

Use of Resources in English Second Language Grade One Classrooms

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RUNNING HEAD: USING RESOURCES IN GRADE ONE CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on the use of resources in second language grade one classrooms. The aim of this study was to investigate the use of resources in the mother-tongue (Sepedi) and in second language (English). An intervention strategy was employed; teachers were trained in workshops on the making and use of resources. The final phase of the research investigated the impact of the resources in grade one classes. Instruments used to collect data were lesson observation schedules, reflective journals and documentary evidence

(photographs). The sample consisted of 20 grade one teachers. Sixty lessons each was observed in phases 1 and 3 of the study. For phase 2, 20 teachers were trained in the making of resources in Sepedi and English. Findings from phase 1 showed minimal presence and use of resources. This increased in phase 3. A major recommendation was that teachers be trained in the making of resources.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sepedi is one of the three African languages spoken in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The other two are TshiVenda and Xitsonga. In keeping with the South African Department of Education's policy on mother-tongue instruction, Foundation Phase learners are taught through the medium of their home language from grade R to grade three (Department of Education 1997). Whilst mother-tongue instruction is highly favoured, resources available in the mother-tongue are limited. Young children, especially those in the Foundation Phase, need visual stimulation to capture their attention so that they can learn effectively (Singh 2009). Whilst there is an abundance of teaching aids available in English, little is available in Sepedi. The research was conducted in rural schools where priority is placed on basic necessities like infrastructure, furniture, water, electricity and textbooks. This means that little financial resources are available for teachers to spend on literacy resources that enhance their lessons. Resources like charts, books and reading cards which are available in English are not affordable in rural schools (Bloch 2002). The result is that teachers use few dated resources during their teaching and these are in a poor condition. For example, during the teaching of reading, teachers are confined to the available textbooks and do not explore other types of reading material such as interactive videos, large story books and children's magazines.

Given the complexities involved in acquiring resources in Foundation Phase literacy classes (Lessing and Mahabeer 2007), a more practical approach is to equip teachers with the necessary skills to create the relevant resources for their classrooms. In this way, teachers can adapt the resources according to the context of the learning environment; for example, a resource that needs electricity to work is of no use to a teacher whose school is not electrified. Although resource needs vary according to the context, there are standard resources that are expected to be used in teaching literacy to grade one learners, irrespective of the language of teaching. For example, the use of alphabet cards (with pictures) in the mother-tongue (in this

case, Sepedi) familiarizes learners with the alphabet. Later on, when they learn an additional language, they can transfer these skills which Cummins refers to as common underlying proficiency (CUP) (Shoebottom 1996). Using colourful, visual resources creates interest and enhances the ability of the learners to acquire literacy skills of reading, writing and speaking.

Against this background, the paper sets out to investigate the use of resources in grade one Sepedi classrooms. Theories of language acquisition (Chomsky 1957; Cummins 1988; Krashen 1981) are used to emphasize the role of resources in language learning especially amongst young children. Since grade one is crucial in the development of language skills, researchers (Garbett 1997; Lessing and Mahabeer 2007) focus on the use of relevant resources to teach literacy at this level. The purpose of the study was to uncover the status of resource use in literacy Sepedi classrooms with the intention of proposing an intervention strategy to maximise use of resources in literacy teaching. The study was carried out as a university community project where researchers from the university involved in teacher education and research worked with teachers from impoverished primary schools surrounding the university.

Child Language Acquisition Theory (Chomsky 1957)

According to Chomsky (1957), “children are born with an inherited ability to learn any human language”. He coined the term: ‘language acquisition devise’ (LAD), which all children possess. LAD helps children to encode the major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child’s brain. All children have to do then, is to learn new vocabulary and apply the syntactic structures from the LAD to form sentences. The relevance of Chomsky’s theory to this study is that it applies to all languages as they all contain nouns, verbs, consonants and vowels. Languages are extremely complex and often have distinctions that even native speakers are unaware of. However, according to Chomsky (1957), all children, regardless of their intellectual ability, become fluent in their native language within five or six years. In the process of learning language, children associate concrete objects (tactile, visual) with learning; this is the link between Chomsky’s theory and how learners in grade one Sepedi classrooms learn using resources.

Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (Krashen 1981)

In the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1981) describes the principles of second language learning. He explains how language is acquired according to the competence level

of the learner. Krashen's (1981) hypothesis is that the competence level of the acquirer should contain structure that is slightly beyond the current level of competence. In the context of this study, although the language being acquired is the home language (Sepedi), second language acquisition skills are applicable as the learners also learn English. The learners already possess basic language skills in Sepedi. Most of their language skills are in the spoken language. To apply these skills to the written language requires the use of appropriate resources which facilitate the development of writing skills in the home language. The challenge that Krashen's (1981) theory poses is that the new language skills should be close enough to the current level of competence so that progress can be made but should not be too far beyond their current competence that they are overwhelmed. The point of relevance to this study is that the use of resources can be used to maintain such an optimum standard of competence to a point that language learning is promoted.

Theory of language learning (Cummins 1988)

Cummins (1988) theory of language learning is based on two types of language skills: basic interpersonal communications skills (BICS) and cognitive language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1988). BICS refers to conversational (surface) fluency while CALP refers to the language proficiency necessary to make efficient use of formal learning situations (Verma, Corrigan and Firth 1995). Both BICS and CALP require that teachers possess and teach language skills in a way that makes it meaningful and relevant for the learners. In grade one classrooms, the teacher usually does this by reinforcing familiar concepts within the immediate environment by using resources such as charts, pictures, photographs that are familiar to learners. This helps stimulate the cognitive skills and the 'visible' aspects of language (which is BICS), such as pronunciation, basic vocabulary and grammar, which allows learners to converse fluently in undemanding everyday situations.

USE OF RESOURCES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

In language teaching in grade one, the focus is on teaching skills in reading, writing and speaking. To do this, teachers make use of resources which stimulate the development of these skills in young learners. The primary purpose of using resources is to support and develop learning (Ansell 2005). Resources can provide a visual image, focus for discussion, tool for exploration and discovery, and stimulus to provide interest and interaction. Due to the variety of ways in which resources can be used in language teaching, it is therefore important that all language teachers possess the necessary resources to make use in their language

lessons. A simple resource like songs can enhance teaching and learning a language. Songs are one of the most enchanting and culturally rich resources that can be easily used in language classroom (Saricoban and Metin 2000). They are precious resources to develop children's abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing. In African cultures, cultural songs have a significant place in all learning.

In many South African classrooms, especially in rural areas, resources are a scarce commodity. Therefore, it is important that teachers in such contexts make use of commonly found things within their environment to make language learning possible. Blog and Blog (2006) term such resources *realia*. *Realia* are everyday authentic objects such as photographs, maps, brochures, movies, charts, and pictures that are used to teach and learn languages. It is important that classrooms contain such resources. These visual stimuli in the classroom promote learning of language (Singh 2009). Newfield (2011) explains how resources may be used to teach reading skills. Some of the resources described are charts, word-cards and making storybooks (Newfield 2011). There are various methods of teaching reading using resources. Holdaway (2009) examines the shared book method, in particular the use of big books. The use of big books is popular amongst young readers because they are fascinated with the size of the book and enhanced pictures. Some big books also contain pop-up features which are a source of interest to young children. When developing reading material, it is important to develop reading materials that are appropriate to the environment (Hugo 2010).

Home language literacy is important in order to lay the foundation for development of other languages. Parents should be encouraged to select mother-tongue education for their children in the first school years and to value their home languages (PRAESA 2007). In South Africa, the switch to English as the medium of instruction either in grade three or four is sometimes too early as learners have not yet grasped the necessary language skills in their home language. Studies (Bloch 2002; Lessing and Mahabeer 2007) describe the issues that children face in acquiring a second language. Bloch's (2002) study examined the writing development of foundation phase learners, in particular their bi-literacy skills in English and Xhosa. Lessing and Mahabeer (2007) examined the barriers to acquiring English reading and writing skills by Zulu-speaking foundation phase learners. Although language skills are transferable to the second language, grounding in the initial language is important before transfer to a second language can take place. In many South African schools, the resources do not exist in the home language to secure the basic grounding, this leads to problems when trying to

acquire the second language. Therefore Hugo's (2010) call to develop appropriate reading materials related to the environment is an appropriate one.

Resources such as teaching materials also have an impact on the teaching and learning of a language. Howard and Major (2005) discuss the designing of effective teaching materials. Not only should teachers be told what to teach, they should also be provided with the relevant teaching materials to make this possible. For example, in South African schools, it is compulsory that schools purchase appropriate reading texts for learners in the foundation phase. However, the challenges that schools face is the lack of sufficient funding to purchase enough books for all learners. Teachers seldom look beyond the conventional story book series that are available in catalogues. Harmer (2001) suggests that the good do-it-yourself (DIY) teachers can make resources themselves to make language learning effective.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in rural primary schools in the Mankweng Circuit of Limpopo province. It was a three-phase study; phase 1 involved data collection on use of resources in Sepedi literacy lessons, numeracy and life skills lessons; phase 2 comprised of ten resource-making workshops conducted at the university; and phase 3 involved collection of data through lesson observation using the resources made in the workshops. This article reports on all three phases of the research project, with a focus on the literacy lessons. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used in this study. The instruments used were a teacher questionnaires, reflective journals and lesson observations. Data was also gathered from photographs during the resource-making workshops.

The sample was purposively chosen. Two grade one Sepedi teachers from ten primary schools in the Mankweng Circuit were selected (n=20). Written permission was obtained from the provincial research office to conduct research in the selected schools. Access to schools was gained through the circuit manager. The principals of these schools were also briefed collectively before the commencement of the project. Data was collected from observations on the presence and use of resources in literacy lessons before and after the intervention workshops. In total, 20 grade one literacy lessons in Sepedi were observed and analysed in phase 1 and 3 of the project. Data was also gathered from teacher questionnaires on use of resources in literacy lessons. A total of 20 questionnaires were completed, one by each of the selected grade one Sepedi teachers. The questionnaire also contained a few open-end questions which were qualitatively analysed. For phase 2 of the research, which was the resource-making workshops, data was collected from reflective journals which were kept by all the teachers. Photographs that captured the making of resources as well as the end products were also taken.

III. RESULTS

Phase 1

Data obtained from the lesson observations and interviews in phase 1 were analysed collectively under the following headings:

Description of resources used in the lessons

In the interviews with the grade one Sepedi teachers, they gave a description of some of the resources that they used in their literacy lessons as follows: breakthrough kits, pictures, flash charts, alphabet charts, word charts, workbooks, readers and pocket words. This wide range of resources cited by the teachers gives the impression that they are making use of resources during their lessons. The resources listed are also appropriate for teaching literacy to grade one Sepedi learners. However, from the lesson observations, these resources were least used in the actual lessons. The dominant use of charts was evident in the lessons. The quality of the charts used was very poor. Many were hand written, torn or untidy. The evidence also indicated that there was little planning put into the use of the charts during the lessons. To corroborate with the lesson observations, photographs were also taken of resources used during the lessons. Although the teachers claimed that they used certain resources during their lessons, the evidence of the use was minimal. These findings point to the need for some form of intervention to assist these teachers. If the resources that aid language learning are lacking in the home language, the Language Acquisition Device (Chomsky 1957) of these learners will not be strongly developed. This implies that when learners have to learn another language later on, their poorly developed LAD will negatively affect further language development.

Availability and use of resources

Of the twenty lessons observed, the availability of resources ranged from well resourced, adequate resources, few relevant resources, not well resourced to no resources. For ten of the twenty lessons, it was found that the classroom was not well resourced and in seven lessons few relevant resources were found. This meant that for majority of the lessons, there was a limited presence and use of resources. Availability of resources is crucial in any grade one classroom. The teacher is immediately at a disadvantage if resources are not available. The next issue is the use of the resources that are available. In one instance, the teacher carried a hand-drawn chart which she used during her teaching. This chart was more of a hindrance than a teaching resource because most children could not see or read the chart. Therefore the purpose of using a visual aid was lost. In addition, the writing used on the chart did not demonstrate good writing skills. Many of the crudely made charts were those used in the home language, Sepedi. The possible reason for this is that charts in English are more readily

available from a variety of sources compared to those available in Sepedi. Since basic literacy skills are taught in the home language, it is important that there is a variety of visual and tactile aids available that can aid language learning in young children (Hugo 2010; Newfield 2011). Of the twenty lessons observed, the following observations were common to all the lessons: some of the resources used were not clear to the children, the resource (egg. chart) was very small or the writing or pictures on the resource was not clearly visible; many resources used were not colourful, consisted of black ink on paper; no concrete resources were used in the literacy lessons; the resources used did not have a huge impact on the lessons. These comments and observations indicate that these classrooms are not well-resourced and the few resources that were present were of poor quality and not properly used during the lessons. Since children require these visual and tactile resources to aid the language development, limited and poor quality resources hamper language development in the home language and competency levels of children to acquire a second language (Krashen 1981). Whilst some teachers did show creativity in making the resources, the overall quality of the resources was unimpressive. One of the striking features in the classrooms was the poor quality of the buildings and furniture. This shabby atmosphere made it almost impossible to display good quality visual resources on the walls.

Source of resources

The teachers were asked to indicate where they got their resources from. They listed three different sources. The sources were: the school provided the resources, the Department of Education provided resources; and they made their own resources. Some listed more than one source. Eight teachers said that they made their resources. Nine said that the school provided resources for them. Eight teachers stated that the Department of Education was the source from which they obtained resources. Examples of resources that were provided were: reading necklace, letters of the alphabet, word charts and weather charts. There was little evidence of use of these resources in the lessons observed. In some classrooms, wall charts were present. When questioned about the resources that would enhance their literacy lessons, the teachers stated that they would like to use puppets, plain boards, wall charts, pictures, story books and puzzles. Some of these concrete resources like puppets and puzzles can be made as projects with the learners as part of the literacy lessons. Children will therefore be involved in learning a skill as well.

Desired training

The teachers were asked to state the type of training that they needed on resources. They listed making of resources, using resources in lessons and selecting of resources for lessons

as priority areas. From their responses and from the evidence gathered from the lessons on use of resources, the teachers were clearly able to pinpoint their areas of weakness. The implication from their responses is that if the necessary training is received, the use of resources in their lessons would improve. They clearly lacked the necessary skills in designing and making appropriate resources for their literacy lessons. In addition, they also needed to be taught how to use these lessons effectively in their lessons.

Phase 2

During this phase of the research, the teachers were engaged in ten resource-making workshops where they made basic literacy and numeracy resources for their grade one classrooms. The focus was on making literacy resources in Sepedi and English. This process was documented by taking photographs during each workshop. In addition, teachers kept a reflective diary of the process. In it, they recorded their personal reflections of each resource development workshop that they attended. They were urged to record what they thought, how they felt, what they learnt, questions and thoughts that they had on resource use. Their reflections on the workshops are presented and discussed as follows:

All the teachers in the study indicated that they benefitted from attending the resource development workshops. They indicated that the resources that they made would be useful in their Sepedi and English literacy and numeracy lessons. They appreciated that they were provided with the necessary and appropriate materials to make the resources. All enjoyed the practical nature of the workshops where they were involved in making their own resources. In addition, after each workshop, they looked forward to the next one. They also indicated that the resources that they made were appropriate for their grade one classrooms. They enjoyed including bright colours in their resources because their learners enjoy interacting with colourful learning aids. A third of the participants indicated that they had difficulty in completing the resource. The skills required to make the resources included cutting, pasting, colouring, measuring and time management. Some of the participants experience difficulty with mixing the use bright colours and with neatness of their resources. It was observed that they were able to learn quickly from each other through observation and sharing ideas while they worked.

In their reflections, the teachers expressed that more time should be devoted to practical resource development workshops as it helped directly in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. They wanted such resource development workshops to be held on a more regular basis and that they be designed to suit their rural environment, as reflected in this comment:

“resources must suit our own rural schools instead of being provided with resources which are irrelevant to our rural learners by the DOE, ‘cause children learn much on the things they see every day”. One interesting and encouraging comment made in many of the reflections was the willingness to share what they had learnt with other teachers from their schools. This indicated the positive attitude of the teachers towards learning and sharing. The teachers also commented on the practical use of the resources in the classrooms. For example, when they teach literacy (reading and writing), the learners will be able to see how letters should be correctly written and the associated colourful pictures will enhance their ability to grasp basic literacy skills in both Sepedi and English. They also stated that learners willingly attempt reading words when they are accompanied by relevant and attractive pictures. The pictures also enhance word recognition: *“the pictures are very beautiful and they will make it very easy for learners to know from the picture what the word means”*. The presence of resources in literacy lessons also contributes to understanding of the content being taught and acts as a motivation for learners.

Phase 3

The same data collection instruments that were used in phase 1, that is, interviews with teachers and classroom observations of literacy lessons, were used in phase 3 as well. In this phase, data was collected data after the intervention (literacy resource making workshops) was carried out. Although the intervention comprised of a limited number of resource-making workshops, the impact was immediately seen in the literacy lessons that were observed during this phase. Whereas there was limited or no use of resources during the pre-intervention lesson observations, during the post-intervention literacy lessons, educators made use of resources during the lessons, there were resources present in the classroom, the resources were relevant to the lessons and educative, learners were able to relate to the resources used, and the resources assisted in achieving the outcome of the lesson. In addition, teachers made use of different types of resources like pictures, charts and concrete aids. The classrooms moved from having no resources or not well resourced to being adequately resourced. Both teachers and learners made use of resources during the post-intervention literacy lessons and the activities were resource based. Some of the types of resources used were colourful pictures, relevant literacy charts like alphabet charts, phonic words, word friezes and blends and consonants and concrete aids like paper fruit and vegetables. From the observations, it was found that the resources made the literacy lesson more interesting. Some used the resources to play word and reading games. The learners enjoyed naming pictures

and associating them with relevant words. In only one of the literacy lessons observed, the teacher made more use of the chalkboard in comparison to other resources.

IV. DISCUSSION

Phase 1

The findings indicated that there is sporadic use of literacy resources to teach literacy, especially in Sepedi. Most of the resources used in the lessons observed for Sepedi were made by the teacher. These consisted primarily of charts and word cards which are relatively inexpensive, quick and easy to make. In many cases, the presence and use of literacy lessons was dependent on the creativeness of the class teacher. There was no standard list of resources that was considered necessary for every literacy classroom. By using some basic resources to teach the home language, it is expected that the basic interpersonal communications skills (BICS) such as conversational fluency (Cummins 1988) that are essential to language acquisition will be acquired. This would lead the way to acquire the cognitive language proficiency (CALP) which is necessary to make efficient use of formal learning situations (Cummins 1988). However, factors such as inadequate and insufficient assistance in the form of language resources can create a time lag in language acquisition.

Phase 2

The second phase of this resource development project revealed many positive things about involving teachers in making literacy resources. Through this process the teachers were able to interact with other teachers and also learn how to use these resources in their literacy classrooms. Their enthusiasm in participating in the workshops showed that they are motivated to excel as teachers; they were pleased that the nature of their rural contexts was considered in the development of the literacy resources. Essentially, they could proudly use these resources knowing that they had created it themselves and also that these resources were relevant to their contexts. The project facilitators also came to the realization that the situation concerning lack of resources was very dire in these rural schools. Basic resources that are normally found in schools and used to teach literacy is often taken for granted. Teachers were desperate for these resources because they knew the potential impact it could have on basic literacy skills of the learners in their classrooms. The third phase of the project revealed the difference these resources made in the teachers' teaching and the learners grasp of literacy skills.

Phase 3

The positive impact of these resource making workshops on grade one teachers literacy teachers was captured during their post-intervention interviews. They oozed self-confidence, self-worth and motivation. They wanted to assist their colleagues (*“since I have attended, I can create my own resources and help my colleagues too”*), wanted to further their studies, and to attend more workshops of this nature. They also felt equipped with skills in making context-relevant resources. They could see a difference in their learners’ ability to read, write and make sentences (*“It is easy for learners to understand through seeing. They can read what they see on the walls. It is easy for them to form words in literacy while before that was a problem”*) (*“Resources are assisting us because learners are able to read and write in Sepedi”*).

Teachers also noted the impact that the resources had on the new curriculum that they were in the process of implementing: (*“Very useful as the resources were in line with the CAPS curriculum which was implemented this year. Grade 1-3 learners are able to respond to simple words”*). Grade one teachers teach the home language (Sepedi) as well as English which is an additional (foreign) language. Transference of skills learnt in one language to the other is evidenced in the following quote: *“When writing a ‘lion’ in Sepedi (tau), the first letter is ‘t’; the learners will look and identify words starting with the letter ‘t’ on all alphabet and word charts on the walls”*. Not only were teachers motivated to teach literacy using resources, they were also motivated to start other resource making projects (*“I can recycle almost anything like using disposable plates to make masks to use in my lessons”*).

Teachers wanted the resource workshops to continue and they also made recommendations of other things they would like to do during the literacy resource workshops. The following are two recommendations made by teachers:

“The workshop was so fruitful, we hope and wish that we meet time and again so that we can support one another and be able to maintain the standard and level of teaching, we wish all educators at our schools get a chance to be work-shopped like this”

“We are looking forward to another workshop that will help us to write reading books for the foundation phase as our school has no textbooks for reading”

The curriculum in South African schools has undergone numerous changes since democracy in 1994. Constant changes in the curriculum definitely had a negative impact on the literacy levels of learners, especially those in the foundation phase and those in rural areas. Over and above the impact that the resource making literacy workshops had on the teachers and learners in their classrooms, they also acted as a form of spurring teachers to become

interested in their teaching again (*“Due to the changes of our education system time and again, our morale was completely low, but ever since we attended this workshop, we feel active and interested in teaching, I feel revived”*).

V. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the presence and use of literacy resources in grade one Sepedi classrooms affects language development and acquisition. An examination of language learning theories indicated that the initial years of schooling are fundamental for language development and acquisition, and that the early stages of language acquisition affect later development and second language acquisition. This means that the language learning environment should be adequately resourced especially at grade one level. In South African schools, especially in rural areas, grade one learners are taught in the home language which is usually a regional African language. Good literacy resources are scarce and not well developed in the local African languages. Even if available, they are not necessarily acquired by schools and used by grade one teachers. Research reviewed has also found that the use of visual and tactile resources aids language development in young children. Therefore the call is for greater use of such resources when teaching formal aspects of language like reading and writing. In addition, skilling teachers in the making of resources and utilising them in language lessons are also a priority for higher education institutions interested in making a difference to the communities they serve.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this research, the following is recommended:

- Foundation phase experts and specialists should, taking into consideration the curriculum, identify possible resources that can be used in grade one Sepedi classrooms when teaching literacy.
- It would be useful to differentiate literacy resources into reading, writing and speaking resources so that these individual skills can be taught using resources specifically designed to enhance literacy skills in these areas.
- Stakeholders such as the Department of Basic Education, local universities involved in teacher training, NGOs and teacher unions should organize and conduct workshops on resource-making where grade one literacy teachers are trained in the making of relevant literacy resources. The resources made by the teachers should be used in literacy lessons.

- Careful consideration should be given to the durability of resources used in grade one classrooms. If they are durable, they can be re-usable. Considering the financial constraints that rural schools face, making resources last for a long time is important.
- When planning to make resources, teachers and other people in this field must take cognizance that the context is relevant and resources are based on experiences, events, situations within Sepedi culture.
- The teacher education training at the university needs to incorporate the needs of the local community into the teacher training programmes so that the university serves the needs of the community with respect to availability and use of resources.

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