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# **How Young Children Learn to Read**

**B.A. Essay**

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## Abstract

Every child experiences the process of learning to read differently. This essay is to show what it means to read. There are different factors that contribute to reading. Beginning readers need to have phonological and phonemic awareness; That means knowing how the sounds of the language work and how to manipulate them. The alphabet is the basis needed for spelling words since they are made up on letters of the alphabet. The vocabulary is the words that the readers know and need to be able to understand what is being read. Fluency comes following the learning process, when the reader has learned to read and is able to go through texts fluently. Fluency is also important for comprehension, the reading needs to be done effortlessly for the reader to be able to gain meaning and comprehend the text. Too much time spent on reading (decoding) every individual word makes the comprehension difficult. Sight word reading, the way accomplished readers read, is the main goal when teaching reading. On the way to reach that level of reading skill readers use decoding, reading by analogy and predicting from context to help them get through and comprehend texts.

To create skilled readers it is vital to develop the language using the right methods. With young children, language development plays a big part in the pre-school years. In the pre-school Tjarnarsel language development is one of the main focuses in the schools' curriculum. They actively try to stimulate their students young minds through books. The teachers use games, outdoor activities and follow a method called Orðaspjall, a way to boost children's vocabulary.

Some children experience reading difficulties like dyslexia or are learning in a second language, however all children should be able to learn how to read with the right instruction and training.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. The Nature of Reading .....	4
2.1 Pre-reading.....	4
2.2. Decoding.....	5
2.3 Sight word reading .....	8
2.4. Comprehension .....	8
3. 1 Prediction from context .....	10
3. 2 Analogy.....	10
4. How to teach reading to beginning readers.....	11
4.1 Beginning literacy instruction with young children .....	11
4.2 Phonics .....	13
4.3 Scaffolding.....	13
4.4 Whole-language reading .....	14
5. An Exemplary Literacy Program .....	15
5.1 Tjarnarsel.....	15
5.2 Development at Tjarnarsel.....	15
5.3 Ten week reading program .....	16
5.4 Orðaspjall (Text talk) .....	17
5.4.1 Books.....	17
5.4.2 Vocabulary.....	18
5.4.3 Word games .....	19
6. Other Reading Issues.....	21
6.1 Reading in a second or foreign language .....	21
6.2 Dyslexia .....	22
7. Conclusion .....	24
References.....	25

# 1. Introduction

Unlike speaking, reading is something that is learned. Reading means gaining understanding over the written symbols represented by the sounds of oral language. This is an important skill to learn as it opens the doors to further studying, better job opportunities and to a whole other world that happens on print. Reading is the most important skill that is learned in schools. Students who do not learn to read may later on face problems when they have to use reading to learn (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996).

Before children learn to read they have established a skill in the spoken language that serves as a foundation for the growth of later reading proficiency. Understanding the spoken word is not the same as getting the meaning from a print, and talent in the spoken language does not mean that the same person will have success in the printed language. Children need to learn how to read written words (Cain, 2010).

This thesis examines how young pre-school children learn to read and describes an exemplary reading program for young children. The first part examines what it means to read and to be literate. Then a description of the components of reading and what pre-reading activities and background knowledge is necessary for literacy to develop. The next part deals with what it means to decode words to be able to grasp their meaning and how the sounds of the words in the spoken language are connected and work with the letters of the written language. Next part covers what it means to comprehend the words and sentences. Then there are some suggestions about possible ways to teach young beginner students to read. Next part looks at an exemplary pre-school program that has a literacy and language development focus that aims at giving its students a good head start in the school years to come. Then two issues that might interfere with the development of reading are described briefly: Reading in a second or foreign language and dyslexia. Finally some conclusions of the study are presented.

## 2. The Nature of Reading

Reading is a skill that is often taken for granted. Successful reading requires many different skills to work together. The reader needs to be able to make sense out of texts as a whole and that entails a collection of different factors such as reading techniques, cognitive factors and appropriate background knowledge (Cain, 2010). The act of reading and everything that is involved in reading can be broken down into two parts. One part being word reading that is taking the word and being able to translate the printed letters of a word into sound and get the meaning of that word and the other part being word comprehension that involves getting the meaning out of the words, sentences and paragraphs (Cain, 2010).

The term literacy can have different meanings but in the context of education, a literate person is someone who is able to read with understanding and is able to use that skill to express themselves in written language. Essentially literacy is based on these four main elements: Reading technique, reading comprehension, spelling and writing. The reading technique is a skill that needs to be learned and trained. It is based on translating the letters and the sounds they stand for and to be able to read those symbols fast and without much effort. Then there is reading comprehension which is based on understanding the vocabulary, sentences and paragraphs to create meaning. Lastly spelling and writing is based on all factors of the language, and mainly spelling requires knowledge in distinguishing sounds (Birgisdóttir, F. Torfadóttir, S. 2007-2008).

The process of reading may be divided into pre-reading activities and the reading process.

### 2.1 Pre-reading

Motivating readers to read is an important part of the reading process. Young children need to be motivated to read, and feel like reading is something that they would be interested in doing. They need to have print awareness, knowing what print looks like, how books are handled and how to turn the pages in the right way and that reading is done from left to right. Children that are starting to learn need to be aware that print is everywhere around them and get familiar with the letters. Skills like being able to tell where the book starts and where it ends and being able to point at single words or

letters or even pictures are all factors that children need to learn before they start to read (Cain, 2010). Children need to have knowledge of the facts that words are made up of strings of different letters, and in the same way sentences are made up of strings of different words (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996). Books should be around children for them to look at, there is a connection between how much children know about books and other prints and the time spent looking at books by themselves or with adults (Cain, 2010).

Knowing the alphabet is a good start but there needs to be knowledge of the names and the forms of each letter, versus just being able to perform it like a song that is learned by heart without any deeper understanding of each individual letter. A good predictor of a later reading success is a pre-reader with an alphabetic knowledge, since most letter names contain sounds that can help with relating spelling of words to its pronunciation (Cain, 2010).

According to the simple view of reading the two elements, word reading and comprehension are vital in the act of reading. Reading is done to gain understanding no matter what is being read and these two elements do not work without each other. Without the ability to read there can be no comprehension, and without comprehension there is nothing to be gained from reading (Cain, 2010). The simple view is used as a framework to study the development of reading, it suggest that reading consist of two separate factors: Decoding (reading) and linguistic comprehension. With young students that are beginning to read these two factors are unrelated but both interact with each other and then later on the relationship between them grows. First the decoding factor is stronger and in the end when the reader has become a skilled reader the comprehension part is dominant (Hoover & Gough, 1990).

## **2.2. Decoding**

Many young students that struggle with the process of learning to read share a common problem, that is they have not been able to master the skill in identifying phonemes, the smallest part of speech and the foundation for speaking and writing. When a child is listening and speaking it is focusing on the meaning and not the sound, its attention needs to be drawn to the sounds that make up the language. Good

readers are able to, without thinking, quickly recognize the phonemes and manipulate them to form words. Without this skill young learners will find it difficult to decode and read in general (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996).

Phonological awareness is the broad awareness of sounds. Readers need to be aware that there are sounds around us we hear and that we can do things like rhyme, clap the syllables, sing nursery rhymes and other sound games to develop this awareness. There is also phonemic awareness and that is working with the smallest units of sounds or the phonemes of a word and that does not necessary mean one sound equals one letter. We hear those sounds when we read by breaking the words into phonemes and then blend them together to read words. Phonemic awareness can be developed by counting the sounds in words or by manipulating them in other ways like taking one sound out and adding another (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

There should be an understanding that words are made up of strings of phonemes, this awareness also helps when it comes to learning to read an alphabet language. Hearing and creating rhymes is something that children should get comfortable with and playing with the sounds in a way that they are pulling words apart and dividing them into syllables and then into phonemes (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996).

Most children should be able to develop skills in phonemic awareness. Teachers are provided with different instruments to both be able to see how well developed a learner's phonemic awareness is and how to further develop that skill. The positive effect of phonemic awareness instruction is long-term and helps develop skills like decoding, spelling and eventually comprehending. There are many tasks that can be used for the instruction, the two most powerful are segmenting and blending. Segmenting is important for spelling words and blending sounds together for decoding them. Each student is different and one activity that involves teaching phonemic awareness might be convenient for one but not for another. This is something the teacher needs to be aware of and be equipped with solutions and different types of activities (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

Phonological recording is when the reader reads a new word by changing each letter to a sound and putting them together to make out that new word. To be able to decode words, the reader must have knowledge of the names and sounds that each

letter has. Decoding is the most important skill to achieve good reading ability, new readers need to master this skill to be able to read accurately and without effort later on (Birgisdóttir, 2011). Decoding skills develop gradually and teachers teaching this skill need to know where to start and to be able to position and monitor where the student is situated in the decoding learning process. The following list shows the main decoding steps and in the order that they happen, students learn these at different speed, some are accomplished at the same time and others take more time in mastering each of them, all depending on the student.

The steps are:

- knowing letters from its sound
- knowing the sound that goes with letters (decoding)
- writing letters from a sound
- connecting sounds to decode words
- reading common words with sight word reading
- decoding and reads short words
- decoding blends of consonants and well known letter combos
- reading of regular words with one syllable
- spelling of regular words with one syllable
- spelling of all words that can be read with decoding
- identifying and reading of compound words, contractions, possessives and inflectional endings
- correct spelling of common words according to age
- reading of words that are multisyllabic
- use of word meaning and order to confirm that decoding was correct
- correct spelling of contractions, possessives and inflectional endings

Specific decoding skills development is necessary but that alone is not enough, the goal of teaching decoding is so the student will be able to attain a large, complete automatic reading vocabulary and that the decoding will only barely be needed when reading (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).



### **2.3 Sight word reading**

Sight word reading is the way skilled readers read and unlike the other methods this kind of reading only applies to words that the reader already knows and recognizes as a whole word and knows its meaning. The word is in the readers memory and can easily be accessed during the reading activity which makes the reading easier, faster and more efficient (Cain, 2010). Sight word reading is an effective way to gain good reading comprehension especially of common words. The words get recognized automatically without having to concentrate too hard. Recognizing sight words speeds up the reading process, the reader still needs to have phonological awareness and know the connection between letters and sounds for when he comes across words that have not still got stuck in memory or are new to the reader (Torfadóttir, n.d.a).

### **2.4. Comprehension**

Since reading is about accessing meaning through the printed word, reading must be fluent. A young student that struggles to read the words on the page will not be able to grasp the larger content of the text. Good understanding therefore calls for good ability to read words, sentences and whole paragraphs for meaning (Cain, 2010).

Understanding individual words may be divided into four stages and those are pre-alphabet phase which describes the act of young learners that can 'read' words that regularly appear in their surroundings. Those learners have limited knowledge of the alphabet or the connection between letters and sounds, they are not yet able to decode and so their 'reading' is done from memory of things they often see like logos and signs. The second phase is the partial alphabetic phase where learners have learned the names of some letters and the sound that belongs to them and can use that information to read words. Often they only know parts of a word like the first and/or the last letter and words that sound alike often get mixed up since there is not enough knowledge of the alphabet. The third phase or the full alphabetic phase is when the learner has knowledge of all the letters and their sounds and is able to decode every word. The reading can still be a little slow but it becomes more accurate and many words get stuck in the memory of the learner and can be read without decoding. Learners on this stage also read by analogy or prediction from context and

common words are stored in their memory and they are able to decode other words. The fourth and last phase is the consolidated alphabetic phase in which decoding is now very well trained and most of the reading is done by sight. Sight word reading is the ultimate goal since it offers more skilled and faster reading and opens the door to a better understanding of the reading material (Cain, 2010).

To master deep and good reading comprehension beyond the word, the reader needs to go through the following factors during reading. Foresight, based on book covers, pictures and other things the reader should be able to predict on some levels what the text is about or what comes next when he is reading. The reader bonds with the text, not only by reading it but by using what he knows about it, and by using his personal knowledge and experience he can better understand what the text is about. The text can bring back memories and feelings that the reader has had before and he can use that to make a mental image of what the text is saying. Going beyond the text to get what the writer of the text is meaning, good readers can build an understanding of somewhat hidden meaning that the writer indicates with words and pictures. The reader is often left with guessing or making his own ideas or theories about what the text is really saying (Torfadóttir, n.d.b).

The talent to reason or conclude about the text gets more important as the text gets more complicated. Synthesis is a process where the reader joins together what he already knows and the new information that he gets from the text. Reading is closely linked to education and usually the reader expects to get something out of the text. Synthesizing is about being able to explain the main point of the reading material and understanding what it means for the reader as a person and how it relates to his own life or other texts that he has read. To detect the structure of the text, is it meant to be informational or for leisure. How the reader approaches the text helps with how he comprehends it. And finally the reader should read critically, not everything that is put on print is true or accurate. The reader has to consider and evaluate the text (Torfadóttir, n.d.b). Often choosing the appropriate reading strategy helps the reader to comprehend the text.

### **3. 1 Prediction from context**

A good reader uses several reading strategies to aid in comprehension of a text.

Predicting from context is a reading strategy that helps a reader gain the meaning of an unknown word from the context of the text that it appears in. When the reader stops at a word that he does not know, there are several clues in the text that he can use to try and determine that unknown word. The reader can use what he has read in the text prior to that word, what he knows about the material and use his understanding of the limits in semantics to guess and evaluate the word that he is struggling with. Predicting a word is used more by unskilled readers, it is easy to make mistakes and this way is not considered a strong strategy when learning to read (Cain, 2010).

### **3. 2 Analogy**

Reading by analogy is about identifying a new word that has the same word pattern or similar spelling as another word known by the reader. The reader will need to have some phonological awareness to be able to read by analogy (Cain, 2010). Readers must also have some vocabulary knowledge for this approach, since to read words with this method, they are comparing words or segments of a word that they do not know to other words that are similar to the ones they do know. Knowing rhyme helps when reading by analogy, words that rhyme can be used as clue words to find the unknown words (Wang, & Gaffney, 1998).

Reading comprehension is complicated, each reader has different background knowledge and might therefore interpret the texts' meaning in different ways.

Comprehension is much more than just understanding each word, the reader needs to be able to get the meaning from whole sentences and paragraphs to grasp what longer texts are saying.

## **4. How to teach reading to beginning readers**

### **4.1 Beginning literacy instruction with young children**

Teaching phonological awareness to learners who are taking their first steps at reading should be at the top of the list in early reading instruction and the main object of attention should be on the sounds before focusing on spelling or writing. A teacher can make individual sounds in words stand out by dragging out for example the initial sound and have the learners isolate each sound in selected words until they are at ease and understand its essence. Young learners need to practice identifying individual phonemes in words. This can be done by asking them to name the first sound or the last, usually the first sound in words are the easiest. Next they should practice blending the phonemes together, starting with two phonemes and slowly adding more phonemes on. Exercises in blending and segmenting helps students gain better comprehension of the relationship that sounds have in a word (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996).

Letters can be written up using special patterns with lines that are slanted, straight and arched. There are both upper-case and lower-case letters and they each have a name and at least one sound. Young learners need to learn and remember the appearance, names and sounds of the letters. It is useful to have all sorts of letters around for them to use, touch and play with. Letters can be made using different materials and there are many ways to use them in games and other activities that help them store the names of the letters in memory. The teacher should be aware of how far the letter knowledge of each student is and decide in what way and order the letters are going to be taught (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

New letters should be introduced clearly. The teacher can start by showing the letter and telling its name and sound and having the young learners repeat after him. Then he can show how the letter is written and have the learners copy him either by moving their finger in the air or write it on a piece of paper. This should be done for a few minutes and repeated for each letter (Walpole & McKenna, 2007). Decoding can start when the young learner has gotten full control over a few letters and the sounds that goes with them. The first words should be common and short and preferably not have consonant blends, stories can be read that have those letter-sound design

repeated again and again to help memorizing them (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996). The teacher could assess how the letter-sound and letter-name knowledge is evolving so he can put more emphasis on letters that need more time and continue practicing blending and sounding out words (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

Reading comprehension needs to be actively trained with new readers. There are some main elements that instruction in reading comprehension should be based on. First, the teacher needs to be aware of what skills the students already have. Knowing how far along they are in the reading process helps when choosing the appropriate reading text, a text that they can decode and understand. It also helps to give the students some background information about what they need to know and learn. The teacher needs to use systematic approaches when he is focusing on comprehension and choose texts that are reasonably demanding and at the same time improve the reading comprehension (Torfadóttir, n.d.b). The National Reading Panel (2000) suggest that there are eight different methods that seem to be most effective to use in a classroom when teaching comprehension:

- Comprehension monitoring. Readers learn to be aware of their understanding and how to react and deal with problems that can come up.
- Cooperative learning. Students work together using comprehension strategies under guidance from the teacher.
- Graphic and semantic organizers. Readers make a visual display of the material to help with comprehension.
- Story structure. The students learn to remember what the story is about and how it is structured by asking and answering questions about it.
- Question answering. The students answers questions about the story from the teachers and get a feedback.
- Question generations. The students will ask themselves questions about the material.
- Summarization. The students will summarize the main points and make it into one whole coherent text.

- Multiple-strategy teaching. The students get to use several of the methods during reading. This is an effective way to use because the teacher can be flexible and use what goes best with the text that is being read.

The teachers should start the comprehension process with an out loud reading and then for the comprehension teaching to be effective the teacher needs to use methods where his management gradually decreases and the students initiative and confidence increases (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

## **4.2 Phonics**

The Phonics approach to reading instruction is often confused with phonemic awareness instructions, but Phonics are about print, letters and spelling or mapping of speech into print. Phonics instruction teaches children that letters and sounds go together so they can read. There are different approaches to teaching phonics to children and some are called synthetic phonics that teach children to change graphemes (smallest unit of letters that represent a single phoneme) into phonemes and then blend them together. Analytic phonics instruction is about examining letter to sound connection once the word is recognized. Phonics-through-spelling is about segmenting and writing the phonemes in word. And then phonics in context is about using the letter and sound connection together with cues from the context to recognize unfamiliar words. Finally, analogy phonics is about using parts of a written word they know to recognize new words. Organized phonics instruction should be used as a tool when teaching reading because it has been shown to be effective, it also helps avoid later reading problems (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001).

## **4.3 Scaffolding**

Another approach to beginning reading is to scaffold the material to the ability of the reader. Scaffolding is a support system for someone who is learning something new. A teacher provides scaffolding to her students by always pushing them a little further in their learning and not doing for them what they can do themselves. The teacher helps them by breaking down the work into manageable tasks or working with the reader until they can read themselves. The goal is for them to do it and stand on their own. Students need to do the work themselves if there is to be any development. This process is similar to a parent with a new baby, helping it to learn how to survive on its

own in the world (Nuttall, 1996). Scaffolding can be described as breaking down the information into blocks and then give a structure with each block. This is a good way for the teacher to build confidence with his students, those who need more guidance to complete the task will get more attention. Scaffolding when teaching reading can be discussing the text before the students read it, some knowledge of what they are about to read helps with comprehension. The teacher can also point out the main words, or have the students read a part of it and then stop to discuss it further (Alber, 2014).

#### **4.4 Whole-language reading**

This instructional approach focuses on the enjoyment of reading and gaining meaning from texts as a whole. The young learner learns to read by recognizing words as a whole piece and not by breaking them down into letters or sounds. The proponents of whole language say that learning to read for children is a natural process and that classrooms should have reading centers with interesting and entertaining books that children can explore and read, even though they cannot read yet. This in turn will motivate them to start reading (Moats, 2007). The whole language approach is not suitable for all students since for those who are beginning to learn to read, correct spelling and grammar is not considered the most important aspect of the learning process. That creates problems for some students that have reading disorders like dyslexia and if they have to rely on phonics and phonemes to help them read. The whole language approach is about getting meaning, students should make and find it in the language and in the process they will learn the correct way of the system. They create their knowledge from what they experience (Bomengen, 2010).

## **5. An Exemplary Literacy Program**

### **5.1 Tjarnarsel**

Tjarnarsel is a pre-school that has been operating since 1967. It has eighty students, ages two to six who are divided into four age groups. Language and literacy is one of the main points of emphasis in Tjarnarsel and the environment is set up to stimulate the development of language and literacy among the students. At the same time it is meant to serve as an early intervention to prevent or reduce the need for later support in schools because of reading difficulties. Through stories, songs and games the language is encouraged right from the start, students are taught to recognize their names on print and to clap the syllables. When the students get older more emphasis is put on phonological awareness, sign language and Orðaspjall (chapter 5.4). In every classroom the written language is very visible and at the same time sign language is used, each student has a sign for his name, and sign language is also used when the students choose where to play or sing for example. The students have easy access to books, they are located in every classroom and the school also has a small library for them to use. Every day the students are read to by a teacher and at other times they can look at books by themselves (Skólanámskrá Tjarnarsels, 2014).

### **5.2 Development at Tjarnarsel**

The school environment is designed to be able to work after the list of goals and guidelines that are found in the language and literacy curricula of Tjarnarsel (2014).

The main targets are to:

- get the students excited about the written and spoken language by providing the opportunity to discover it in various ways
- promote vocabulary, listening comprehension and the skill in narration
- promote phonological awareness
- promote students speaking
- introduction and teaching of the symbol and sounds of letters
- encourage students to express themselves
- learn easy lyrics and verses
- develop the skill in listening to stories
- promote active listening



- get to know and learn sign language

The teacher is expected to offer the students a loving atmosphere, and he should try to get each student motivated to play an active role in the language development, he shows them that they have a voice and listens to them. The teacher should train the students in active listening, and use every opportunity to educate and talk about their surroundings (Námskrá Tjarnarsels, 2014).

### **5.3 Ten week reading program**

The oldest age group, five to six year old in Tjarnarsel are encouraged to take part in a ten week reading and writing program. This is free of charge and completely optional. Students can choose to take part in the program and are always allowed to skip a class. This is supposed to be fun and exciting, and no student has ever chosen not to participate in the program. The teaching is done both inside and outside. There are four classes each week, and the usual schedule is that the students will spend three of those classes inside in a small comfortable classroom and then one class is spent outside in a field trip that is related to the inside classes. For example if the students were learning about the letter "B" they would go find and look at street names or other objects that they would find that have the letter B in their names to further embed it in memory.

Each class introduces a new letter, the students learn its name and the sound that goes with it. They learn and practice how to write it and then do different kinds of activities to help them fully learn how that letter functions. Each student collects each letter in an envelope, red envelope for letters that have vowel sound and green for consonants. There are endless games and activities that can be done with the students to help them learn the names and the sounds of the letters. There are many types of letters available made from all kinds of materials, students can use those to touch, draw after, play games with, sort or label things that have that letters. They can make letters out of clay or beads or bake them, the possibilities are endless. It is all about getting them involved and excited about learning. Field trips are a great addition and help strengthen the literacy and the language, there are many things in the surroundings that can be used as a teaching tool, there are many opportunities to look at the written language and learn new words. Even just sitting out in the nature and read a

book can be a positive fresh change from the class room (Námskrá Tjarnarsels, 2014. R. Sigurðardóttir, personal communication, March 31, 2016).

#### **5.4 Orðaspjall (Text talk)**

A method adapted to Icelandic pre-school children, developed in Tjarnarsel and based on a word teaching method called text talk. This method is about reading a book with the children and systematically choosing words from the book to look at further (Jónsdóttir, 2013).

More and more effort has been put in looking at and developing methods to boost the vocabulary with pre-school children. Researches show that there is a clear connection between how well they do in their first years in school and how advanced their language development is along with vocabulary and knowledge of the written language. Helping the children in this development at a young age only benefits them later in school, children at this age are at different stages regarding the language development.

Most children when they begin in first grade they all have good vocabulary knowledge, those that are behind are in danger of being left out when reading instructions begin and will face problems with reading comprehension. It has been made clear that with the right instruction and training language development with pre-school children, they can achieve great progress. Reading books is one of the most powerful ways to build vocabulary and language comprehension with children. Orðaspjall is mainly about that: Books. Teaching children about books is also an important part of the process, they will learn during reading that in books are stories made by an author in the written language. They will learn that the written language consists of words that are put together by letters that can be decoded into spoken words. This is what the method Orðaspjall aims to do, build up the language along with other developmental factors that the language development affects. And at the same time lay the important foundation for later on reading (Jónsdóttir, 2013).

##### **5.4.1 Books**

Reading books with students offers further discussions about the story where the creative and curious young minds get to have their inputs and opinions. Since most pre-school students are not literate the teacher does the reading and goes through the

words that are being focused on. After the reading the teacher will ask questions, point out the special words and use them in different context and give the students the opportunity to use them themselves. Word games are a great tool in the method, question games, acting out the words and whatever fun games the teachers can come up with to help them remember the words that they have learnt. The next step is writing the words down on little pieces of paper and put on the walls so that the students will gain more awareness of the connection of the written and spoken language. In the beginning one word from a story or a book is suitable, once both students and teachers are more experienced with how this works more words can be chosen during reading. Teachers use the words that have been collected in everyday speech so the students can see it used in diverse context. Since there is no way to teach all words that one language has this way, the words need to be chosen with diligence. With the youngest students the words that are chosen are easy and rather common, their vocabulary is still rather basic and the words are connected to what they know in their surroundings. First the teacher chooses what word he wants to teach and then he chooses the appropriate book. As students get older the words become more complex, students become more engaged with the story and the language. The words that are chosen to work with need to be words that are easily explained and possess the ability to play with further since acting out the words are a big part of the method (Jónsdóttir, 2013).

#### **5.4.2 Vocabulary**

Vocabulary instruction can be divided into three tiers in the Tjarnarsel program. The first tier contains the basic everyday words that young children will learn from interaction with the people around them. This is the vocabulary that usually builds up without direct teaching, this tier contains the part of words that teachers put emphasis on with the youngest students. The next tier, and the one that Orðaspjall is mainly focused on are the words that are not that common in everyday speech but still appear in the written language. Students learn those words incidentally through texts. The authors of the text talk method claim that this tier is where teachers should direct their attention. Every word that students will add to their vocabulary from this tier will help them with later on reading comprehension. When teachers come across words

that they believe belong to this part, they should stop and briefly explain the words to help students understand, those are most likely the words that can later define the students' writing style. The third tier has the least common and abstract words, these are the words that students will not likely come across unless reading about specific topic or academic texts. These are words that are fun to know but do not play as important role in the vocabulary development as the others that fall into the other two tiers. Orðaspjall is about getting the students excited about the words through games and other activities (Jónsdóttir, 2013).

### **5.4.3 Word games**

Word games are a big part of Orðaspjall, multiple games can be played with words in a fun and educational way. Students can play out the words and the others guess what word it is, they can draw or paint the words, connect pictures and words that go together or write them on a board. One game, spin the bottle, is when the words that the students have already learned are written on pieces of paper and laid on the floor in a circle. The bottle is then put in the middle and each student gets to spin it to have it point to one word. Depending on the student, he or she can either act out the word, explain what it means or say it out loud and clap the syllables. The teacher can also make up questions about the words in the circle and have the students answer them. For the older students that are starting to read, the teacher can take the words they have learnt that were put on the wall and have them draw one piece of paper with a word and read it out loud, the other students need to find for example an antonym or synonym for that word and the one that gets it right gets the paper. In the end the students that collected the most words is the winner.

Acting out words is a good way to play especially with the youngest students, it is easy to find words from their vocabulary to act out with them. The teacher can have the students take turns in taking one piece of paper with a word on to act out and have the others guess what it says. Another game is a question game, students can be divided into teams and need to answer questions to get points, both students and teachers can make the questions and if they get the questions right they have got the meaning of the words. The teacher can also read to the students and then have them create paintings about the story, this gives them a chance to express their

understanding and explain it to the others. Story bags are also popular. Then the teachers, sometimes with help from the students, will collect items in a bag that relate to a story and the students can look at these things while listening to the story. This makes it more real and also gives the students a chance to retell the story based on the items that they have. Bringing the stories out of the books is a good way to educate and have fun (Jónsdóttir, 2013).

Tjarnarsel emphasizes on the vocabulary development with their students. Words and letters play a big part in their daily routine and they are kept visible for the students to help them remember and learn. The many ways that the teachers use to teach the students makes them motivated to learn and take an active part in the process. Learning is made fun. Reading will most likely be a big part of the students future therefore this is a good head start for them. The bigger the vocabulary that they possess, the quicker and easier they will gain meaning during reading. Hopefully this program will discharge six year old students that are more prepared for the work ahead in their future education.

## 6. Other Reading Issues

### 6.1 Reading in a second or foreign language

Literacy is the passage into every society and is the main function in schools. Literacy in all languages, whether it is reading in the first or second language, is about developing all skills that are required to read (Baker, 2011). There are different reasons for reading in a second or foreign language. It can be used as a classroom activity or to be able to access more literature for one's own enjoyment for example. Same as with reading in first language, the reader needs to be motivated and the main goal is to obtain meaning from the text (Nuttall, 1996). Spoken languages have their own writing systems of correct spelling and pronunciation. Each language has its own rules, different language means a different system (Cain, 2010). Readers are the ones that give meaning to a text and individuals with different cultural background can comprehend texts differently. Teachers with students that have a different native language need to be aware of different cultural backgrounds and knowledge or there can be imbalance between what the school is aiming for and what the reader knows. A student might be able to read the words of another language correctly without having any idea of that those words mean (Baker, 2011).

The native language or the mother tongue is the foundation every student builds on, to be able to read and understand the reader needs to have some vocabulary knowledge of the language that is being read. Limited vocabulary will make it difficult to understand, according to researches students need to recognize and understand 98% of the words to be able to fully get the content of a textbook without any help, if that percentage goes down to 95% the students will require some help (teacher and/or dictionary) to fully understand. If the understanding of the language of the text is limited it will create problems to understand the text as a whole. Language development plays a big part in reading comprehension, systematically developing the vocabulary will have a positive effect on the reading process. The teacher should:

- choose texts with appropriate amount of words that the students do now know.
- choose texts that contain words that are important to the learning process at that time.

- Have texts that have the focus words be diverse and have those words frequent. Best would be if the student can work on projects with those words to help them remember.
- Help students learn to use skills to guess the meaning of words that they do not know.
- Have dictionaries in students native language available for them to use.

For a child that is learning a second language, a good solid vocabulary is what they need to fully get the content of what they are reading. Teachers need to be mindful of where in the learning process the students are, and what obstacles they face with a different language than the one that is used in the class-room and teach appropriately.

## **6.2 Dyslexia**

Many people experience difficulties when it comes to reading and writing, the reasons for those difficulties can vary and most of them can be explained. There are however some instances where it is harder to find explanations and those people are said to be dyslexic. Dyslexia is seen as a special problem, different or uneven harmony of skills is usually what identifies and validates the suspicion of said issue. Dyslexia alters speed and the way information is processed and for that reason it can affect the ability to read and write (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). People with dyslexia are affected in different ways, but they usually share common symptoms that can appear in different forms. Sight problems can be that the dyslexic reader changes the order of the letters in a word, the letters can even seem to be moving on the page. Bad spelling and missing of letters, words or lines during reading or writing. Hearing can also be affected by dyslexia, sounds can seem to be louder or quieter than they actually are. Hearing of sounds or words that others do not hear or even the opposite. Balance and movement can also be a problem for a dyslexic person, they can experience dizziness or nausea when reading, find it hard to sit still or have coordination problems. Attention holding and not moving takes some effort because dyslexic people can easily be distracted by everything around them (lesblind.is, n.d.). Problems with phonological processing skills is the core of this special reading disorder and for that reason the consequences are reading difficulties since good word reading requires that the reader is able to decode and manipulate sounds (Cain, 2010).

Children with dyslexia usually develop poor reading skills. This does not mean that they therefore suffer from other learning difficulties, or that they are lazy. Due to this disability that is neurobiological - they will face problems from not being able to read right and poor spelling ability follows. There are signs that can appear from an early age that indicate that a child is dyslexic. A pre-school child will show some difficulties before they learn to read or write and those can be seen when learning nursery rhymes and rhyming words. The same child can struggle to remember labels for known objects and use substitute words instead of the right word. At primary school age the child will have a notable difficulty when it comes to reading and spelling. An understanding of what was read can be somewhat missing. Remembering the alphabet or other formulas can be difficult and writing takes longer than the average since similar letters or similar written words can sometimes be confusing. Primary school students at the age of twelve years old and older with dyslexia will still be reading incorrectly and will still have difficulties when spelling words. Just planning and writing an essay can be hard. Instructions and telephone numbers need to be repeated, and using long words can be a handful for children that have dyslexia (Cain, 2010).



## 7. Conclusion

This thesis aims to show how literacy is the cornerstone to education. Reading development happens in stages and each stage is important in the process of learning (teaching reading needs to be done in certain steps to be effective). Vocabulary plays a big part in reading, therefore it needs to be developed at a young age. Books and other activities are - a great tool to help children gain a bigger vocabulary. Books are a great learning field, children that are read to from young age will gain more comprehension, vocabulary knowledge and their minds become more creative and open with diverse stories. In pre-school, children are at the age where language development is valuable and important, it is the foundation for all further education in schools.

Children need environment that encourages their language learning. Parents could read to their children from a very young age and make sure that there are books around for them to look at and get used to. Parents are role models for their children, how they use books and the language is what influences their children. It is not enough that the teacher makes the children read during class, parents need to play an active role in their learning process.

Through the process of writing this thesis I have realized that as a pre-school teacher, I am able to play an important role for my students. I am more aware of the circumstances where I can apply the correct and appropriate teaching methods, whether it is to help them with language development or help them learn to read. Every student has different needs and the methods need to be used accordingly whether it is to fit the age of the child, use of a second language or a child with a special problem. Every opportunity should be taken to teach and make teaching fun and be creative with the young minds. Teachers need to have patience, ambition and be interested in what they are doing.

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