

Case Study 4.1: Mrs Mogale's English class

Mrs Mogale is teaching Grade 1 in a school in the urban township of Soweto. English has been chosen as the medium instruction because the class is made up of children from many different home language groups. Most of the children have some familiarity with English from advertising boards, packaging and television. However, it is still an additional language to most of them.

Mrs Mogale teaches them a rhyme. She read the poem aloud once and then asked two children to come to the front and act the parts. Once the children were familiar with the rhythm of the rhyme, she writes it on the board:

A fat cat sat on the mat.
The fat cat saw a rat.
The fat cat jumped for the rat.
The rat ran away.

She uses the letters, sounds and syllables approach to help them read the first few words.

Pointing to the 'c', she asks what sound it makes. Working with one child who raises their hand, she asks them to sound out the rest of the word: 'C-a-t, cat'. Then she moves on to the next word, asking one child to sound it out and say it: 'F-a-t, fat'. She then asks if anyone can tell her what the next word says. A child volunteers: 'Sat'. She then points to 'mat' and 'rat', and different children read the words. She asks the class what is the same about these words, writing them in a column on the board, one under the other. Children respond that they all end with '-at'.

She points to the word 'saw' and helps them to sound it out ('s-aw'), and asks someone to mime its meaning. She points to the word 'jumped' and claps its sounds ('j-u-m-p-ed'), and asks someone to mime its meaning.

Mrs Mogale then reads the rhyme with the whole class, in chorus. They do this a few times. Now she asks two children to dramatise the rhyme while a volunteer recites it. One plays the part of the cat, the other the rat. In this way the able readers get the chance to read it on their own. She allows several pairs of children to do this.

Mrs Mogale has placed letter cards in packets. Some of the letters are single letters ('b', 'c', 'f', 'h', 'm', 'p', 'r', 's'), and one card has 'at' on it. She asks the children to work in pairs. They take it in turns to draw out a letter and put it in front of 'at'. The person drawing out the letter reads the word and then puts the letter back. The other partner has a turn. When they have been playing this game for 5 minutes, she lets one pair show the class how they do it.

After the lesson, she makes a wall chart for the word family of 'at'.