workshop, I chose a picture book called, I'll Take You To Mrs Cole! for my demonstration

Step 1 - Pre-Reading - Preparing to Read

I started by asking everybody in the room to come and sit closer to me. Nevertheless, the group was still somewhat spread out. I held up the picture book so that everybody could see the front cover. The title is written in a font that looks a bit shaky. The picture shows a large woman holding a piece of bread on a toasting-fork in one hand. In her other she is holding a whisk to her mouth, like a microphone. It looks as though she might be singing. A boy is sitting at a table holding a sandwich and smiling.

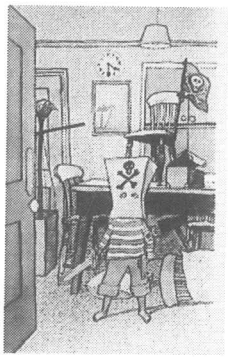


After giving everybody a chance to see the cover, I asked what they expected the book to be about, and to give their reasons. There were different answers, such as "It's about Mrs Cole." "Somebody is threatening somebody else." I asked them to think of situations from their own lives when people say things like "I'll take you to ....." I asked what they thought might happen in the story. I drew their attention to the picture on the cover. I asked, who they thought Mrs Cole might be.

As the abakhwezeli responded, I asked them to give reasons for their comments. I drew their attention to the font that the title was written in. Somebody pointed out that the title had an exclamation mark at the end. I didn't say anything about what I knew was inside the book. I just listened to their responses, and asked them to give reasons to explain why they had said something.

Step 2 - Reading (Supported by critical questions)

I opened the book and pointed to the very first picture on the frontispiece, and also to the picture on the title page. Then I turned to the first page of text and began to read. I held up the book so that everybody could see the first two pictures. There is a contrast between the picture on the first left-hand page and the facing right-hand page. The picture on the left shows a child dressed as a pirate and playing at home. There is a lot of blue in the picture. The facing page is very dark, and somebody is standing outside an open doorway, in a rather threatening way. The story tells us that the boy hasn't been doing what his mother asked him to do, and she is threatening to take him to Mrs Cole.



When my mum came in from work
and I hadn't got the table laid,
she said,
"If you can't do what you're told,
I'll take you to Mrs Cole."

Mrs Cole lives down the street,
in a dirty house,
in a noisy house,
with lots of kids under her feet.

I continued reading. On the next double-page spread there is still a lot of blue in the picture, but it is getting a little darker. It shows a boy on his hands and knees playing

with water on the bathroom floor. The bath has overflowed and there is a mess. His mother is standing in the doorway of the bathroom. Again, she threatens to take him to Mrs Cole. This time they get as far as the front door.

I turned the page and there was a picture of what the boy imagines Mrs Cole's house might be like. It is very dark, with lots of grey and other faded colours. Mrs Cole is standing on a table, with a whip in her hand, while lots of children are on their hands and knees scrubbing the floor.

I asked them what they thought the writer wanted us to think. What did the pictures tell us about the story? What about the choice of colours? Who was the book about? How did the writer feel about the boy? What did he feel about the boy's mother? What did the writer want us to feel about Mrs Cole? The abakhwezeli shared their thoughts and ideas, and explained why they thought and felt the way they did. Not everybody felt the same about the story. There were different ideas.

On reflection, I realise that I could have drawn their attention to the similarities and differences between the pictures on these pages. And I could have asked what effect both the writer and the illustrator wanted to achieve by giving us those two double-page spreads. This would have made the abakhwezeli even more conscious about the decisions the writer and illustrator had made when they created the book.

As the story continues, the boy in the story does other things which upset his mother, and she continues to threaten to take him to Mrs Cole. Each time they get a little closer to Mrs Cole's house. One Saturday morning, when his mother goes to work leaving the boy with a list of jobs to do, he decides to run away. We talked about the issue of running away.

As the boy walks down the street, he finds himself outside Mrs Cole's house. She invites him in. We discussed what the boy might find inside. The picture of Mrs Cole was of a warm smiling person. The words told us that it was cold outside, that there was music blaring out of the house, and that all the lights were on. Some of us thought Mrs Cole *seemed* warm and friendly, but perhaps she was just trying to trap him. We referred to other instances in which children have been abducted.

When we turned the page, we saw what Mrs Cole's house looked like. It was a mess! Toys, clothes and shoes were lying everywhere. Was this what they had expected? Why? We talked about what the pictures told us about

Mrs Cole's home. I asked which home they would prefer to live in and why. After some discussion, we read the rest of the story.

Step 3 - Post-Reading - Asking reflective questions

When we had finished the story, we discussed in what ways the story was different from our expectations. We talked about the behaviour of the mother in the story and her son. We talked about how they had felt. We brought our own knowledge of similar situations to help us to understand the story better. We discussed whether or not it was fair for the mother to threaten her son. Some people felt that she should have carried out her threat the first time, and because she didn't, she was weak. Others felt that she was trying to give her son another chance. We talked about the difficulties of being a single parent. We also talked about the way this story challenges racial stereo-types.

I realise that we could have asked many more questions. But this was my first experience of asking these kinds of questions about a picture book, and I was a bit nervous. It would have helped me if I had written down some specific questions to ask *before* we shared the book. Then I would have felt more confident.

I wish now that I had asked the question, *"From whose point of view is the story written?"* Then I could have suggested that we try to tell the story from the mother's point of view. This would have helped us to understand her actions better.

We all realised that reading a book in this way is an important activity. It helps us think of different possibilities. It helps us to get inside the mind of a writer, and to see some of the choices s/he made as s/he wrote the story.

You have read this Report to **make notes** of the Steps, and to **compare** it with what you did at the face-to-face session. Now read through the piece carefully **one more time.** As you re-read, mark in the margin (by writing in a large **R**) the places where the writer of this Report reflects on what happened. Do you see how reflection is built into the written Report?

*When we went to trial the **Key Activity,** I made sure that I had thought about questions which would be appropriate to ask primary school children about the books they had made themselves. In fact, first of all we wrote down a set of questions. Then we spent a few days thinking about the questions. After that, we discussed them, and made some changes.*

This is the same thing you did in Umthamo 21, Unit 2 page 18.

In the next Unit you will have a chance to read how three different teachers put this approach to sharing books into action with young learners. You will need to read these Readings before moving onto the **Key Activity.**

Unit 4 - Evidence of the approach in action

In this Unit, we have included some examples of discussions around texts which other teachers have carried out with their learners. But first of all, read the following extract by Aidan Chambers. He asks the question, *Are Children Critics?*

The implication behind his question is that adults have a tendency to underestimate what children are capable of doing.

Are Children Critics?

When our study group asked teacher colleagues this question, the answer was often no. Criticism, we were assured, is an unnatural, specialist and adult activity for which you need training, as well as a perverse taste for pleasure-destroying analysis. Criticism, these teachers seemed to believe, deals in abstractions, in unfeeling intellectualism, calculating dissection. You can't 'do' criticism with children, they said, and if you try you only put them off literature altogether. Many of them, it turned out, had been put off by what they thought of as criticism during secondary-school and tertiary literature courses.

We asked the question in the first place because our work had persuaded us that children possess an innate critical faculty. They instinctively question, report, compare and judge. Left to themselves, they make their opinions and feelings plain, and are interested in the feelings of their friends. When they talk about books, films, television, sport, or whatever own-time activities they share enthusiastically, they enjoy gathering information and are quite as discriminating as an adult connoisseur. No one, for example, is more critical than a nine-year-old soccer fan comparing notes about the previous night's game, or is more trenchant in defence of strongly held opinions.

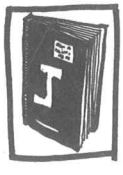
If there is a deep interest in a subject, and the facilities are provided for its expression, children are, it seemed to us self-evident, natural critics from quite early ages (certainly by the time they start school at five years old). What our dissenting colleagues were talking about, we decided, was a warped notion of literary criticism based upon their own unhappy experiences.

What, then was our view of literary criticism? What do critics do? And is that what children do, or can be enabled to do? (Chambers. 1993:29)

Connoisseur – a person who is a good judge of something

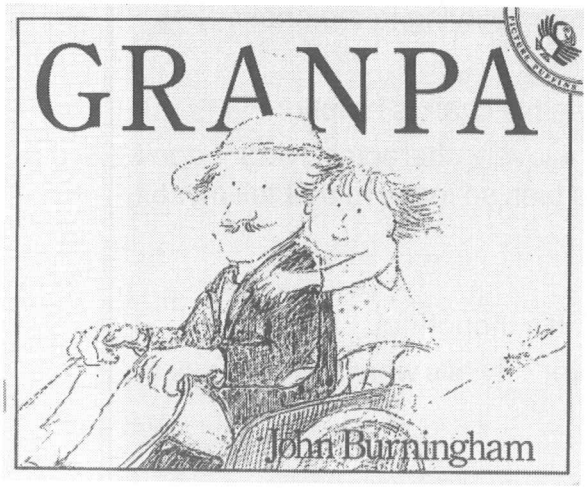
Trenchant – determined and sharp

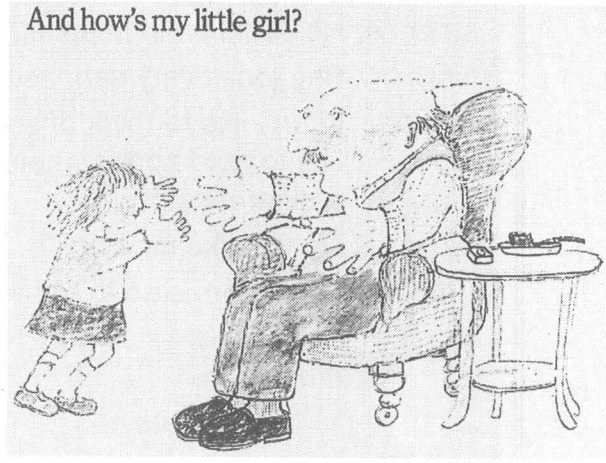
Activity 6a - Children asking critical questions



Think about what you have just read. Think about the children you teach. What questions might your learners have? What do you expect to find in the three Readings in this Unit? Do you think pre-school children can ask questions and think of possible answers about the stories they hear? Why? Open your Journal and write down your response.

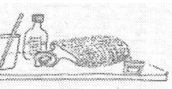
The following extract comes from a transcript of a discussion between a young teacher and a group of children aged between nine and eleven. The teacher and children are discussing a picture book, *Granpa,* which has very little text. The pictures in the book and the words show the relationship between a young child and her grandfather. The children and the teacher have read the book twice.

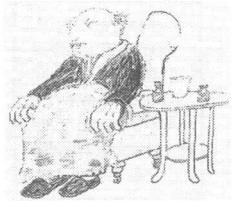




Reading 1 - 'Tell me' beginners

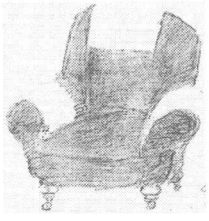
Teacher:	Has anybody noticed anything they want to tell us?
Lee:	At the end he [Granpa] has gone.
Bryan:	Maybe he's gone to Africa without her.
Gwilym:	She [the unnamed little girl] asks if worms go to heaven, she knows people do.
Candy:	Definitely.
Jessica:	He is gradually getting older and then he is very ill, then he dies.
Teacher:	Yes, I noticed that. Did anyone else?
Gwilym:	It starts off as spring and goes all the way through.
Teacher:	Yes, starts in spring, through summer, autumn, and ends in winter. What do you think spring is like?
Stuart:	Growth, new life, cows have calves.
Teacher:	Brilliant!
Gwilym:	The beginning of life for many animals.
Teacher:	And perhaps the beginning of life or youth for people too?
Claire:	The carriage at the end is pushed by an angel.
Stuart:	No, it's the little girl after …
Teacher:	This page [the last picture in the book] causes a lot of discussion. People don't know what to make of it.
Gwilym:	She has grown up, she has learned to play on her own and be independent. In every other picture she is playing or doing something with Granpa, in this case she's alone.
Teacher:	Perhaps life goes on. Do you think Granpa has died?





Lee:	He has got his medicine out on the table and then next page it is gone.
Teacher:	What do you think of that part? All the signs are he has got a cold - that's Vaseline, a thermometer.
Stuart:	It's getting cold in the winter, perhaps he catches pneumonia - and died. And they have been playing in the snow.
Catherine:	He could be in hospital.
Stuart:	She looks very sad, because his chair is empty.
Catherine:	I don't like to think of such a lovely character dying. I don't like to read books where he dies so in my mind I tell myself a different story.
Teacher:	Do you like the book?
Martin:	I like 'worms go to heaven'. It's thoughtful.
Lee:	I like 'can we stay here forever?' That's what I used to say at the beach.
	(Disturbance.)
Teacher:	What do you think the book is about?
Candy:	I think it's about a child's relationship with her grandfather. I think it's a very good book - if that's what it's about. It's very truthful from a child's point of view. But it's also about death and children need that.
Stuart:	How people get old, about life.
Teacher:	Yes, definitely, that's very good. I think that too. What would you tell a friend about it? What about the language in the book?
Candy:	It's very clever. It's just how children say things and what children do.
Jessica:	It's sad - it sounds boring - you have to read it, then you realize and think it's great.
Teacher:	Do the pictures add meaning to the story?
Candy:	Yes. For example, the [empty] chair is most important. That is what the story is about really. It's the pictures that tell you what they are doing, and where they are, and sometimes other things like Granpa's old games, and the words just tell you a tiny bit of what else is going on.

(From an unpublished dissertation, *Working with John Burningham* by Susan Jayne Lamacq, 1990. Quoted in Chambers. 1993:36-37)



In the next extract, Margaret Mallett has been reading the book, *The Sheep Pig* by Dick King-Smith to a group of nine-year old children. The children have been trying to find out more information about pigs to increase their understanding of the story. In the extract she is helping them to share, and reflect on, what they have found out from pamphlets and information books.

The film "Babe" was based on this children's book.

Reading 2 - How long does a Pig live?

All readers bring their knowledge of the world to the texts they read as well as their knowledge about the conventions of the particular genre. Sometimes the act of reflection reveals a mismatch between our common-sense knowledge and what we read. I asked the children if reading the books and pamphlets had changed any of their views.

Stuart: ...that pigs are very clean animals!

MM: You had had the impression before that they were dirty? Why do people think that?

Ben: Because they roll in mud and things like that.

Stuart: ... and they smell a little bit.

MM: ...if they are kept indoors. Do they smell if they are kept out of doors, Wendy?

[Wendy's special experience makes her the 'expert' in the group.]

Wendy: They still smell a little bit outdoors, but the little ones don't.

MM: It's in our language isn't it - this idea of 'dirty pigs'?

One of the things being learnt here is that our common-sense knowledge is modified by what we read. It is this dissonance which can stimulate reflection.

MM: What does it say here that makes Stuart now say the pig is a clean animal? What does it do that makes us think it is clean?

Stuart: It says they roll in the mud and then they clean themselves off and they go to the toilet in a separate place. [Looking at the text and paraphrasing.]

Wendy: Yes, they don't sit in the part of the field where they go to the toilet. [Wendy brings in her first-hand knowledge appropriately.]

MM: What I did not know was that pigs cannot sweat. Did you know that? [This is mentioned in the text.]

Wendy: Their skin is more dry and they haven't got as much salt in their body as us.

MM: How do you know that, Wendy?

Wendy: Because I asked the farmer about their skin and he said they do not sweat as they have less salt than us.

MM: That's interesting.

Wendy: Yes - because when you sweat salt comes out, doesn't it?

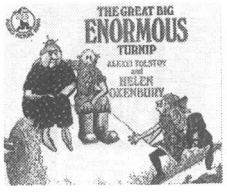
[Here the text has helped Wendy to reflect and make sense of her first-hand observations. The metabolism of a pig is different from that of a human being.](Mallett.1992:179-180)

Genre – kind of literature or text – poetry, narratives, reports, etc.

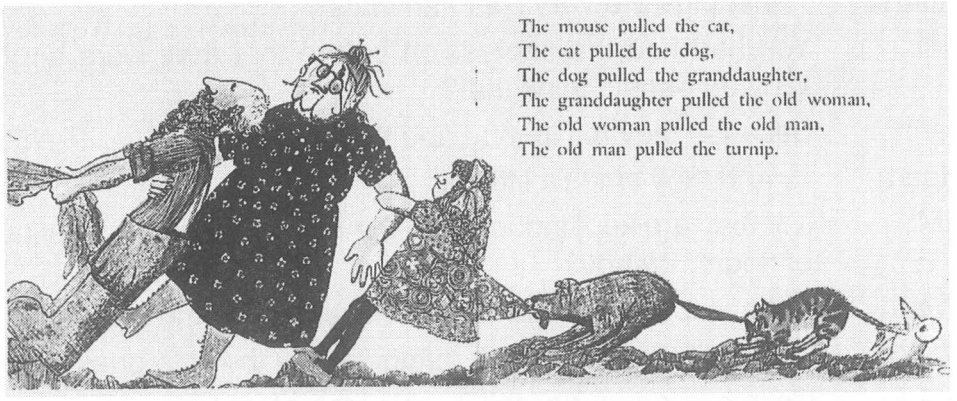
Lev Vygotsky (1978:86) describes this way of a teacher working with learners as working within the 'zone of proximal development'. We hope you will learn more about how to do this in Helping Learners Learn.

In the third Reading, Vivian Paley records a discussion about *The Tale of the Turnip.*

Reading 3 - Prologue



Imagine an enormous turnip in a row of ordinary turnips. Grandfather tries but fails to pull it up. Grandmother comes to help, but together they cannot do it. First a grandchild and then a black cat join the others, but the turnip stays firm. Only when a brown mouse adds his effort does it come up.



How can a tiny mouse make such a difference? Common sense insists that the turnip is ready to come up, and the mouse only appears to make the big difference. But in a kindergarten classroom the appearance is as good as the deed.

No - better than the deed. When a magical idea is presented, the common-sense approach is looked at but then discarded. Hear five-year-olds who have just entered kindergarten as they discuss *The Tale of the Turnip.*

Teacher: Why did the turnip come up when the little brown mouse pulled?

Warren: Because the grandfather and grandmother couldn't pull it up.

Teacher: They couldn't. You're right. Then the mouse helped and it came up. Why?

Warren: He was stronger.

Deana: If all of them pulled, the enormous turnip *would* come up.

Wally: That was only the strength they needed.

Eddie: If just some pulled it wouldn't. But they needed all to pull.

Wally: Maybe the mouse lived down there.

Jill: Under the turnip? Is that where he lives at night?

Wally: Maybe he pushed it up when it was coming out.

Jill: Maybe he was stronger than they were.

Eddie: Animals could be stronger than people.

Deana: Maybe the roots got stuck to the bottom of the ground and when the mouse came he could pull the roots up.

Fred: If the cat and mouse pulled theirselves it comes up.

Teacher: Why?

Fred: They're stronger. But if the roots stuck they might need help.

Wally: Maybe someone was inside the dirt and he saw the roots and he pulled it so they couldn't pull the turnip.

Tanya: If the mouse pulled it up by himself it would work.

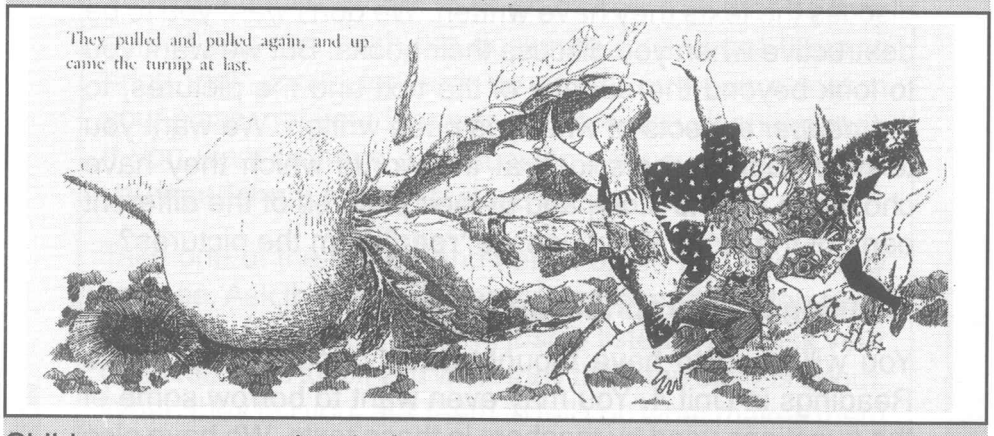
Wally: What if two people were underneath pulling?

Teacher: How would they happen to be under the ground?

Eddie: They dug a hole.

Tanya: But the mouse has the most power. Right? *(Everyone agrees.)*

The mouse's size is not important. A mouse can push up a huge turnip because the child can see him do it in his mind. The child can also see the other story characters pulling on the turnip, but he would rather think about the mouse. Fine. Unless you are a teacher determined to teach the concepts that are in *your mind.* (Paley. 1981:1-3)



Children come together in fantasy and act out stories of friends who conquer danger and preserve dependable rituals. They examine common concerns and build worlds in which friendship and fairness are inalienable rights. Everything the children wonder about becomes "Let's pretend ....." and there is remarkable agreement about which issues are important. (Paley, VG. 1989:141)

Rituals – little ceremonies or ways of doing things

Activity 6b - Reflecting on the Readings

What have you found interesting in these Readings? What surprised you? Think about the kind of questions you could ask as a teacher, *on behalf of your learners,* to encourage them to begin to *interrogate* texts and stories more *critically.*

Now think about your own learners again. What kinds of questions might they be interested in? What opportunities do your learners have to share questions about the stories and books they use? What could you do to give them more opportunities to ask questions about books? How could you extend the questions they ask? Then open your Journal, and write at least a page in response.

Unit 5 - Discussing Books

Everything that you have been doing as you have worked through this umthamo has been leading up to the **Key Activity** in this Unit. You have discussed with your learners the stories or books they like best. You have built up a mind-map of *What makes a story a good story?* And your learners have been busy composing their own stories, and turning their texts into books.

You have also read the Readings in Unit 4 which show how other teachers have discussed books and stories with their learners. And you have seen that even very young learners are able to explain what they think and feel about the stories and books which they have met.

Now in this Unit, in the **Key Activity,** we want you to spend time with your own learners looking *critically* at what they have written. We want you to help them to *interrogate* and discuss the texts they have written. We don't want you to be destructive when you discuss their books. But we want you to look beyond the *surface of* the text and the pictures, to the *deeper* aspects of what has been written. We want you to help your learners look at the words which they have chosen to tell the story, and at their pictures of the different parts of the story. What can we '**read**' from the pictures?

Thinking of appropriate questions

You will need to have thought deeply yourself about the Readings in Unit 4. You may even want to borrow some of the questions used by teachers in those texts. We have also included a list of possible questions in the Appendix at the end of this umthamo. You won't need to use them all. They won't all be suitable. In fact, you may well need to draw up some of your own questions.

Remember throughout the **Key Activity,** to be a good listener. Try not to dominate the discussion with your own opinions, ideas and thoughts. Ask open questions. And listen carefully and trustingly to your learners' ideas. Model the notion (idea) of *appraisal.* Praise your learners. Be positive. Encourage them. But remember, you also want to challenge them to do and think even more.

We have not given you Options for this Activity. We are trusting you to make the necessary adjustments and adaptations to suit the level of your group of learners. If you are working with younger learners, you will be looking at the books you have helped them to create. We suggest that you discuss each book separately, and on separate occasions, so that you can do each book justice.

If you are working with older learners, first discuss one of the books which they have made. Then they can work in groups on their own to discuss the other books. If you model how such a discussion can proceed by chairing and *guiding the first discussion,* your learners will be confident and know what to do when they work in groups on their own.

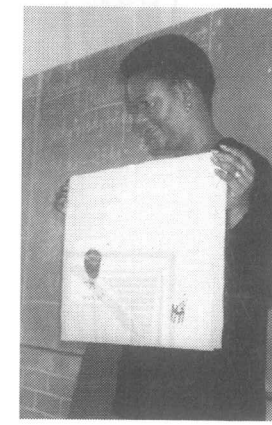
A day or two before you plan to do the **Key Activity** and to have this discussion collect the books which your learners have made. Set aside some time so that you can read them through carefully before the discussion. You may even want to make a list of some questions which will help your learners interrogate the texts.

Activity 7 - Key Activity

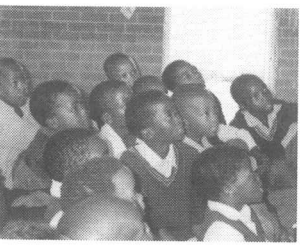
Part 1 - Interrogating the texts we've written

Make sure that you have the books ready to discuss. Then get your learners to sit as closely together as they can. If you can push the desks back, and get them to bring their chairs forward, do so. If you have a mat in your class, get your learners to come and sit on the mat. If you want to have a discussion with everybody, then you need them to form a close group.

In some classes, teachers get their learners to each bring their own little mat made by a parent or grandparent.



Take one of the books, and hold it up so that everybody can see. Ask the people (learners) who made up the story to keep quiet for a while, and just to listen. Then ask your other learners to tell you what they think the story is about. When they tell you, ask them to tell you what makes them to think that. Draw their attention to the title. What does the title tell them? Listen carefully to their ideas.



Then start to read the story aloud. Try to read in a way that makes your listeners interested in the story so that you do justice to the text. Show your learners the illustrations as you go along. You will be modelling what a good reader does.

After you have read a few pages, stop at a suitable point. This may be a good time to ask or to comment on whether their predictions were accurate. Who do they think is/are the most important character(s)? Why? Who do they think is less important? Why?

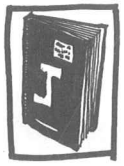
Then read the rest of the story. When you have finished it, ask your learners questions such as, From whose point of view is the story written? Why do you think that? Let's try to tell the story from a different character's point of view. How could we change the story? What would you have done if you had been a different character? What

You will have experienced a discussion rather like this at the face-to-face session where this umthamo was introduced. You can use that experience to guide you as you facilitate this discussion.

can we use from this story? What do the writers want us to think? Why do you think that? Do you want to feel or think that? Was what happened fair? Why?

You may find that the first time you do this, your learners may be unsure of themselves. They may think that there is only one right answer to each question. You will need to reassure them that there are many possible answers. The important thing is to be able to support their answers.

It will probably take you about half an hour to have a discussion like this. You can choose whether you deal with another book in this way now, or whether you choose to work with the other books at another time. If you work with older learners, we suggest that you set aside time on another day for your learners to work in groups to discuss a book themselves. Each group could take another group's book. You will need to prepare some question cards to guide them, or you will need to write up a list of questions that they can use as they look critically at each other's books.



Later in the day, open your Journal and write a description of what happened when you carried out this discussion with your learners. What surprised you? Why do you think you were surprised? Who did most of the talking, you or your learners? How well did you listen to them? What do you feel you have learned or gained from this Activity? How would you do this differently next time?

Phambi kwesifundo
Imibuzo
- Ibali eli lingantoni, utsho ngoba?
- Uciinga ukuba yintoni esathwenjeka? Kha ucikelele.
- Ikho umlo oyaziyo ngomongo webali olidlwye ngabadlali abakulo?

Emva kwesifundo
- Ngubani umdlali ophambi? Nika isizathu sokuba utsho
- Ngubani onengqondo embi kweli bali? ngoba?
- Umbalisi ufuna ukusixelela ntoni? ngoba?
- Le ngxaki ekweli bali inganyisombulula njani?
- Ukuba eli bali belinoku baliswa ngumqondo mbi, bebeliyajika njani?

Part 2 - Writing a Reflective Report

To complete this Key Activity, you need to write a Reflective Report. Firts, look back in your Journal to what you wrote about the discussion you had with your learners in Activity 3, in Unit 2. As you re-read what you wrote in that entry, mark in the margin with a letter **R** wherever you find evidence that you were reflecting on what happened. If you are uncertain what we mean by this, turn back to pages 24 to 27, where we gave you an example of a Reflective Report. It might help to look for phrases in your writing like, *I wonder if, or I was surprised, I realise now that ....., Next time I do this activity with my learners, I would like to .....*

Then you will need to turn to what you wrote after you had completed Activity 4, in which you got your learners started on their stories and making their own books. Again, mark in the margin with an **R** wherever you feel you were reflecting on what happened.

Lastly, re-read what you have written about the critical discussion in this **Key Activity,** and write a letter **R** in the margin wherever you think you have *reflected on* what occurred.

Now take a piece of paper and

- make a list of all the things that your learners have done that have excited you as you carried out the different activities.
- Next, make a list of all the things that they have done that have surprised you.
- Lastly, make a list of the things which you feel you have learned as you have worked through this umthamo. You may need to refer to the Readings in Unit 4. Were there ideas in any of those Readings which you would like to begin (or have already begun) to do yourself in your own class? What would you do differently?

Then take another sheet of paper and start writing your Report. **Start** with the exciting things which you have listed that your learners have done. **Describe** what they did. **Explain** why you felt excited. Then go on to the things which your learners did which surprised you. **Explain** why you were surprised. Next, **write** about what you feel you have gained from all this. In what ways has this unit of work been different from what you have been doing up until now? In what ways is this going to effect your daily teaching? Lastly, comment on whether you feel you are becoming more reflective as a teacher in your own class, and how this influences what you do with your learners.

Extending the work in this umthamo - older learners write for younger learners

When learners are asked to **write** in schools, very often they only ever **write** for the teacher. In other words, the teacher is the only other person to **read** their writing. The teacher is their *audience.* In this Activity, your learners will write for a *different* audience. They will write for younger children.

Through this activity, older learners will work across a number of different learning areas, and will have to carry out a number of related tasks. (And the things that younger children **read** in school are mostly **written** for them by adults. They seldom **read** the **written work** of older learners).

- They will have to work collaboratively, in groups, to survey their intended audience (find out what they like to hear or read).

- They will develop a critical awareness of language, as they experience *process writing.*
- They will have to use Maths and Technology skills as they design, measure and construct a book. They will also be developing their artistic skills when they make the drawings to illustrate their stories.
- And they will be developing their aesthetic sense as they plan, layout and put their books together in order to ensure that their finished books are pleasing.

The preparations you need to carry out for this Optional Activity will involve speaking with some of the other staff in your school. *Who* you will need to speak to, will depend on how much freedom you have in your school. However, we would suggest that you discuss what you plan to do with your head of department, as well as with the teacher with whom you will need to work. If your Principal is very supportive, then you may wish to discuss what you intend to do with her/him as well.

Activity 8 - Writing for a different audience (Optional Activity)

Preparation

First of all discuss what you are required to do for this Activity with your head of department. You may need to explain that by doing this Activity, older learners in the school will be developing their skills of writing in their primary language. They will need to think about

- *who* is going to read what they write,
- *what* is an appropriate register,
- *how* to make their writing 'sound' interesting when it is read aloud to younger learners.

You will need to set aside a period of about 30 minutes for this first Step. You will need to spend about 5 minutes explaining the task. Then the learners will need to spend about 10 minutes devising some suitable questions. Some learners may need another 5 minutes to refine and adjust their questions. They will need approximately another 10 minutes to interview young learners about the stories and books they enjoy.

Step 1 - Thinking of questions to ask

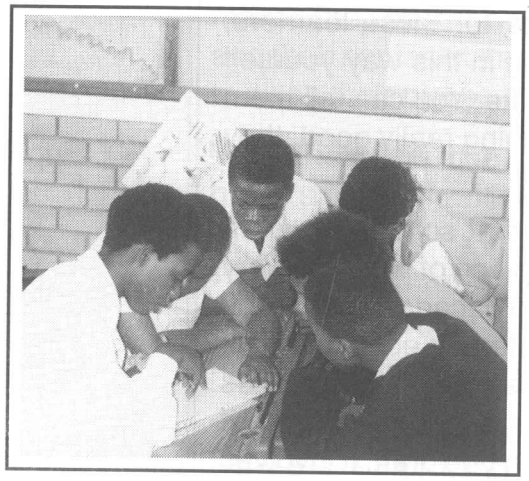
Tell the older learners that you want them to do some writing, but that that you want them to write for somebody other than the teacher. Explain that you want them to write stories for the learners of a Grade 1 or 2 class. Tell them that when they have written their stories, you want them to make their stories into picture books for those learners. They are going to be authors and illustrators.

If you are teaching younger learners, you need to leave your class with something that the teacher of the older learners can supervise while you prepare the work with that class.

However, **first of all,** they will need to find out what stories or books the younger children like to hear, to read, or have read to them. Ask them to think about questions which they could ask to find out what stories or books these children enjoy. Let them talk to the person next to

them for a minute or two, and then tell them to make a mind-map of the questions which they suggest.

After a few minutes, stop your learners and give some of your groups a chance to share the questions that they have thought of. This will mean that if there are groups who are struggling to think of some open questions, they can learn and get ideas from one another. When each group has five or six possible questions, let them interview a group of the younger children.



Imibuzo

1. nithanda eliphi ibali elezilwanya okanye elabantu?
2. nilithanda ngaba litheri?
3. nithanda amabali enyani okanye obuxoki?
4. uhlambi nithandaamabali athetha ngamazima?
5. nilithanda nokuba elibali?

You will need to tell your learners how long they have to conduct their interviews. We think 10 minutes should be plenty of time. Also, you need to explain that each group will interview a small group of learners in the class(es) that you have made an arrangement with. Make sure that they are quite clear that they will need to make notes of what the younger learners tell them.

We would suggest that you allow your learners to work with a group of friends for this Step.

Step 2 - Finding out what the audience enjoys

Now send the learners off to interview the younger children. You will find it interesting if you go with the learners. You will be able to observe how they interact with younger learners. Who is able to get the younger children to talk? Why do you think this is? What does the body language of the younger learners tell you? What about the body language of the older learners? What has surprised or interested you? This is an opportunity for you to appraise learners in a different setting or situation. It can help you to develop a more complete picture of the children in your school.

Remember Umthamo 10? In that umthamo we asked you to observe one particular learner in your class. But we found that when we visited the different Centres, many of the teachers had begun to observe many more of their learners. Some were even making notes on all the children in their class.

When we trialled this Activity at Mpongo Primary, each group asked the whole class of younger learners the questions they had thought of. The Activity worked really well. The younger children really enjoyed being asked questions about stories.

If the classes in your school are large it might be best if you allow *half* of the older learners to go to a Grade 1 or 2 class, and if you invite *half* of a Grade 1 or 2 class to come in to be interviewed in the higher Grade's class.

Step 3 - Writing a first draft

You may want to carry out this Step with the older learners at a different time. But if the Staff in your school have a more flexible timetable, you could let them continue with this Step straight away.

Now the older learners have found out what their intended audience likes to read or listen to, the groups can think about, plan and compose their stories. Give them a set time in which they should complete the *first drafts* of their stories. If this is a new experience for these learners, don't worry. You have been working in this way yourself as you work on the Reports you write. You can tell them that if they are going to write something really good, they need to work in rough first.

In the past, when many of us were at school, we were expected to complete a "finished" piece of work the very first time we wrote it. But for several decades now, many people involved in language and literacy education talk about **process writing.** Process writing involves developing a piece of writing over a period of time. It requires the writer to write more than one draft. It involves editing, re-working, and sharing a piece of work with others, before producing a final copy. This kind of writing gives learners the chance to *behave as a professional writer or author.* And this is very important because it is through *behaving as* a writer that we can learn what it *is* to be a writer, and what writers do.

If you encourage learners to work in this way, you will find that when they hand in work for appraisal, their work will be of a much higher standard. They will have checked their work themselves (as well as asking a peer to check)

- to see that it makes sense
- for spelling and grammar mistakes
- for interest.

This will mean that your task of appraising is easier. We all know that it is much, much easier to read and appraise a good piece of work, than it is to read through and appraise a poor or weak piece. It also takes less time.

When learners work in groups to create a piece of writing, they can also produce a better quality text. Each member of the group is able to contribute her/his strengths. They will be able to help one another, and to provide significant feedback to one another. Make it quite clear to your learners that you expect high quality interesting stories from them. Then let them write their first drafts.

Step 4 - Editing and writing a second draft

Before you continue with this Step of the Activity, we recommend that the learners leave their writing for a day or two. It needs to just sit at the back of their brains, like bread dough which has been left to rise.

After a couple of days, ask the learners to get out their stories for the younger learners. Tell them to read through what they wrote. Give them about 10 minutes to make any immediate alterations that they feel they need to make. They should make sure that they write ***First Draft*** and their names at the top of their writing. Then ask them to swap their pieces of writing with another group.

Tell the learners to read through the first draft of the other group's piece of writing. They need to check the piece of writing to see

- whether it makes sense,
- what they would like to know more about, and
- whether it's interesting.

Tell them to write their comments **in pencil.** They can mark any place in the text where they are not quite clear what the authors want to say. After that, they need to write any suggestions they have at the end of the piece of writing. We think this part of the task will take about 15 minutes.

Then they can return the piece of writing to the authors, and each group can spend some time re-working what they have written. To do this, they will need to write another draft. The time they will need to do this will vary from group to group. Perhaps those learners who don't manage to complete this task during the time you have allocated, can finish this **second draft** after school. They will need to write, ***Second Draft*** and their names at the top of this piece of writing. Then they should store the two pieces of writing safely.

Step 5 - Final editing and writing a third draft

The next day, or a day or two later, get the learners to take out their two drafts of their writing. Again, give them time to re-read their second drafts. Ask them if they are happy with what they have written? Are there any minor changes they would like to make?

It would be really good if they could go back to the learners whom they interviewed, and if they read their stories to these children. They could ask their audience if there is

Although this is a lot of work, many children all over the world are writing in this way. Sometimes, they don't write 3 drafts. Sometimes they write as many as 10 drafts!

And authors also have to write several drafts before their books are published. It is also quite usual to ask somebody to read what you have written and to give you comments so that you can make some improvements to what you have written.

anything they would like to change in the story, why and in what ways. The writers can use this information when they write the **third draft** of their stories. When the older learners return to their own classroom, give them some time to write the **third** and **final** draft of their stories.

Step 6 - Turning the stories into books

Now the learners need to make their books. They may have had a number of experiences of making books by now. And some of them may have made a book of a traditional song in Umthamo 23. They will need to plan where they put the text and what illustrations each part of the text needs. If you have some picture books to show them, they can use these to see how other authors and illustrators layout the pages.

As we have said, making books involves Maths because learners have to decide on the size of the books they want to make, the number of pages, the size of the writing, and the size of the illustrations. Also, they are turning paper into a book - and this is a technological process. So, as you can see, this Activity touches at least two other learning areas.

Then they will need to decide on the title of their story. They will need to write the title clearly on the cover of their book. They may want to write it in a different font (kind of writing or print). And they will need to make a picture for the cover.

In Umthamo 15, we drew you and your learners attention to the print on packages and in advertisements. Also in that umthamo the Key Activity required learners to make a cover for a story book of the story of Ityesi kaSiphokazi. So you should be able to help and support any learners in this task.

And last, but not least, they will need to write their names on the cover. Again, it would be a good idea to have a few picture books for them to look at so that they can see different ways in which the cover information can be presented clearly and attractively.

Step 7 - Sharing the books

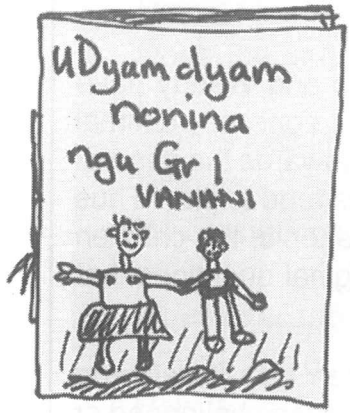
When all the books are complete, and the authors and illustrators are happy with them, arrange for the learners to go and read their stories to the children for whom they wrote them. It is probably best for each group to read to the group of children for whom they wrote, rather than to the whole class. But if the learners are confident, perhaps one or two could read their stories each day until every group has had a chance to read their story to the whole class of younger learners.

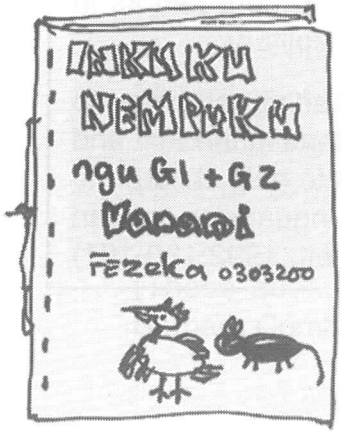
If the older learners are happy to do so, they could leave their storybooks in the classroom with the younger learners, as reading material. In this way they would have contributed a substantial number of books to the class Library.

However, some of the learners may want their books to be returned to their own class after a few weeks. You will need to negotiate with them what they think or feel would be best, and what they would prefer.

Reflecting on this Activity

When you have finished this Activity with the sets of learners, open your Journal and write a description of what happened. Reflect carefully on what took place. What surprised you? Why do you think you were surprised? Think about the learners' participation. What did you learn from what they said? If you were to do this Activity again, what would you choose to do differently? Why? What do you tihink the learners gained from this experience? What do you feel you have learned or gained from this Activity? Write at least a page.



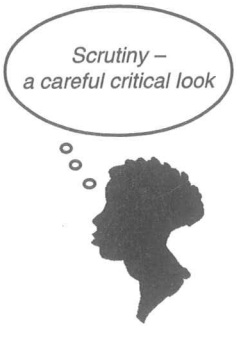


Conclusion

In this umthamo you have thought more about the curriculum of primary classrooms, and about the fact that we need to redress the oppressiveness of the past. You have read about the way teachers in other parts of the world have tried to create opportunities for their learners to ask questions about important issues.

You have read and thought about the role parents play in their children's acquisition of language, and the role they can play in our classrooms. And you have co-created stories with your learners, and supported them as they have turned those stories into books. Through this activity, your learners will have begun to see themselves as authors. They will have begun to create their own texts to read. And they will have looked critically at the books they have made.

You need to continue to think about your role as a teacher in supporting learners as they do innovative and challenging things in the classroom. Read what Margaret Mallett thought of when she reflected on the discussions she had with young learners.



> Finally, let us draw together what I think has emerged about the benefits of collaborative scrutiny of reading materials. Three main activities seemed of particular value: asking questions, sharing anecdotes and offering and challenging hypotheses.....Asking questions out loud in a group .....reveals the sorts of things that occur to other readers and reinforces the idea that we are active in grappling with the text.
>
> When it comes to sharing experience both Ben and Wendy have much to contribute.....This brought them to a 'zone of proximal development' which enabled me to nudge them towards the general point that the young of more intelligent creatures tend to play. Thus far from becoming increasingly remote from the topic, the children were coming close to answering one of the original questions that inspired our research. Is the pig intelligent?
>
> In a group context suggestions and ideas can be offered and tested..... This proffering of theories, which are then challenged or modified by others, helps us to take into account more factors in reflecting on the issues than if our reading were solitary.....
>
> When offering anecdotes inspired by shared reading, children do not always make explicit the link between the ideas in the text and the related experience..... The teacher's role is to help children to see how their experience of the world and as language users can be made to serve their school learning (Mallett. 1992:180-181)

Appendix

Some Critical Literacy Questions

Questions on topics

What do you think this book is about? What makes you think that?

What do we already know about that topic?

What do our own lives tell us about this topic?

What have you read about this topic?

Questions about how text/pictures construct topic

What do you think the book will tell you?

What can you tell from the pictures?

What is the writer trying to tell us?

In what ways does the writer try to convince us?

How do the drawings support this?

What does the writer think? How can you tell?

What doesn't the writer tell us?

Questions about how texts/pictures construct world

What kind of world does the text show?

Who is important in the story? How do you know?

How do they behave?

Does the writer approve of this behaviour? How do you know?

Who is less important? How can you tell?

Who was this book written for?

Who produces these texts? Why?

Questions about how the words work

What kinds of words does the writer use about .....?

How does the text portray gender, age, and culture?

What are the females/males like?

Make lists of what females/males do.

Make lists of what old/young do.

Who is telling the story? How can you tell?

Write or tell this story from a different character's point of view.

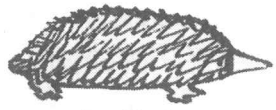
(These questions have been adapted from a paper by Barbara Comber -1998.)

A Story about the Making of a Book - by Alan Kenyon

In 1986 and 1987 I spent time teaching in a Primary School in North London. I worked mostly with the reception class and the grade 1 class. There were a number of really disruptive unruly children at that school who came from troubled homes. Keeping them on task, getting them to learn and preventing them from disturbing the other children was quite a challenge. Even in the grade 1 class there were quite a number of really 'reluctant' learners.

On the advice of my wife Vic, who was working as a senior second language specialist in another part of London, I decided to try making a book with a group of five of the most disruptive boys.

I took in one of my own children's soft toys - a small furry mole to use as a focus for the story I wanted the group to compose.



At the start of the school day I negotiated with the rest of the class that they would get on quietly with work of their own while I gave some special attention to Darren, Kojo, Tsehai, Michael and Swapo.

I showed them the toy mole, let them pass it around to look at and feel, and then I gave them some time to talk to each other about what they knew about Moles. While they talked I stuck a blank sheet of paper on the wall behind me. Then I suggested that we make up a story of a mole that we could use to make a book of our own to read.

Mole lives in a hole under the ground.
~~Mole has no eyes.~~
One day mole lost his hole.
He digged up the ground and got a new hole.
And he sleeped in his new hole in the ground
He could not find his hole anywhere.
The End

~~The STORY of~~ The MOLE who Lost His Hole

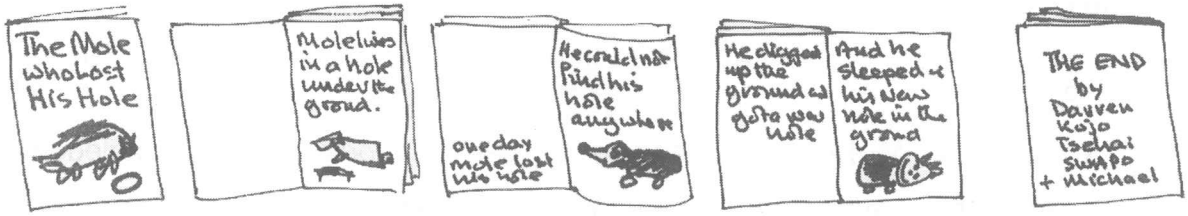
I wrote up the ideas as sentences as they gave them to me.

After just two descriptive sentences, they gave the Mole a problem (they knew how stories work). The problem was solved in the very next sentence and the story was concluded in the 5th sentence

This was a very economical telling.

We then spent some time editing the story together. Was there anything that was not needed, or redundant?
"Everyone knows that a mole has no eyes. Scratch that out Alan!"
Was anything missing in the story? Did it make proper sense? What is the first thing you do when you have lost something?
"You look for it!" - so a new sentence was added.
Then a title was suggested and then shortened. "And we must put 'the end' otherwise it is not a proper story!"

Then we talked about how we could make a book by folding a few blank A4 pages. Where would we write each sentence and what drawings would we need. While they did the drawings, I wrote out the story in the book. Then we pasted in the pictures Swapo got frustrated with his drawing of the digging of a hole and tore up Michael's picture out of spite. We went on anyhow.



They were all very pleased and proud of the end product. Now they each wanted their own personal copy - so I wrote out the story again on an A5 sheet and made a photo-copy for each boy. This time Swapo did all his own drawing and didn't trouble Michael. They cut out the sentences and worked out how to fit them and their pictures in the correct order. They made their very own versions of the book.

On reflection, it was quite amazing just how much work they had done. They had collaborated in composing and editing a story.
- They had seen their words transformed from spoken into written.
- They had read and re-read what was written even though they didn't see themselves as readers yet.
- They had cut and ordered sentence strips.
- They had drawn, and matched pictures to text.
- They had composed, laid out and pasted up their pages.
- They had read and re-read their books to others in the class.
- They had something they valued to take home and show.
- They were the pioneers in a Book Making Epidemic in the class.

For once these boys had a 'CAN DO' rather than a 'CAN'T DO' Feeling about school - They had a SUCCESS experience to look back on.

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Language, Literacy & Communication
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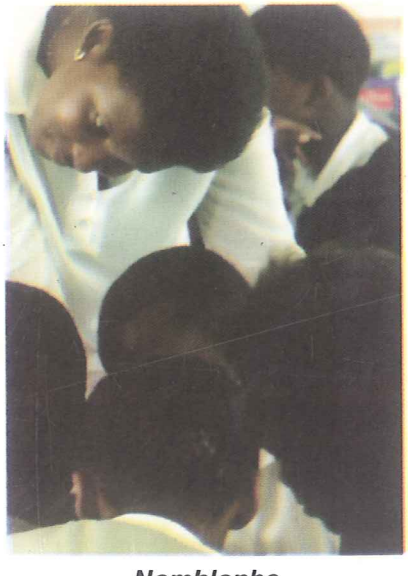
First Pilot Edition - 2000

Viv Kenyon, with the help of
Tillie Tshangela and Alan Kenyon
Co-ordinated, illustrated and edited by
Alan and Viv Kenyon

Nomalungelo

Nomonde



Nomhlophe

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