

Using Media in Teaching

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Using Media in Teaching

Learning Guide

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SECTION SIX

Using textbooks in teaching

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Why are textbooks so important?

6.1

How are textbooks different from popular media resources?

'We must abandon textbooks,' a teacher told us recently. 'They are old-fashioned, biased, and boring.' He said 'modern' teachers should design their own 'learning materials'. He also said we should make far more use of newspapers and magazines, and of the 'experiences of our learners'. But when we visit schools we see many teachers *and* learners who are dependent on textbooks. Their work plans are copied directly from the textbook's contents pages. The notes they ask learners to copy from the chalkboard are summaries of textbook chapters. Often they read to their classes directly from the textbook.

These two extreme positions regarding textbooks will not help us to teach better. Textbooks are very useful educational resources. But they must be used well. In order to make the best use of textbooks within a media-rich teaching style, we need to understand how textbooks differ from the *popular* media resources we will use in our classroom.

Textbooks are designed in order to help people *learn*. Generally they are only used in educational institutions, such as schools or universities. Popular media have a number of different purposes. Some, like advertising leaflets, are designed to *persuade*, while the main functions of newspapers, magazines and television are to *entertain* and *inform*. When we read a magazine or watch television or read a novel, we do so mainly for enjoyment. Sometimes we listen to the radio or watch television or read a newspaper to keep up-to-date about current affairs. This could be regarded as *educative*, but only in an informal sense.

However, sometimes novels *are* read for study purposes. They are used as 'setworks' in Literature courses. At times we also use advertising leaflets to *teach* learners how to analyse adverts as part of an English lesson. We may read an encyclopaedia for study purposes: we might use it in order to find information to supplement our learning of a particular topic. *But in all cases the teacher has to turn these into learning resources*. In other words, we give the non-educational media a *new educational purpose*. In order to do this successfully, we need to have a good understanding of how people learn.

In resource-based OBE, worksheets or activity sheets are the most common way in which we're-purpose' popular media in order that they become educational. *Worksheets* are generally short (they may only be used for one lesson), contain some information, but consist mainly of activities designed for group or individual study. *Workbooks* are a collection of activities and worksheets used to structure a week-long, or term-long, sequence of work. Both are designed to enable learners to work independently of the teacher. They would replace a lot of the teacher talk and note-copying time in current classrooms.

But, while worksheets – and the popular media included in these – may trigger learner experience and interest, they seldom include the content knowledge or conceptual development needed for good learning. This is why the teachers that we have met in this module so far tend to refer learners to textbooks (and other reference books) at various points in a learning programme. And, while worksheets or workbooks based on popular media should provide some kind of logical learning sequence, they are unlikely to provide the overall organizing structure for the subject. Textbooks can do this.

So how is a textbook different from other media resources? The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives two definitions of *textbook*:



You should begin week 16 now.
You will have completed 90
hours of work so far.

In Section Two we discussed
this issue briefly. Can you
remember what we learnt?

- a book used as the *standard work* for the study of a particular subject;
- a *manual of instruction* in a subject of study.

In other words, good textbooks are different from other media resources in three key ways.

Textbooks select knowledge appropriate to a learning area and at a particular level

Textbooks are selections of the content required to learn and teach a particular subject or learning area at a particular level of study. Teachers, for instance, often speak of *history* textbooks or *mathematics* textbooks. In Curriculum 2005, 'subjects' are replaced by 'learning areas' but it is likely that teachers will continue to use, for example, a history textbook for some of their work in the learning area of Human and Social Sciences.

Some teachers argue that textbooks 'restrict' their freedom. We would argue that they assist teachers and learners in that they provide a useful *framework* for learning. They sketch what needs to be learnt but do not dictate that teachers or learners restrict themselves to this learning. Good teachers and learners will experiment with this framework. (See the example of a contents page on page 192. Notice how it 'frames' what needs to be studied.)


Textbooks organize knowledge in a manner which encourages appropriate learning

Good textbooks organize this information in a manner that encourages learning. They don't simply present bits of fragmented information. Instead, relationships are drawn between different pieces of information so that learners develop an understanding of the bigger concept. This allows them to think better and use information to solve problems. Good text-books have a logical developmental structure appropriate to the grade being taught. Turn again to page 194 and look at the contents page of a new Grade 5 History textbook.

Do you notice how the writers have organized the content logically? What we really liked about this contents page was that it used a series of *questions* to guide learners (and teachers) in a logical way through the history being taught. The logical order encourages good, systematic learning that results in understanding historical concepts rather than memorizing historical facts. The questions create a mentally active approach within learners and teachers: they are being *asked*, not *told*.

But good textbooks do more than this. Have a look at how the same text- book introduces new chapters (see page 183). Do you notice how, through a cartoon, the textbook:

- *summarizes its key points?* This allows readers to begin reading with a focus: they know what is important in the chapter.
- *makes connections between one topic and the next.* It refers back to the previous chapter – which dealt with *hunter-gatherers* – and explains that this chapter will show how hunter-gatherers became *herders* and *farmers*. These connections assist learners in understanding subjects holistically rather than as bits of information.

52 **5 Hunter-gatherers become herders and farmers** 

This is a short chapter. It is also a very important chapter because you will learn about a big change that came into the lives of hunter-gatherers all over the world.

The change was that many hunter-gatherers became herders and farmers.

The way of life for herders and farmers was very different from the way of life for hunter-gatherers.

10 000 years ago, all the people in the world lived by hunting and gathering. The places where they lived are coloured red on this world map.

You will also learn an important new word: **domesticating**.

1. Domesticating plants and animals

10 000 years ago all *plants* were *wild* and all *animals* were *wild*. All the people in the world were *hunter-gatherers* and lived by *hunting wild*



This chapter introduction is taken from Clacherty, G. & Ludlow, H. 1995. *Looking into the Past*, Grade 5. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

Textbooks are used by learners with the conscious aim of/earning

We tend to read textbooks with the conscious aim of study, of learning. We seldom read textbooks to be entertained! Writers also write textbooks with this kind of use in mind. While this has benefits – particularly in the care with which both learners and writers approach the text – it can also pose problems.

Many of us have a narrow view of what learning is. This is also a view that suggests that learning and life (and having fun) are completely different phenomena. People then question the value of learning that is too entertaining. For instance, one of the writers was once told that if he *enjoyed* a novel, the novel wasn't good literature! A consequence of this kind of thinking – and many learners, teachers and textbook writers are guilty of it – is that we may be suspicious of textbooks that are too closely linked with real-life experience, or which teach in a 'playful' way.

So, while we need to write textbooks in educationally sound ways, and use them seriously, this should not stop us from:

- using popular media to draw learners into textbooks, and then to assist them in applying new textbook knowledge to the real world;
- selecting textbooks that are written in a lively manner. Many good new textbooks are written in a conversational tone, include good illustrations, and link learning to the real world.



Quickly, as a form of revision, write down the *different* roles that textbooks and popular media play in teaching. Think of what the implications of these are for your teaching. Discuss this with a fellow teacher if you wish.

Why are textbooks so central to good learning?

One of the most important shifts brought about by Curriculum 2005 is that our learning outcomes must include:

- enabling learners *to do* things. In other words, they need to have the **skills** to *apply* the content knowledge they have learnt to activities in the real world.
- understanding concepts at a *higher level*. We need to develop conceptual **knowledge** rather than more and more low-level facts without any real understanding.



Do you remember the points made about conceptual learning in Section 2.4? You may want to page back and re-read this section now. You may find that it makes a great deal more sense to you since you read it last, now that you have worked through Sections Three and Four.

- developing a *more thoughtful and reflective attitude*. In other words, we need to develop an ability to make and defend value decisions.

We need to spend less time teaching fragmented facts and content knowledge and more time developing sustained abilities to think, reflect, argue and problem-solve. Many people have argued that, in order to achieve this, we have to develop the reading skills of our learners: we need to develop these skills so that our learners are able to read and understand complex arguments and do so critically.

Popular media tend to be short, punchy, and focused on facts and not argument. Although they are useful in developing interest in reading, can develop lower-order reading skills, and can be used to begin developing critical analytical skills, they do not develop these at a level that will enable learners to live and work in the complex information society that South Africa is becoming. Textbooks, because they are designed *educationally*, and because they can be used to encourage sustained reading by learners, enable teachers to develop these essential higher-order skills. Through text-book reading, learners will see how information is linked in order to develop concepts: good textbooks model sound conceptual learning.

Desired learning outcomes

By the end of this section, learners will be able to:

- use textbooks more appropriately. In order to do this, you will learn about some of the advantages and disadvantages of using textbooks in formal teaching.
- select good textbooks. In order to do this, you will learn about some of the generally accepted features of 'good' and 'poor' textbooks.
- teach learners to use all textbooks more interactively and critically. In order to do this, you will learn about ways in which you can improve the reading skills of your learners.



Checking your learning:

How should you use these outcomes? You may find that they don't mean much before you study the section. That's why it is so important to check back regularly. Ask: 'Have I achieved any of these outcomes yet? What do I still need to learn in order to meet these outcomes?' Write down those things you still think you need to learn, and use them to focus your learning.

The strengths and limitations of textbooks

6.2

Two teachers, Thandenani and Mbali, work at a school near Johannesburg. When we visited them we found them in the middle of a debate about the usefulness of textbooks. We recorded their conversation and would like you to read through it. Make notes in the margin where you agree or disagree with a point made by either teacher.

Mbali: *I don't have time to develop my own learning materials! And I can't develop materials as good as textbooks. I like making work-sheets and charts and using newspapers and magazines, but I need my textbook. The headings and sub-headings help me to plan my work. My learners like it because they can use it to work on their own ...*

Thandenani: *Maybe. But you have a **good** textbook. I don't. My learners complain that my textbook is boring and difficult. When I give them homework from it, they do nothing.*

Mbali: *Yes, but is that the textbook's fault ... or because they haven't been taught how to use textbooks?*

Thandenani: *I don't know. But asking my learners to read at home is just a waste of time. I think another problem is that my learners disagree with the apartheid bias in the textbook ... it's very much out of date.*

Mbali: *Yes, but you teach history! Why don't you use this textbook to teach them about bias in history? It's ideal!*

Thandenani: *Hmnn ... that's an idea.*

Mbali: *But you would have to help them read their textbooks critically. Show them how they can use the contents pages to find their way around the book. Or how they can scan a chapter for relevant information ...*

Thandenani: *I thought that was the English teacher's job!*

Mbali: *Partly ... But learners need to practise ... and not just in their English classes. That's why I want textbooks, even if they aren't perfect. I ask learners to do activities from the book, or I can ask them to read ahead in preparation for the next lessons ... text-books give them the opportunity to develop their reading skills.*

Thandenani: *Yes, but what about the bias in my book? You ignore that question. My learners simply refuse to read it. I refuse to read it!*

Mbali: *Well, that's a bad attitude! All textbooks have some bias. In fact, all teaching is biased. Do you mean to tell me that your own learning materials aren't biased? We need to teach our learners how to read critically ...*

Thandenani: *Hmnn! This sounds like even more work!*

Mbali: *I don't think so. Teaching learners to recognize bias, to read critically, is one of the outcomes in Human and Social Studies. I get really worried about learners who think that because something has been written in a textbook it's 'the whole truth' ...*

ACTIVITY 45

- How do Mbali and Thandenani differ in their attitudes to using textbooks as learning resources?
- What is your opinion about textbooks? Can you think of any other strengths or limitations textbooks may have?



Don't spend more than 30 minutes on this activity. When you have completed the activity, turn to your audiotape and listen to Part 5. A number of teachers and researchers discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of textbook use.

The strengths of textbooks as learning resources

First, Mbali says textbooks assist her in planning her work. If she works from a well-written textbook, the work to be learnt will be presented logically and links will be made between one chapter and the next. Obviously, this means that the textbook would also assist learners in planning their work. In other words, it could act as the beginning of a set of transparent 'outcomes' that could guide learning in her class.

Second, textbooks also allow Mbali to set independent work for her learners. This achieves an important learning outcome – developing autonomous and independent learners. It also has a practical benefit – it saves scarce class time for important and difficult parts of the syllabus. Learners use a textbook for homework tasks. This allows Mbali more class time to deal with difficult concepts that require her expertise as mediator.

Third, textbooks provide learners with reading material through which they can develop and practise their reading skills. Good textbooks present reading at a level appropriate for your class. They also provide lengthier pieces of writing that model ways of thinking and reasoning. This develops the more advanced reading skills learners require but would not get from short magazine or newspaper articles.

But, as Mbali suggested earlier, we also need to teach learners how to detect bias in textbooks. Reading is more than being able to recognize the words on a page. Good readers are able to recognize when information is presented from only one angle, and are able to propose another possible view. This is sometimes called critical literacy. *Critical* literacy is another outcome listed in South Africa's OBE cross-field outcomes.

Finally, when all learning area teachers encourage their learners to read textbooks, a much richer reading environment is created in school than that which would exist if reading were only practised in Language lessons.



Many of the points made about media literacy in Section Five can be applied to textbooks too. Think of using some of the analytical activities in Section Five to teach your learners how to analyse their textbooks. Towards the end of this section we provide ideas about how to read textbooks critically.

The limitations of textbooks as learning resources

First, we noticed that Thandenani's learners found textbooks difficult to read and understand. It seemed their difficulty stemmed from the learners' poor command of English. But many textbooks are also poorly written, or written without linking new and abstract knowledge with the life experiences of learners. This makes the text difficult, which often results in learner boredom. These are legitimate criticisms. But what do we do about them?

As Mbali suggested, we can't improve reading skills unless we get our learners to read. And our learners will only read if we teach them how to read, provide books through which they can practise their reading, and develop interesting reading tasks so that they are motivated to read. Mbali, although not a language teacher, taught her learners how to read. She showed them how to use contents pages, and how to scan for key points. She also often gave them questions to guide their reading. You will notice that good textbooks, like good teachers, provide this assistance too.

But Mbali didn't tackle the other problem: some textbooks are simply boring! Can you think of ways of addressing this problem? One reason why they seem boring is that learners cannot relate the new information to their lives. They cannot see why it is relevant. So perhaps one way of reducing boredom is by introducing learners to textbook reading through a class activity which enables them to see how their reading links up with real life. This is where other media, such as newspapers or television, may come in useful.

The second textbook limitation raised by Thandenani was that they become outdated. In some cases, the problem is extreme. In South Africa, for instance, we are moving from an apartheid education system into a non-racial, democratic system. Yet some texts, especially in subjects like History, still present a history biased towards white colonial settlement in South Africa.

Textbooks can be out of date in at least three ways:

- *They may present biased content.* For instance, in many old History textbooks, the history of Indians in South Africa was titled 'The Indian *problem*'. White settlement was never regarded as a problem, although it clearly created many problems! As Mbali notes, even new textbooks that appear to be a neutral source of information, may present some people and some cultural practices in a favourable way and others in an unfavourable way.
- *They teach in a manner that is at odds with the main aims of new education policy.* Old South African textbooks present information in a didactic way that emphasizes the recall of facts. This is at odds with the new emphasis on a teaching style that develops critical thinking skills, a democratic and tolerant attitude, and an ability to use the knowledge learnt.
- *They may not meet all the requirements of a current learning programme.* South Africa's new syllabuses ask that teachers and learners cover content that wasn't covered in the past. This will become an ever-increasing problem in a world where important knowledge changes rapidly. As teachers, we need to be aware of this new information and supplement textbooks with information gathered from newspapers, magazines and other books.

The final problem about textbook use was raised by Mbali. She said that learners may accept a textbook as 'the gospel' on a topic. This leads them to memorize information rather than debate the ideas critically. It might also lead to lazy teachers simply reading from the textbook rather than teaching in an imaginative way. We weren't convinced that this was a serious problem. Thandenani's learners seemed to have no problem recognising the bias in old apartheid textbooks. Yet, in many cases, learners still rote learn this and reproduce it in exams. They do this because their teachers reward them for this kind of learning!

So, we think this problem can be overcome if teachers use textbooks imaginatively:

- Set activities and exams which encourage learning for *understanding* rather than rote learning.
- Supplement your textbook with other textbooks and other popular media in order to present alternative views on a particular subject.
- Teach learners how to read critically and how to analyse texts.



At this point we are simply listing the strengths and limitations of textbooks. Later in this section we provide a number of ideas about how you can use textbooks in learning.

6.3

How do we select textbooks appropriately?

Some features of 'good' textbooks

One of the exciting but challenging features of South Africa's new schooling policy is the power teachers now have over the selection of textbooks. This offers good teachers the freedom to choose textbooks that best meet their teaching needs rather than having to manage with textbooks that aren't particularly appropriate. But it also poses a new problem: what criteria do we use to assess the quality of textbooks? What is a 'good' textbook?



Spend no more than 30 minutes on this activity.

ACTIVITY 46

Think about all the textbooks you have ever used as a learner and as a teacher.

- a Which one have you liked best as a *learner*?
- b Which one have you liked best as a *teacher*?
- c Can you explain why have you chosen these two?
- d Compare your ideas with those of a fellow student or teacher.

What did we find?

You may have noticed that opinion about what constitutes a good textbook varies widely. This is one of the big problems in selecting textbooks. Let's examine four South African attempts to develop a set of good textbook criteria. Read through the checklists on page 187. You will notice that we have started listing common criteria in the centre of the page. Can you identify the rest?



This is an important assignment. Spend at least 90 minutes on it. Once you have completed it, you should listen to Part 5 on your audiotape. Do these researchers add anything new to your ideas?

ACTIVITY 47

We'd like you to develop your own 'Textbook Selection Checklist'. In order to do this, we'd like you to:

- a Complete the '*Good textbooks: Criteria common to most checklists*' list that we started. Check for other criteria that are accepted by at least three of the four checklists. Do this carefully. You may find that writers use different words to describe similar criteria.
- b Then, re-read your answer to Activity 46. Can any of the reasons you mentioned for liking a textbook be added to this 'checklist'?
- c Do you think any of the criteria mentioned by two or less of the checklists are so important they should be included?
- d Describe each criterion in more detail. We found many of these criteria so brief they were difficult to understand and thus to use when selecting textbooks.

Include your checklist in your workbook. You will use it later.

1 Langhan: 1993

- a Is new information always linked to what learners already know?
- b Do titles and headings clearly indicate the topics to be dealt with?
- c Are vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate for the reading competence of my learners?
- d Are the meanings of unknown or difficult words and concepts clearly explained?
- e Is information presented in a logical manner?
- f Does the textbook tell the reader 'everything'?
- g Do passages 'point' clearly to the things they are talking about?

2 Media in Education Trust: 1998

Good educational texts should:

- a build new knowledge on what learners already understand and know;
- b use language that is easy for learners to understand;
- c use examples that make the knowledge relevant to the learners' lives;
- d ask questions which promote critical thinking and problem-solving;
- e encourage a 'hands-on' approach to learning;
- f have activities that incorporate reading, writing, listening and speaking;
- g have activities that go beyond the boundaries of the classroom;
- h encourage learners to think about their own values and attitudes; acknowledge that there are diverse cultures and beliefs in our society;
- j avoid gender and racial stereotypes;
- k present different views on an issue and encourage learners to make an informed choice; present information in interesting ways that will encourage a love for learning;
- m present information in the form of pictures, diagrams and tables, and not only in text form.

Good textbooks: criteria common to most 'checklists'

- 1 Must build on learner experience and knowledge (Langhan (a), Reed (a) and MIET (a))
- 2 Must be written at a level appropriate to the reading competence of my learners (Langhan (c), MIET (c), and maybe *The Teacher*(a))
- 3 Must be structured logically and in a manner that assists learning (Langhan (e), Reed (g), and maybe also Langhan (b)?)
- 4 ...
- 5 ...
- 6 ...

3 Reed: 1997

Good textbooks should:

- a engage learners, tap into their interests and immediate concerns, and extend their understanding in a creative and critical way;
- b engage learners' attention;
- c be lively and appealing to learners;
- d be 'inclusive' rather than 'exclusive'; that is, they should reflect a diverse range of race, culture, gender, class, and geographic contexts;
- e include visual materials;
- f include a range of text types and vary the ways in which information is presented on the page;
- g be pedagogically sound; they should demonstrate an understanding of how learners learn the particular subject, should teach in a logical and clear manner, and should provide educators with suggestions of how to deal with common learning difficulties in that subject area;
- h support learners as they work through sequences of activities (i.e. provide scaffolding for learners); include helpful examples and a range of carefully developed activities.

4 The Teacher: 1996

- a Is the textbook well-written and accessible?
- b Does it cover the required content, concepts and skills in sufficient detail?
- c Does it offer the language support my learners need?
- d Does it include enough activities to build the required skills and assess learners' progress?
- e Is the textbook written in a manner that will interest learners and encourage them to learn?
- f Does it teach skills and understanding that will assist learners in other learning areas and in future studies?
- g If I were a learner again, would I like to learn from this book?



- Langhan's checklist is based on learner difficulties with Grade 5 Geography textbooks. His research report was published in 1993 by the Human Sciences Research Council as 'The textbook as a source of difficulty in teaching and learning'.
- Reed's checklist is based on the opinions of textbook writers. The research was done for a 1997 distance education coursebook titled *Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials*, published by the University of the Witwatersrand.
- The checklist for The Teacher appeared in the June 1996 issue.
- The Media in Education Trust checklist is taken from *Ideas for Resourceful Teaching*, published in 1998.

Our 'good textbook' checklist

We found reading through other people's good textbook criteria interesting. Here is the checklist we came up with. We drew from all four checklists but organized our checklist into a key question and then a set of supporting criteria. In all cases we decided to be selective and to choose what we believed were the three most important criteria in support of each question. So, for instance, you will notice that our question is: 'Is the textbook written in a style and language that is accessible to my learners?' In order to answer this question systematically, we believe you need to explore criteria related to language level, structure, language support, etc. We have left space for you to add criteria that you feel should be included.

Textbook Selection Checklist

	Yes	No
1. Is the textbook written in a style and language that is accessible to my learners?		
• Difficult and new words and concepts are explained when they are first used, and reinforced when used subsequently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The textbook is written in a conversational style and uses short, active sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The textbook provides the language support my learners need. It includes activities that develop reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is the textbook's structure and sequencing clear and logical?	Yes	No
• The textbook includes a clear and descriptive contents page.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Titles and headings clearly indicate what will be covered in different chapters or sections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Paragraphs are well structured, with clear topic sentences that are followed by the logical development of ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is the textbook written in a manner that links with the lives of my learners?	Yes	No
• New information is linked to what learners already know (to the learners' existing background knowledge) or it actively builds up the necessary background information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• While it taps into my learners' interests and immediate concerns, it also extends their understanding of familiar concepts in creative and critical ways.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The textbook demonstrates how knowledge can be used in life: it encourages a 'hands-on' approach to learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4 Is the textbook structured so as to develop higher-level conceptual knowledge in the subject! learning area?	Yes	No
• The textbook covers the required content, concepts and skills of my subject/learning area in sufficient detail.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• It is structured in a way that demonstrates an understanding of how learners learn in particular subjects. It teaches the subject in a logical and clear manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The textbook includes enough activities to build the required skills of learners and not just their content knowledge. It also supports learners as they work through sequences of activities (i.e. it provides scaffolding for learners).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Is the textbook designed in an attractive and user-friendly manner?	Yes	No
• The textbook includes a range of text types and varies the ways in which information is presented on the page.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• It presents information in the form of pictures, diagrams and tables, and not only in text form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• It includes helpful examples and a range of carefully developed activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Is the textbook committed to teaching in a non-discriminatory and critical way?	Yes	No
• The textbook reflects a diverse range of race, culture, gender, class and geographic contexts (and examples), and avoids using stereotypes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The textbook encourages learners to think about and question their own values and attitudes, and acknowledges the diverse beliefs in our society.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• It presents different views on an issue and encourages learners to make informed choices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 If I were a learner again, would I like to learn from this book?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



You may want to evaluate textbooks that you are currently using. Use this checklist to do so. Try to do your evaluation with other teachers. Discuss your findings.

How does our list compare with your own? Did the textbook you liked best (go back to Activity 47) include these characteristics?

Textbooks written for use in countries that take an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning usually state the possible learning outcomes associated with each unit or chapter in the book. This is beginning to happen in South Africa and so teachers and learners may consider clear statements of learning outcomes to be another characteristic of a good textbook. You will notice that we have included this idea using slightly different language under 2: 'Titles and headings clearly indicate what will be covered in different chapters or sections!'

This example is taken from Langhan, 1993. 'The textbook as a source of difficulty in teaching and learning'. Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, Langhan's comments (taken from pages 53 to 57) have been edited and adapted.

Some features of 'poor' textbooks

A quick and easy way of recognising poor textbooks would be the absence of some of the 'good textbook' criteria. In other words, if your evaluation leaves you with a list of 'No's', then you could conclude that you've just looked through a poor textbook! We will demonstrate how you can use the criteria in order to analyse a few pages from a Geography textbook.

Textbook makes no attempt to link with learner background knowledge and skills. The first sentence defines a new concept, 'climate', in terms of another concept that learners probably don't understand, namely 'weather pattern'.

Headings and subheadings don't guide readers through the text. The topic is 'Climate' yet all the sub-headings refer to 'rain'. Rain is only a part of the concept 'Climate'. Sub-headings should develop an understanding of the key concept.

Logic of paragraphs is poor, Poor use of topic sentences. Paragraph 1 begins with a topic sentence but the rest of the paragraph doesn't develop the 'topic'. Paragraph 2 begins talking about 'rain-bearing winds' but carries on this discussion in paragraph 7. The textbook is written in a fragmented way that makes understanding difficult.

The Climate of the RSA

Climate is the weather pattern of a particular area. For instance, in the south-western Cape Province the climate in winter is spells of cool, rainy weather followed by lovely sunny days. In chapter 2 you learned about the weather. You should by now have started making your own weather chart (see p. 10). Study it and say what the weather pattern in your area has been lately.

RAIN-BEARING WINDS

As you probably already know, wind brings moisture to the land. As you remember from standard 2, hot air rises and cold air sinks. In the interior of the RSA the summers are hot, so the air rises. Warm, moist air from over the Indian Ocean flows in to take its place. This causes summer thunderstorms. When the moist air reaches the escarpment it is forced to rise and rain falls. There is also a lot of mist in this area. Thus, the air loses a lot of its moisture before crossing the mountains of the escarpment. This is why less rain falls on the western side of the mountains and the climate gets drier and drier the further west one goes. It gets so dry that there is a desert along the west coast of southern Africa (mainly in Namibia). Find out what this desert is called.

THE RAINFALL ZONES OF THE RSA

The following map (no. 1) indicates the

Map 1: The rainfall zones of the RSA

Rainfall in Cape Town

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall (mm)	25	30	35	45	90	105	95	85	65	45	35	25

Rainfall in Mossel Bay

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall (mm)	25	35	40	35	30	35	40	45	40	35	30	25

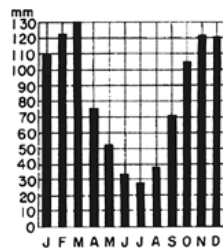
Vocabulary and sentence structure are inappropriate for Grade 5 learners.

Within the first two paragraphs, two difficult words – 'spells' and 'rain-bearing' – are introduced without explanation. A better way of structuring this chapter would be to talk first about daily and seasonal changes in the weather, something most learners would be familiar with and be able to relate to. The chapter could then conclude by drawing on this familiar knowledge to explain the concepts 'climate' and 'weather patterns'. The final sentences could be something far easier to understand, such as: 'Remember: the weather is changing all the time. The climate of a place is the story of the weather in winter or summer or for the whole year.'

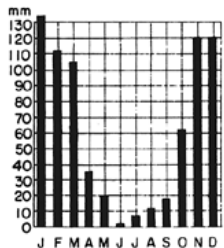
Information is presented in a confusing way. This is caused mainly by poor links between words and diagrams used,

Paragraph 2 explains the way in which rain is caused. This would have been far more easily understood if sketches had been used to illustrate the process.

References to Map 1 are also confusing. For instance, the map has three references to rain-bearing winds. The explanation refers to only one set of rain-bearing winds. The map makes no reference to an 'escarpment' while the paragraph does. In addition, the graphs and maps used are not particularly attractive and are sometimes confusing.



DURBAN
Rainfall in Durban



PRETORIA
Rainfall in Pretoria

rain-bearing winds, the season when they blow and the rainfall zones of the RSA. Study it carefully and then answer these questions:

- In which rainfall zone is your town or city situated?
- When does Cape Town get most of its rain?
- Does Cape Town or Port Nolloth get more rain?
- When does Mossel Bay get its rain?
- When do Durban and Bloemfontein get their rain?
- Does Durban or Bloemfontein get more rain?

The diagrams above show how much rain usually falls each year in Cape Town, Mossel Bay, Pretoria and Durban. Each black line stands for a month. The longer the black line, the more rain usually falls in that month. The numbers up the side show how many mm rain usually falls. So, 130 mm rain usually falls in Pretoria during the month of January and 30 mm rain usually falls in Mossel Bay during the month of June.

Study the diagrams and decide in which rainfall zone each town or city falls. Now find the places on the map and see whether you were right.

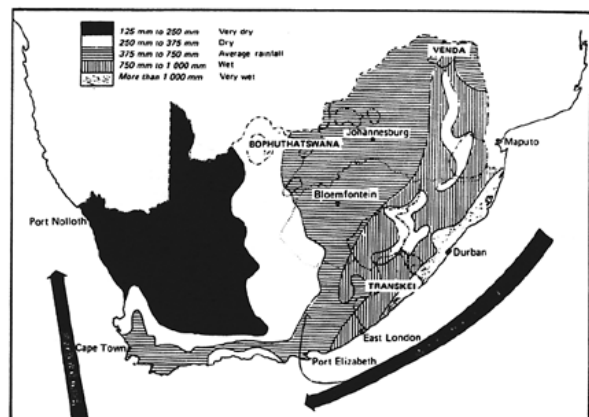
HOW MUCH RAIN FALLS IN THE RSA

Map no. 2 shows how much rain usually falls in the RSA every year. Study it carefully and then answer the following questions:

- Name three regions which have more than 1 000 mm rain per year.
 - Think about what you learned about rain-bearing winds. Now try to explain why these areas have so much rain.
- Which area of the RSA has the lowest rainfall per year? Why?
- Does East London or Cape Town usually have more rain each year? How much rain usually falls in Johannesburg each year?
- Work out where your home town or city is on the map. Now say how much rain usually falls each year where you live.

RELIABILITY OF THE RAINFALL

When we learnt about rain-bearing winds (p. 28) we saw that when the moist air from the Indian Ocean is forced to rise against the slopes of the escarpment, it loses most of its moisture, so the areas west of the



Map 2: Average annual rainfall

escarpment are dry. Look at a map and you will see that this means that most of the RSA is dry. In other words, it has a low rainfall which mostly falls in the form of scattered thunderstorms. These areas often suffer from drought. A drought is when far less rain than normal falls in an area. Often in these areas the rain falls in strips. This means that while one farm gets a good fall of rain during a thunderstorm, its neighbour gets none.

Logic of paragraphs is poor.

Poor use of topic sentences. The 'rain-bearing winds' mentioned in paragraph 2 on page 28 are only discussed in paragraph 7. The textbook is written in a fragmented way that makes understanding difficult.

Headings and subheadings don't guide readers through the text.

The topic is 'Climate' yet all the sub-headings refer to 'rain'. Rain is only a part of the concept 'Climate'. Sub-headings should develop an understanding of the key concept.

We have only focused on some weaknesses in this textbook. You may want to focus on a few more. It is important to evaluate textbooks in relation to your learners' interests and background knowledge and the textbook's ability to develop new understandings of the subject (learning area). Next we will evaluate what we regard as a 'good' textbook. You might want to compare the way it is written with this example.

Evaluating the quality of textbooks

There will probably never be a 'perfect' textbook. For one thing, writers have to try to write for teachers and learners who work in a wide range of contexts, and it is very difficult to meet the interests and needs of everyone. For another, publishing textbooks is expensive and sometimes publishing companies put limits on the number of photographs or illustrations or the amount of colour that writers can include because these add to the cost of producing the books. However, some textbooks are definitely much better than others. Let's have a look at the contents page from a Grade 5 History textbook and see to what extent this demonstrates some of the characteristics of a 'good' textbook.



These sample texts are taken from Hattingh et al. 1981. *Our New World 3*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.



You should now begin Week 17. You have completed 96 hours of work on the module.

It begins with information for teachers about how they might use the book.

Chapter 1 'sets the scene' by explaining what the book is about and how the information is organized.

The book asks the kinds of questions that might arouse learners' interest.

Contents	
To the teacher	1
1 How to find your way around this book	2
What is history?	2
What people are we going to learn about this year?	2
When did these people live?	3
Where did these people live?	4
How do we know how the people lived?	4
2 Time-lines, maps and evidence	6
1. What time of day is it?	8
Other ways of telling the time	9
2. What time of year is it?	10
Another kind of calendar	11
3. Counting time in years	12
4. Counting years in B.C. and A.D.	14
5. What is a map?	16
6. Reading a map	18
7. What is evidence?	20
3 Very early humans	22
1. Animals or early humans?	24
Humans and animals	24
2. Evidence of early humans in southern Africa	26
3. Skulls and teeth	27
Skulls	27
Teeth	27
4. What did early humans look like?	28
More about bones	28
5. How did early humans live?	30
What have you learned in this chapter?	33
4 Hunter-gatherers	35
1. How do we know about hunter-gatherers?	36

Several of the chapters end with a summary (What have you learned in this chapter?), and there is a summary of the whole book at the end of the final chapter.

What have you learned in this chapter?	04
9 Egypt: an ancient farming kingdom	107
1. The Nile River	108
Farmers in Egypt	109
2. Farming life in Egypt	110
3. Farmers get organised	112
Irrigation in Egypt	113
4. Kings and pharaohs	114
5. Burial and life after death	116
6. Taxes	118
7. Writing	120
Scribes	121
8. Egyptian crafts	122
9. Priests and temples	124
What have you learned in this chapter?	125
Questions, quizzes and crosswords	126
Glossary of difficult words and terms	132

There is a glossary (a word list with explanations) of difficult words at the end of the book. These are explained in English, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, isiXhosa and isiZulu.



These contents pages as well as the pages that follow are taken from Clacherty, G. & Ludlow, H. 1995. *Looking into the Past, Grade 5*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

We believe that's a pretty good start for this textbook. But obviously we can't end our evaluation at the contents pages! So we pulled out two other pages from Chapter 5 of this textbook. Let's have a look at them.

52 **5 Hunter-gatherers become herders and farmers**

This is a short chapter. It is also a very important chapter because you will learn about a big change that came into the lives of hunter-gatherers all over the world.

The change was that many hunter-gatherers became herders and farmers.

The way of life for herders and farmers was very different from the way of life for hunter-gatherers.

You will also learn an important new word: **domesticating**.

10 000 years ago, all the people in the world lived by hunting and gathering. The places where they lived are coloured red on this world map.

1. Domesticating plants and animals

10 000 years ago all *plants* were *wild* and all *animals* were *wild*. All the people in the world were hunter-gatherers and lived by hunting wild animals and gathering wild plants.

Then life changed for some hunter-gatherers. They began to *keep* animals and to grow plants for themselves. They no longer lived by hunting and gathering.

When an animal is *kept* and *looked after* by people, or when a plant is *grown* by them, we say the animals and plants are **domesticated**.

Some people kept *only animals*. We call these people *herders*. Herders move from place to place to find food and water for their animals.

Some people *kept animals and also planted crops*. We call these people *farmers*. Farmers stayed in one place to wait for their plants to grow.

Now look at the drawings on page 53. They show hunter-gatherers becoming herders and farmers.

The speech bubbles at the beginning of the chapter summarize what the chapter will be about.

Learners see drawings of other learners like themselves who 'speak' to them. This may encourage them to read the text.

The most important new concept (domesticated) is printed in bold type and is carefully explained. The process of domestication is explained in both words and pictures.

Key words that contribute to the explanation are printed in italic script.

The two maps help learners to compare where hunter-gatherers lived 10 000 years ago with where they live today.

The writers do not claim to know 'everything'. Notice that the boy says: 'We are not sure how or why people began to domesticate plants and animals. It could have happened like this.'

Hunter-gatherers become herders and farmers 53

1 Instead of going out to hunt animals, people began to catch animals and keep them.

2 Sometimes people also kept animals to help them.

3 In some places less rain fell and it got hotter. Wild plants and animals died. The people had to have food. Otherwise they would have starved.

4 And, as time passed, look what happened ...

Today most people get their food from farmers. There are very few hunter-gatherers left in the world. Look at the map. The red shows where they still live today.

did you know?
There are only a few people living as hunter-gatherers today. They are the *!Kung* in northern Namibia, the *Amazon Indians* in South America and the *Aborigines* in Australia.

When you thought about any features that you might wish to change, you may have noticed that it is not clear in which order learners should read the speech bubbles in the introduction. You may also have noticed that the 'Did you know?' block mentions hunter-gatherers in only three places in the world, but the map shows many others. None of the places are named on the map and so the teacher would need to guide learners here.

Now we'd like you to do your own evaluation of excerpts from another textbook. We will not tell you whether we believe this to be a good textbook or not: you make your decision before we tell you what we think.



This is an important activity. Spend about an hour carefully evaluating these excerpts. You may want to re-read this unit to guide your evaluation. You might also want to use the checklist you developed earlier to evaluate this textbook.

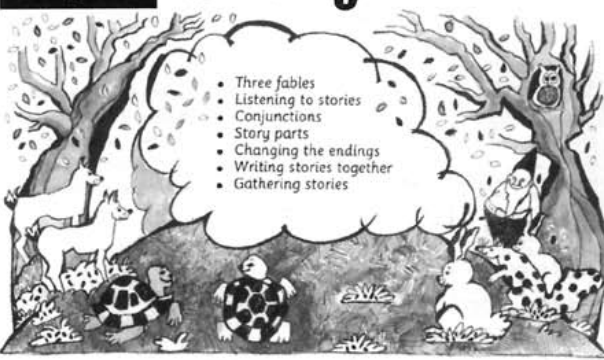
These pages are taken from Wenman, J. & Viljoen, S. 1998. *On Track with English, Grade 7*. Cape Town: Phumelela Books.

ACTIVITY 48

Read the extracts from a unit from *On Track with English*, a Grade 7 textbook.

- a Decide which of the features of a good textbook are demonstrated in these pages.
- b Suggest any changes that you think would improve these pages.

7 Storytime



- Three fables
- Listening to stories
- Conjunctions
- Story parts
- Changing the endings
- Writing stories together
- Gathering stories

LOOKING AT TEXTS LLC S03 AC1,2; HSS S01 AC1; HSS S06 AC1; A+C S01 AC1,2,3

Do you enjoy reading or listening to stories?
 People all over the world tell stories to remember the past, to teach about life and to entertain others.
 Many stories have animals as the main characters. Often the animals talk, feel, think and behave like humans. Sometimes animal stories teach us lessons about life. We call such stories **fables**. The three stories in this unit are fables.

The story circle

1. Get into a group of three and sit in a circle. This is your story circle.
2. Each person in the story circle chooses a different number – either 1, 2 or 3.
3. On the next few pages are three fables. Read the fable that matches your number. You will need to read it quietly to yourself at least twice so that you know the story well enough to tell it to the others in your own words. Do not read the other two stories.
4. Take turns to tell the others in your story circle the story you have read. When your turn comes to listen, you will need to listen carefully to the other stories because there are questions later.

56

Table 1:
How the Tortoise Got Cracks in its Shell

A long time ago, all the birds were invited to a feast up in the sky, being given by their King.

When the greedy tortoise heard that all the birds were going to a feast he wished that he was a bird too, so that he could attend the feast. He sat down in his house and thought about what to do.


At last, he knew what to do. He told all the birds that he wanted to go with them to the great feast, and asked them to help him. The kind birds agreed to the tortoise's request, and each contributed a feather to the tortoise, until he had two full wings like the birds.

The feast day came, and all the birds and the tortoise flew to the King's palace in the sky. When they reached half-way the tortoise told all the birds that it was not good to be called by their usual names when attending a big feast. He said, 'Everyone should choose a new name.' They all agreed, and the tortoise chose the name 'All of You'.

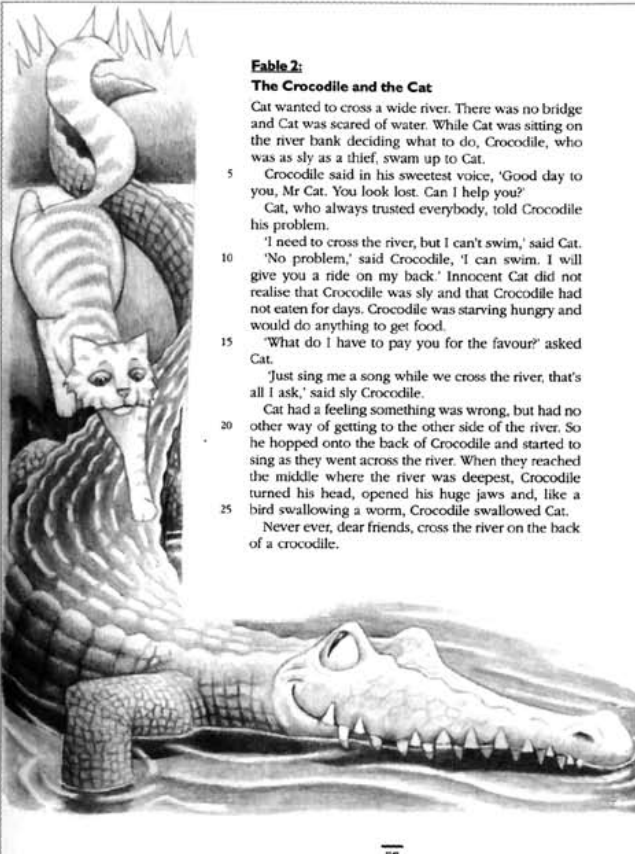
After the King's speech, the meal was served. The servant said to them, 'This meal is for all of you,' and went away. Then the tortoise said, 'You remember that we chose new names on the way. And all of you know that my new name is "All of You", and the servant said the food is for "All of You", which means that it's mine. So I am going to eat it all.'

He was left alone, and ate up all the food. The angry birds took their feathers away from him. So he sent a message to his wife that he was going to jump down from the sky and she should put soft things out in front of the house for him to land on. But the bird who took the message told the tortoise's wife to put all the hardest things on the ground.

So when the tortoise reached the ground, he fell badly and his shell was severely broken. That is why the tortoise has its shell cracked in many places up to this day.



57



Fable 2:
The Crocodile and the Cat

Cat wanted to cross a wide river. There was no bridge and Cat was scared of water. While Cat was sitting on the river bank deciding what to do, Crocodile, who was as sly as a thief, swam up to Cat.

5 Crocodile said in his sweetest voice, 'Good day to you, Mr Cat. You look lost. Can I help you?'

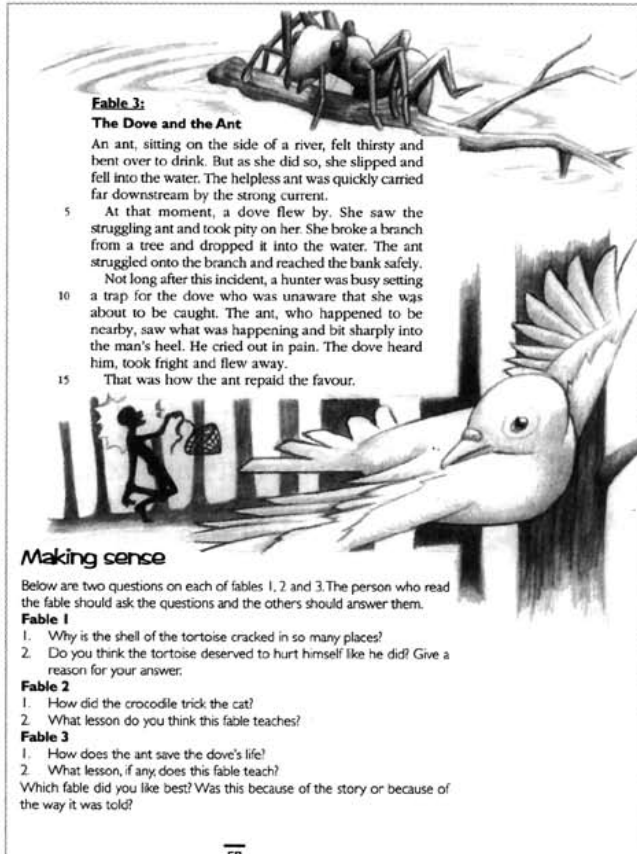
Cat, who always trusted everybody, told Crocodile his problem.

10 'I need to cross the river, but I can't swim,' said Cat. 'No problem,' said Crocodile, 'I can swim. I will give you a ride on my back.' Innocent Cat did not realise that Crocodile was sly and that Crocodile had not eaten for days. Crocodile was starving hungry and would do anything to get food.

15 'What do I have to pay you for the favour?' asked Cat. 'Just sing me a song while we cross the river, that's all I ask,' said sly Crocodile.

20 Cat had a feeling something was wrong, but had no other way of getting to the other side of the river. So he hopped onto the back of Crocodile and started to sing as they went across the river. When they reached the middle where the river was deepest, Crocodile turned his head, opened his huge jaws and, like a bird swallowing a worm, Crocodile swallowed Cat.

25 'Never ever, dear friends, cross the river on the back of a crocodile.'



Fable 3:
The Dove and the Ant

An ant, sitting on the side of a river, felt thirsty and bent over to drink. But as she did so, she slipped and fell into the water. The helpless ant was quickly carried far downstream by the strong current.

5 At that moment, a dove flew by. She saw the struggling ant and took pity on her. She broke a branch from a tree and dropped it into the water. The ant struggled onto the branch and reached the bank safely.

10 Not long after this incident, a hunter was busy setting a trap for the dove who was unaware that she was about to be caught. The ant, who happened to be nearby, saw what was happening and bit sharply into the man's heel. He cried out in pain. The dove heard him, took fright and flew away.

15 That was how the ant repaid the favour.

Making sense

Below are two questions on each of fables 1, 2 and 3. The person who read the fable should ask the questions and the others should answer them.

Fable 1

1. Why is the shell of the tortoise cracked in so many places?
2. Do you think the tortoise deserved to hurt himself like he did? Give a reason for your answer.

Fable 2

1. How did the crocodile trick the cat?
2. What lesson do you think this fable teaches?

Fable 3

1. How does the ant save the dove's life?
2. What lesson, if any, does this fable teach?

Which fable did you like best? Was this because of the story or because of the way it was told?

What did we think of On Track with English?

We think the excerpts included a number of features of a good textbook. For instance:

- The chapter begins with a list of the main topics and learning activities to be addressed in the chapter. They appear in a bubble in the cartoon below the title 'Story time'.
- The introduction – 'Looking at Texts' – 'sets the scene' for the learning and explains the meaning of the key word 'fable' (which is in bold).
- Clear instructions about how to use individual and group work are provided before the fables begin (The Story Circle').
- Illustrations that support each of the fables and that are likely to add to learners' enjoyment of the reading are included.
- Stimulating and challenging learning activities and questions are provided both at the beginning and end of the chapter.

Did you have any other ideas? Would you use this textbook in your teaching? Remember, it isn't necessary that your checklist be filled with 'Yes's' in order to select a textbook for use. If you wait for this, you may never select a textbook! Rather use your checklist to assess where a textbook is strong and where its limitations are. Then decide:

- whether the textbook is strong in the areas that you regard as important if you are to achieve the learning you desire;
- whether you have the means – access to other materials, for instance – to minimize the textbook's weaknesses.

If you say 'Yes' to both, then you should probably use this textbook in teaching.

6.4 Using textbooks effectively

How do South African teachers (ab) use textbooks?

Having a good textbook doesn't guarantee good teaching or learning. In fact, recent South African research has shown that poor teaching often destroys the educational potential of good textbooks!

How do South African educators use textbooks? Obviously the answer to this question varies. But we all have our stories about teachers who wander into a class, pick up a battered book, scrabble around till they find the correct page, and then read slowly and boringly from the textbook until the bell rings! Many of us have done exactly that ourselves! Recent research provides some other interesting insights into educator use of textbooks and other learning materials. Before we get you to read from the research report, we'd like you to turn to your audiotape and listen to a couple of researchers and teachers talk about good and bad use of textbooks.



Spend about 20 minutes on this activity.

ACTIVITY 49

Turn to Part 5 on your audiotape. Listen again to Sharman Wickham and Ruth Versfeld. Make notes of their key points before you read the classroom example of textbook use that we describe later.

An example of textbook use in a Cape Town classroom

The teacher is a secondary school English and Biology teacher. Her lesson is based on a comprehension passage in a textbook used in the English class. This is the researcher's description of the lesson:

Teacher 3 wrote the objectives for her lesson as being:

- Sentence construction
- Reading with understanding
- Quick thinking
- Ability to select facts from a long speech
- Reporting in the same tense

The teacher began the lesson by reading the comprehension passage aloud and then asked the question: 'vwhat is a life cycle?' There was no discussion whatsoever about frogs and what learners knew about them, or whether they had learnt about frogs at school before. The abstract nature of the question (What is a life cycle?) and the lack of contextualization seems strange, given that this teacher is also a Biology teacher (and thus does have an understanding of this content).

The teacher worked laboriously through the text (the comprehension passage), stopping to explain words - both those high-lighted in the text and others. The teacher asked learners questions that they found difficult to answer. So she provided the answers herself Some examples of these questions include the following: 'What is hibernate?', 'What is fertilization?', 'vwhat. is fertilize the eggs?' Only one question did not relate directly to the meaning of the text; instead it dealt with punctuation conventions: 'What is the use of the apostrophe?'

Learners were then asked to summarize the passage in ten points and in not more than 45 words. Other instructions given at this point included instructions not to be vague, to use full sentences and to use



This extract (and the ideas that follow) are taken from research done in 1998 by Sharman Wickham and Ruth Versfeld in four under-resourced schools in the greater Cape Town area. They presented their research in a paper titled 'What is the relationship between classroom materials and good teaching practices?' to the Tenth World Congress of Comparative Education in 1998.

the same tense. Learners did this task individually and in silence.

Although the learners were seated in groups, no group work was done in this lesson. The picture of the tadpole and the frog next to the comprehension passage were not referred to in explanations of terms such as {external gills'. One of the exercises below the text was a guided summary of the passage, but that was also ignored by the teacher.

What do you think of this lesson? The researcher does not provide information about whether the textbook used was 'good' or 'bad'. But that is not the point. We want to evaluate how well the teacher used the textbook.

ACTIVITY 50

Re-read the researcher's description of the lesson carefully. Then suggest how this teacher could have used the textbook more effectively. Think about:

- a** *The stated purpose of her lesson (the objectives that she listed). Was it clear? Was it appropriate? (Note: This was an English lesson.)*
- b** *Her introduction. Did she draw on learners' background knowledge? Did she develop this knowledge?*
- c** *The activities used during the lesson. Were they likely to assist the teacher in achieving her purpose? Did they encourage independent and critical thinking? Did they assist learners to read better?*
- d** *The way in which the teacher concluded the lesson. Did learners leave with a clear sense of what they had learnt and why it was useful?*

In particular, examine the way the teacher *used* the textbook to develop all of the phases of her lesson listed above.



Spend about 40 minutes on this activity. You may want to discuss your impressions with a fellow student or teacher.

Using a textbook to achieve a clear educational purpose

The teacher wrote down five 'objectives' for her lesson, but none of these is specific enough to provide a clear focus for her teaching. She needs to be more specific. Her purpose should be more clearly stated. You may have asked questions such as:

- What aspect of sentence construction does she intend to focus on?
- What does it mean 'to read with understanding' and what skills, knowledge and attitudes will learners need in order to achieve such 'understanding'?
- What does the teacher mean by 'quick thinking' and how does she expect learners to develop this ability?
- Is the passage that learners will read actually a speech? Does the teacher intend to make a distinction between 'facts' and 'opinions'?
- What does she mean by 'reporting in the same tense'? Perhaps learners can choose any verb tense and then use it consistently in their writing, but this is not clear.
- Are there connections between one 'objective' and another and, if so, what are these connections?

The list of the teacher's objectives and the description of what happened during her lesson suggest that she did not have a clear purpose in mind. To use the language of outcomes-based education, she seems to have been unclear about the intended learning outcomes and about what learners should do in order to demonstrate their achievement of these outcomes.

A 'good' textbook can assist a teacher to decide on the purpose or purposes of a lesson. For example, the instructions for 'The Story Circle' in the extract from *On Track with English, Grade 7* (see page 194) indicate the purpose far more precisely. They suggest that the purposes of the reading passages and the activities are to give

learners opportunities to develop their skills in the following:

- silent reading (with understanding);
- summarizing in order to re-tell the story;
- telling the story to classmates;
- listening (with understanding) to classmates' stories;
- answering questions based on the stories.

Furthermore, in a 'good' textbook the information and the learning activities are presented in a coherent sequence: teachers and learners can see how one piece of the text and one activity link to the next. This is what happens in *Story time* (page 194). After reading and discussing examples of animal fables, the next section of the textbook introduces information and activities about how to work in groups to write a story about animals. Teacher 3's lesson seemed to wander aimlessly and was largely driven by the teacher's explanation of words in the text. There was little logical development.

If teachers are going to use a textbook in a lesson, it is important to think about how to use it when planning the lesson. 'Teacher 3' did not do this. For instance, she asked learners to write a summary of the passage on the life cycle of the frog without referring them to the guided summary printed in the textbook. The textbook summary could have been used to 'teach' learners about how to summarize: they could have assessed their summaries against the summary in the textbook. She also explained difficult abstract concepts related to frogs without using the textbook pictures to make these concepts more concrete.

'Poor' textbooks do not always give a clear indication of the purpose of the information and of the activities that have been included in the book. This makes teachers' work more challenging as we have to decide why we are going to use a particular section of a book and how we are going to use it. For example, we may choose to use a textbook because it provides learners with some useful information. But we may also recognize that the questions asked in the book are very limited because they do not give learners any opportunities to express their own points of view, or to critically evaluate the information. If our purpose is to assist learners to do one or both of these, then we need to construct our own questions for learners to use while reading the passage in the textbook.

Using learners' existing knowledge to understand textbooks

The extract from the researcher's notes begins with these observations:

The teacher began the lesson by reading the comprehension passage aloud and then asked the question: 'What is a life cycle?' There was no discussion whatsoever about frogs and what learners knew about them or whether they had learnt about frogs at school before.

In other words, the teacher did not introduce the topic or theme of the comprehension passage from an English textbook. She also did not attempt to find out what learners already knew about frogs. If she had done this she could have:

- worked from their knowledge of frogs towards the more abstract knowledge in the textbook;
- used learners who had a good knowledge of frogs as a learning resource for other learners.

If you are able to read this module, you already have many reading skills. But it is likely that there are some kinds of texts that you still find difficult to read. What makes it easy or difficult for you to read particular kinds of texts, but not others?

If a text deals with a subject with which you are unfamiliar and that has its own

specialist vocabulary, then you may struggle to read and understand this text. However, texts written on a subject that you know well will be much easier to read. For example, I find I am unable to read a university newsletter with information about how to use my computer more effectively because I don't understand how computers 'work', and I also get confused by all the specialist 'computer' vocabulary in the newsletter!

Background knowledge (or, as some call it, a *mental schema*) assists us to understand what we read. One of a teacher's most important tasks is to *activate* or 'bring alive' this background knowledge so that learners can use it as the starting point for reading a new text. For example, the teacher described in the extract could have begun the lesson by asking the learners in each group to tell each other what they already know about frogs: what they look like, where they have seen frogs, and so on. She could have used colourful pictures from a magazine, or video clips she'd recorded from television, to introduce the topic. Then she could have asked for a report from two or three of the groups and used the learners' responses to prepare the whole class for what they were about to read.

It is very likely that the learners did know something about frogs. However, one of our challenges as teachers is to introduce learners to *unfamiliar subject matter*. This requires us to think carefully about how to do this. Sometimes we can use photographs or drawings from newspapers and magazines as well as from textbooks, or we can make our own drawings on the chalkboard. You will have noticed that the researcher commented that the teacher she observed did not even use the illustrations of the tadpole and the frog that were in the textbook!

Sometimes we can introduce the unknown by making comparisons with the known. Here is my favourite example of how a creative teacher did this in a poorly resourced school in a rural area in the Northern Province. The teacher, working with Grade 9 learners in a rural school, faced the challenge of providing the class with the background knowledge they would need to read a play that was set in a castle in Europe, hundreds of years ago, and in which the characters included a king, a queen, a chancellor and a jester. How did he do this?

First, he drew a castle on the chalkboard and included details from the text of the play (such as the moat that surrounded the castle). He then asked the class questions to find out what they knew about the structure of the kraal of the local chief. Some learners were able to tell the class that around the chief's home there was a thick, thorn-bush fence. He asked them why they thought this fence had been built and they suggested that it was to protect the chief by making it difficult for either people or animals to reach his home without being noticed.

The teacher then explained that the water-filled channel around the castle (i.e. the moat) fulfilled the same function for the king and his family: it protected them. To introduce the new vocabulary item, 'jester', he asked learners to talk about which of their classmates make them laugh and what it is these classmates do that is amusing. He explained that this person could be called the 'class jester' ...

ACTIVITY 51

Think about your experiences as a student reading textbooks.

- If any of your teachers or lecturers activated your existing background knowledge or provided you with background knowledge on an unfamiliar topic, how did they do this?
- If they did not, what do you think they could have done to help you when you found a particular textbook difficult to read?
- On the basis of your answers, what strategies do you think you would like to try out when you are using a textbook in your own teaching?



As we suggested in Sections Three and Four, popular media are particularly good at activating learner interest. The trick is to know how to move learners from popular media into a more meaningful reading of their textbooks.

Spend about 30 minutes on this activity.



These ideas and the quoted passages are taken from Carol McDonald and Elizabeth Burrough's 1991 book, *Eager to Talk and Learn and Think*, published by Maskew Miller Longman.

Using activities to improve textbook reading skills

The two strategies mentioned above – making the purpose of your lesson clear to learners, and building your lesson by activating learners' background knowledge – will both assist learners in reading their textbooks more effectively. Reading is the foundation of all learning and is necessary in order that learners are able to read textbooks. But how can we integrate reading as an activity in all learning areas?

Learning to read textbooks involves learning how to 'make meaning' from printed symbols – at the most basic level, being able to interpret a+n+d as the word 'and' – as well as from illustrations. We could divide the process of learning to read into three stages:

- *Thinking about reading as a 'whole system of communicating'*. This involves recognising shapes (letters like 'a'), and then associating these shapes with sounds ('a' sounds like ay), etc.
- *Reading to confirm what one already knows*. In other words, practising our new reading skills. This is achieved by reading familiar stories and other texts in which commonly used words appear.
- *Reading to gain new information*. This reading moves away from familiar stories and begins opening up new ideas, new stories and whole new worlds to the reader. It allows us to learn about what is beyond our own experience.

There is a lot of debate about how people learn to read. We won't go into that debate here. Our interest is in *improving* the reading skills of our learners (not teaching them the basics of reading). How do we do this?

Teachers can assist them to make meaning from texts by developing:

- 'pre-reading' activities;
- 'while-reading' activities; and
- 'post-reading' activities.

The following example of such activities is based on this passage from a Grade 5 Geography textbook:

Pollution is caused mainly by big factories, industries and the mines which use water. This water passes through various machines and becomes poisoned and dirty. Many of the chemicals used by farmers are washed by rain into the rivers, making them impure. Even mud from our lands makes our rivers brown, spoils the water for our use and, in time, fills up our dams.

This may seem a simple passage. But imagine yourself as a Grade 5 learner who has English as an additional language rather than as a mother tongue language. What difficulties do you think these learners would have with this text? And what could we, as teachers, do to assist learners in their reading?

There are several possible sources of difficulty for learners attempting to read this text. Did you notice that the word 'pollution' is not explained? The reader has to work out its meaning from the examples which the writer gives. This will be difficult for a Grade 5 learner to do if he or she does not know the meaning of words such as 'chemicals' and 'impure'. It may not be clear to learners that the whole text is about one kind of pollution, namely *water* pollution. There are at least two kinds of difficulties:

- words that learners may not know (vocabulary difficulties); and
- insufficient or unclear links between one point and another in the text.

So, what could be done?

Developing 'pre-reading' activities

Several *pre-reading activities* could be used. These might focus on pollution in general or be directed to the topic of 'clean and dirty water'. Most importantly, these activities would draw on the likely background knowledge learners bring to the class. Here is an example:

POLLUTION: POSSIBLE PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- 1 *Ask learner to work in groups to make a list of all the dirty and untidy areas in the local community. Depending on where the school is situated, these could include streets and roadsides where rubbish has been dumped, rivers or dams into which factory or mine waste has been pumped, or areas which are grimy and smoke-filled because of smoke from factory chimneys. Ask a spokesperson from each group to report to the class.*
- 2 *Bring some photographs from newspapers and magazines to class that illustrate various kinds of pollution. Ask learners to work in groups to discuss what they see in the photographs. Some questions to guide their discussion might be helpful.*
- 3 *Ask learners to explain the meaning of words such as 'chemicals', 'poisoned', 'impure' in English or any language that they know. If no-one is able to explain fully, offer explanations using as many as possible of the learners' ideas, and use photographs to illustrate the concept.*

The teacher could then use the examples given by the learners to build up the idea of pollution as a term to describe damage to the environment. Otherwise, you could use learners' responses to the photographs to build an understanding of pollution.

We could also begin by drawing on learners' understandings of a related concept, 'clean and dirty water', and then build from this to an understanding of 'pollution'. For instance:

Ask a learner to work in small groups to make a list of all the 'things' they can think of which change water from being clean and pure and safe to drink to being dirty and impure and unsafe to drink. Ask a spokesperson from each group to report to the class.

You could then use the learners' ideas to introduce the reading text. Tell them that when they read it, they should notice how many of their ideas are in the text. Ask them to write down any extra information they have thought of, and to note what information in the text they had not thought of. Photographs and discussion of particular words as in 1 and 2 above could be introduced before learners read the pollution text.

Building in 'while-reading' activities

While-reading activities motivate learners to continue reading. This is achieved most easily by ensuring that your learners understand why they are reading. What will they get from the textbook that is useful to them?

We have already mentioned one technique for achieving this, namely the 'matching' of learners' ideas on a topic with those found in the printed text (see the last paragraph under 'pre-reading'). Learners feel encouraged when they find that they actually know more than they thought they did.

Another technique is to ask learners to 'play detective'. Ask them to write down questions they would like to ask about the topic under discussion, such as pollution. Then ask them to read to find answers to these questions.

Here is another idea. As a teacher you could create an interesting 'real-life' problem linked to the topic under discussion. For instance, you could set the following problem for the pollution text:

You are a local councillor. A large new fertilizer company asks the local council for permission to open up a factory in your region. They say



The ideas about the use of 'activities' to assist learners in reading the 'pollution' passage originally appeared in Reed, Y. 1996. *Theory and Practice of English Language Teaching*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

that this will bring many jobs to your town and that they would also offer local farmers a special deal on fertilizer. What would be your response? In order to make an informed decision:

Read pages 35 to 42 of your textbook. As you read:

- 1 Work out how a fertilizer factory might impact on pollution in your area.
- 2 Suggest precautions that you might ask the factory to take if you were to allow them in.
- 3 Provide evidence for whatever decision you take.



You will notice that the ideas here are similar to those first mentioned in Section Three. As you read through this, think of ways in which you could integrate popular media in order to assist textbook reading and make learning more relevant to everyday events.

A 'post-reading' activity

If learners seem particularly interested in a local pollution issue, a *post-reading activity* could involve writing to a relevant authority such as the local council (e.g. if rubbish is not being collected), or a factory or a mine manager to express their views and ask that action be taken. If there is rubbish in or near the school grounds, a class could collect all of it and sort it into categories (e.g. bottles, cans, paper, plastic bags). In some parts of the country, glass, cans and paper can be sold to recycling companies as a way of tidying up the environment and of raising money for the school at the same time.

Some textbooks, particularly the more recently published ones, include pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities, but if you are using books that do not have these, then you need to think about what will help learners to understand and respond to the information in the book and to prepare one or more activities for them. Even if a textbook does include activities that are designed to help learners to make meaning from a passage, these may not always be suitable for all learners, so teachers may need to adapt activities to suit their classroom context. Magazines, newspapers, advertising leaflets or radio programmes on tape could provide useful materials for these activities.

Using questions to improve reading and learning

Questions are a powerful means of improving learners' reading skills and their learning. But teachers need to think carefully about the purposes of the questions we ask. The following are just a few examples of questions we could ask ourselves about the purpose of the questions we ask learners:

- Do we want to provide a starting point for new learning by activating learners' background knowledge?
- Do we want learners to find a particular piece of information in a passage?
- Do we want learners to give their own response to something they have read?
- Do we want learners to read a text critically and ask their own questions?

The researcher who described the reading comprehension lesson on the life cycle of the frog commented that learners found the teacher's questions difficult to answer, so she answered most of them herself.

Imagine being a learner in this teacher's class. The lesson began with the teacher reading the comprehension passage. When she had finished, she asked 'What is a life cycle?' At this point in the lesson, all you have done as a learner is to follow the words in the textbook while listening to the teacher. You have not had any opportunity to interact with the text and to make your own meaning from it, so this is a very difficult question and not appropriate for this stage of the lesson. As mentioned earlier, introductory questions should help learners to 'tune in' to the text, remind them of what they already know about a topic and provide a starting point for new learning.

If we want to find out whether learners can locate a particular piece of information in a text, our questions should make this clear. For example, we might ask: 'According to the passage, how many days does it take for frogs' eggs to hatch into tadpoles?' One of the reasons why learners sometimes do not respond to teachers' questions is that the questions are unclear and learners do not know what answer the teacher expects. In the lesson about the life cycle of the frog, the question '*What is fertilize the eggs?*' is an example of an unclear question. What kind of answer do you think the teacher expects? It could be either:

- to find out if learners *understand the meaning of the term 'fertilize';* or
- to find out if *learners understand how the eggs are fertilized.*

Some of our questions should encourage learners to think, to solve problems and to express their own points of view. For example, if we were using the extract from *Looking into the Past, Grade 5* with a class, we could ask questions like these:

Hunter-gatherers, herders and farmers often met and traded with each other. What do you think members of each group brought to trade with the others? What do you think they talked about with each other?

We could follow these questions with an activity such as this one that the writers include in the book:

Work in a group of three. Imagine that one of you is a hunter-gatherer, one a herder and one a farmer. Decide what you have brought to trade. Then act out your meeting.

We could also ask learners whether they would like to be a hunter-gatherer, a herder or a farmer and to give reasons for their answer.

Reading textbooks critically

In the lists of characteristics of 'good' and 'poor' textbooks, you read that one of the weaknesses of poor textbooks is that they present information as though it cannot be challenged or thought about in other ways. Another weakness of some textbooks is that information about some individuals or groups is presented in a biased or prejudiced way. This may happen as a result of the way in which they are described, or because they are left out of the text altogether. One of our responsibilities as teachers is to demonstrate to learners that they can ask critical questions of texts, and to assist them to develop skills in doing this.

The example below demonstrates the kinds of *critical questions* teachers and learners can ask about a passage from a textbook.

HOW A WRITER OF HISTORY USES LANGUAGE TO POSITION READERS

In this description of the battle of Vegkop, from a history textbook used in South African primary schools until 1980, decide who are portrayed as the goodies and who are portrayed as the baddies. Answer the following questions to see how this is done.




You should now begin Week 18 of your studies. You should have spent at least 102 hours on this module.



This page is taken from Janks, H. 1993. *Language and Position*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press and Hodder & Stoughton. You will notice that the ideas presented link strongly with the media literacy activities we presented in Section Five.

The trekkers hurried into the laager and closed the entrance. All around were the Matabele hordes, sharpening their assegais, killing animals and drinking the raw blood. Sarel Celliers offered up a prayer.

When the enemy made a savage attack, the defenders fired volley upon volley into their ranks. All helped. The women and children, including Paul Kruger, loaded extra guns and handed them to the men. After a fierce battle the Matabele fled. The voortrekkers gave thanks to God for their deliverance.



Is any explanation given for this behaviour? What is this behaviour likely to make the reader think of the Matabele?

Matabele is the name white people made up for the Ndebele tribe.

What are the effects of these words?

Why is this information placed at this point in the passage: before the onset of the battle and before Celliers prays?

How does the writer convey the impression that the trekkers are civilised?

Why not the word 'withdrew' or 'retreated'?

Give reasons other than God's intervention to account for the trekker victory. Use information in the passage. Why is this information kept in the background? How is it kept in the background?

How does the writer give the impression that God is on the side of the trekkers? Why is this important?

The information and the questions in the bubbles help learners to understand that, in this textbook (one that is no longer used in schools), the Ndebele people are portrayed as savage and bloodthirsty, and the trekkers as civilized and courageous. In the passage, there is no mention of the fact that it is the trekkers which is the group that has moved into an area in which African people had long been living.

Teachers can assist even very young learners to ask critical questions. For example, if a Reader used in Grade 1 has pictures of men and women in stereotyped roles (mother washing dishes in the kitchen, father washing the car, for example), teachers can ask learners questions such as:

- What are these people doing?
- Who does this work in your home?
- Does the same person always do this work?
- Why do you think the person who drew this picture drew it like this?

Such questions can help learners to think about the possible differences between 'real life' and what is illustrated in a book.

A practical way in which teachers could ensure that more than one view of an issue is aired is by buying *different* textbooks. Instead of buying all your Grade 9 History texts from one publisher, buy half from another. Check beforehand that both are good textbooks and that they offer different views on issues. Allow learners to share these textbooks.

A process for developing better textbook reading skills

Nana Mthimkhulu has suggested an interesting process that teachers can use to get learners to read textbooks more effectively and more critically. She suggests that teachers begin by asking learners what 'comprehension' means and then use learners' answers to emphasize that to comprehend means to *understand and to be able to respond to what you have read*. She then outlines the steps that a teacher and groups of learners could follow. Here is her lesson plan.

LESSON PLAN: READING TEXTBOOKS

- 1 Divide the class into groups into no more than four people each. Make sure each group has a textbook.
- 2 Ask each group to develop five questions on the section in the textbook that is to be studied (15 minutes). Remind learners to:
 - ask questions that give their classmates an opportunity to show that they understand the whole article. An example of such a question could be, 'What other title or headline could you give this article?'
 - ask at least one question that gives learners an opportunity to give their own opinion on the article as a whole or on a particular issue raised within it.
- 3 As soon as groups have completed the writing of their questions, ask them to swap their questions with those in the group next to them.
- 4 Each group should then:
 - write an answer to each of the other group's questions. Group members should work out these answers together.
 - suggest any changes that they believe would improve these questions. The group must give reasons for those changes. (15 minutes)
- 5 When groups have had an opportunity to respond to each other's questions, they should submit their answers to the group that asked those questions.
- 6 End this activity with a whole-class discussion on what learners have learned from participating in the activity.



Nana Mthimkhulu develops her ideas further in Mthimkhulu, N. & Reed, Y.1997. *Exploring Alternatives in the Language Classroom*. Manzini: Macmillan Boleswa.



Try this lesson out with a class. Ask another teacher to observe, then discuss the lesson with him or her. Spend about an hour on this activity.

An activity of this kind is likely to encourage learners to read an article or a passage from a textbook very carefully in order to develop their questions. It also provides valuable language practice as learners work together to write questions that other learners can understand.

Developing a culture of reading at your school

Many of these suggestions focus on developing the skills of reading. They also focus on strategies you can use in your class and with particular texts. But, as we emphasized in Sections Three and Four, in order to have a big impact on the quality of reading, we need to change the current *attitude* to reading.

As we noted earlier, many teachers don't read. Very often, when we read we do so because we *have* to rather than because of the fun it gives us. And often we delegate all responsibility for reading to the Language teacher! This kind of atmosphere is unlikely to improve the reading skills of our learners. We need to develop a culture of reading at our schools and this requires teacher collaboration.

The teacher we criticised earlier provides an example of one way we can begin to work together to improve reading. Instead of choosing some arbitrary comprehension exercise, she used a passage from the Biology text her learners were studying.

This action has a number of benefits:

- Learners use their English time to study Biology. But they don't lose out on developing their language skills. Both teachers and learners maximize the limited time they have for the teaching of their respective subjects.
- The comprehension exercise has meaning for the learners. They understand that the skills they are learning will benefit them in other areas of study and life. It is likely that learners will now 'transfer' their learning to other subjects.

This co-operation could be extended. Language teachers could work with other learning area teachers to ensure that they build good reading strategies into their teaching, and that they maximize the time learners have to read. Joint planning around particular themes could assist this process.

In addition, all teachers could work together to develop a reading/ resource centre and then could build time into the timetable in which learners concentrate on reading. In addition, teachers should develop box libraries in their own classrooms in which they keep useful reading material that they actively encourage learners to use.

What have we learnt about using textbooks?

6.5

Key learning points

- Textbooks are an absolutely essential part of any good teaching process. They are particularly important in:
 - developing the higher-order reading skills and analytical skills that popular media can't develop;
 - structuring learning in an educationally sound manner which is not built into popular media design;
 - providing means for developing independent learning.
- The limitations of textbooks include:
 - the often abstract nature of the content knowledge they carry and the difficult language used;
 - the fact that the information in them may be out of date;
 - the fact that they often provide only one point of view;
 - the tendency for teachers and learners to become dependent on them.

These limitations don't point to the need to abandon textbooks. Instead, they simply emphasize the need to use a wide variety of media in our teaching.

- But some textbooks are very poor. Their weaknesses include:
 - ideological bias: many are racist and sexist and out of tune with democratic values;
 - poor design: many do not provide the educational scaffolding necessary in developing conceptual understanding.
- Teachers need the skills to select textbooks appropriately. There are at least seven questions you should ask of textbooks:
 - Is the textbook written in a style and language that is accessible to my learners?
 - Is the textbook's structure and sequencing clear and logical?
 - Is the textbook written in a manner that links with the lives of my learners?
 - Is the textbook structured so as to develop higher-level conceptual knowledge in their subject/learning area?
 - Is the textbook designed in an attractive and user-friendly manner?
 - Is the textbook committed to teaching in a non-discriminatory and critical way?
 - If I were a learner again, would I like to learn from this book?
- Textbooks don't need to satisfy all criteria. Rather teachers should ensure that:
 - the textbook satisfies the important criteria;
 - they can use other media to minimize the weaknesses.
- Another big problem is the poor use of textbooks by teachers and learners. This includes:
 - an unhealthy and uncritical dependence on textbooks;
 - no attempt by teachers to teach learners how to read effectively and critically;
 - too much poor reading of textbooks by the teacher;
 - no use of alternative materials to supplement the textbook and to provide a different point of view.
- Teachers need to learn to use textbooks better. This would include:
 - using textbooks to develop a clear educational purpose;

- using learners' existing knowledge to improve their reading abilities;
- using other media to bridge the gap between learner understandings and the more abstract understandings in textbooks;
- using questions, activities, and structured reading processes to develop learners' higher-order reading skills;
- working on developing the critical reading skills of learners;
- developing a culture of reading at your school.



This is a major summative exercise that attempts to integrate all learning achieved so far. Spend about three hours on this activity. Then get together with other teachers and discuss your effort.

A summative assessment activity

Design a series of lessons in which you use both popular media and textbooks to teach a concept in a sound manner. In other words:

- a** Clearly explain what your learning outcomes are.
- b** Demonstrate how you would use popular media to activate learner interest (see Sections Three and Four).
- c** Then take the textbook you are planning to use. Choose the appropriate passage and show how you will:
 - link this with the ideas raised through popular media;
 - develop learners' abilities to read and understand the textbook.
- d** In order to answer the second part of (c), write one example of each of the following kinds of questions that you could ask on this passage (see this section):
 - a question to activate your own background knowledge or the background knowledge of your learners;
 - a question to find out whether you or your learners have understood the passage;
 - a question that encourages you or your learners to express an opinion on the views expressed in the passage;
 - a critical question that encourages you or your learners to think about the information in the passage in different ways.
- e** Demonstrate how you develop conceptual depth as you move your learners through these lessons. (You may want to make reference to Section Two to check this.)