

support the development of their second language proficiency in general.

The second study, by Amer (1997), looked at the effect of the teacher's reading aloud on the reading comprehension of EFL students. The authors point out that reading aloud by the teacher is often discouraged in EFL methodology. They argue that it can be very important at the beginning stages of L2 learning in particular as it can help the pupils to focus on units of meaning rather than on surface details and word-for-word type strategies. The results of the study suggest that there is support for their argument. It is interesting to note in this context, that in the NCCA (2008) curriculum review of the teaching of Irish in primary schools, that reading aloud by the teacher or other pupils was the strategy most frequently cited by teachers to foster a reading culture in their classes. The results of the Amer (1997) study support reading aloud by the teacher but doesn't mention reading aloud by other pupils. The scale of the study, however, is not broad enough to make a general recommendation for the use of a reading aloud strategy for developing pupils' reading comprehension skills in Irish.

## **Reading aloud and reading strategies**

One way, according to a small-scale research study (Amer, 1997), that teachers can help students' L2 reading comprehension is for the teacher to read texts aloud. The students follow the text as the teacher reads it. This helps the students to focus on larger units of meaning in the text rather than depending on word by word decoding. This in turn can help the reader to build on larger meaningful segments rather than depending on graphic cues. The correct pronunciation, stress and intonation by the teacher also aid this process.

Skilled readers draw on a combination of top-down interpretation strategies and bottom-up recognition skills as they read. Students do not always transfer their L1 reading strategies to their reading in the L2. They tend to over-rely on bottom-up strategies such as reading a text word by word and looking up unknown vocabulary items in a dictionary. It may be necessary to specifically teach reading strategies so that students can use a

combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches where they are enabled to combine textual information with the information the reader brings to a text. Reading has been conceptualised as a bi-directional interactive process that concerns both the reader and the text.

The approach to reading in many second language programmes is to use short texts, often only a few sentences long, to expose students to vocabulary and short phrases already presented orally. Many writers suggest that developing L2 literacy skills can help to increase proficiency in the L2 and also lead to increased motivation. One of the keys to improving L2 literacy skills is to provide students opportunities to read extended texts and to teach reading strategies to pupils.

Some research suggests that L2 reading strategies need to be explicitly taught as it cannot be assumed that they will automatically transfer from the pupils' L1. Thus it is not enough merely to expose students to L2 reading material. One such study with 10-11 year-old French L2 learners in England (Macaro, 2009) used a text that was originally written in English and some of the words were replaced with their French equivalents which was the students' L2. The purpose of this was to encourage the pupils to infer the meaning of the new word from the context and the surrounding text in their L1 and to discourage them from using word by word strategies. The percentage of French words was 18% in the first chapter of the book and was increased slightly for each subsequent session, 22% in the second chapter etc. The researchers found that this group significantly outperformed two comparison groups in terms of inferring the meaning of new words in sentences where there was sufficient information for them to make a good guess. They also achieved higher scores in tests for the identification of high-frequency function words. Examples of equivalent function words in English to those in the test would be: *then, in, on, the, enough, a, very, with* etc. The researchers concluded that text-based work has a place in the primary second language curriculum.

The third study is that of Drew (2009) who examined the effectiveness of the Early Years Literacy Programme (EYLP) with third and fourth grade EFL pupils in Norway. The EYLP is a programme developed in Australia to boost L1 reading. In an extensive reading programme pupils are exposed to large amounts of reading texts to introduce high frequency words and to improve reading fluency. They engage in regular reading at home and at school where they are taught by teachers with expert knowledge, who monitor and assess their progress systematically. The classes are