

Beating educational inequality with an integrated reading pedagogy

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The Pitjantjatjara experience

In the 1980s a great social movement was sweeping remote Indigenous communities in Australia, in which families were leaving the government settlements and missions of the assimilation era, and taking their children home to their ancestral lands. As part of this 'homelands movement', I worked for many years for the Pitjantjatjara people of central Australia. To be able to work for such a great ideal was an honour and an inspiration, as well as a steep educational experience, learning how to interact in a very different culture, to speak a different language, and to raise a family in the harsh conditions of desert living and working. But I was fortunate to have some of the greatest teachers and role models anyone could hope for, the Pitjantjatjara elders who were the leaders of the homelands movement.

Sounds idyllic, doesn't it? But cast across this bright picture, of a great future in the making, was a terrifying dark shadow. The entire teenage generation of Pitjantjatjara children were destroying themselves in an orgy of petrol sniffing. To give an idea of how awful that was, it was not just the constant stink of petrol fumes that gangs of children inhaled from tin cans held permanently to their faces, or the ghoulish, often violent behaviour the drug induced, but the lead in the petrol was stripping their neurones, turning intelligent children into cripples, and killing them one by one. In some communities 80% of children from 12 to 20 were sniffing petrol all their waking hours, living in appalling squalor, terrorising their families, and demolishing the houses and infrastructure of their communities. Within my first year there I quit my job in community development and went to work voluntarily for the only people doing anything serious about this crisis, the elders who had adopted my family in the Pitjantjatjara kinship system, Nganyintja and Charlie Ilyatjari.

Together with other community leaders, Nganyintja and Charlie saw education as the long term solution for this disaster, and took every opportunity to demand a decent school education for their children. Working on their cultural and training programme with those young people, two things were depressingly clear: none of them had more than a smattering of literacy in either Pitjantjatjara or English, and whatever education they had received had given them none of the resources they needed to cope with the changes their communities were going through, to help them construct secure identities that could handle those changes. The oblivion that petrol sniffing afforded was their way out of the confusion and lack of self-esteem that a lack of useful education had left them with.

Now all of these children had attended the state schools in their communities until at least year six, in which the main teaching focus was a Pitjantjatjara language curriculum, that was supposed to bridge them into school literacy, at the same time as it helped maintain their culture, but patently achieved neither (Japangardi-Poulson 1988, Lester 1993, Rose 1992). Some children attended sporadically, particularly as

they got older, but most had sat in classrooms for many hundreds of hours through their childhood years, yet had apparently learnt very little, about reading, writing, numeracy, or any of the curriculum content we normally expect from primary school. How could this be, given that their teachers were trained professionals, often with specific skills in ESL and literacy in the early years?

Part of the answer was given by research such as Folds (1987) who showed that class time in Aboriginal community schools was overwhelmingly taken up with procedures, behaviour management and busywork, leaving little time for actual learning activities. The reasons for this imbalance in classroom time were partly explained by Malcolm (1991), who recorded the dysfunctional communication that is typical in Aboriginal community schools when teachers use the standard patterns of asking questions. Malcolm and others thus assumed that asking questions is a non-Aboriginal practice, that Aboriginal children reject. But this conclusion is wide of the mark: questions are a part of interactions between teachers and learners in Indigenous Australian cultures as much as in any other culture. The critical issue is whether learners can answer the questions successfully. In classrooms the world over, teachers continually ask questions that some students can answer but not others. We then use the responses of successful students as stepping stones in the progress of our lessons (Alexander 2000, Gibbons 2002, Nassaji & Wells 2000, Rose 2004). What happens then in classrooms where no student is able or willing to give the answers we are after? That is the situation that Malcolm and others have observed, and which forces teachers to resort to activities that have little or no learning value, as Folds observed, but which avoid the behaviour problems that result from communication failure in the classroom.

Certainly there was a problem with the standard question-response-feedback pattern of classroom interaction, but the problem was not so much with teachers asking questions, but with the children's inability to respond successfully. So why couldn't these Aboriginal children give the responses their teachers' needed? One factor that was starkly apparent was that none of them could read at anything like the levels needed to engage with the primary school curriculum. In 1998 my colleagues Brian Gray, Wendy Cowey and I formally tested all the children who were present in the community schools of the Pitjantjatjara region. We found that no children were able to read independently before the end of Year 3. By the end of primary only a handful could read more than basal picture books, and those that could did not understand one in every five words - they could not understand what they were reading. In the urban high school program these children attended, few had more than junior primary level reading skills despite years of intensive one-on-one support, including ESL specialists (Rose, Gray and Cowey 1999).

Whatever other problems were hampering the education of these children, their inability to read the school curriculum was clearly an overwhelming stumbling block. Consequently Gray, Cowey and I made this the focus of our intervention project *Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children in School*, using reading strategies developed in the Schools and Community Centre in Canberra University, together with the genre based approach to writing developed by Joan Rothery, Jim Martin and colleagues, with the NSW Disadvantaged Schools Program and Sydney University (Christie and Martin 1997, Rose 2008).

By the end of the project's first year the teachers we worked with had all the high school students and many of the primary students reading at age appropriate levels (McRae et al 2000, Gray, Rose & Cowey 1998). We were able to achieve these results in one year, in just 2 or 3 lessons a week, at the same time as the teachers were figuring out how to make it work. This rapid improvement begs the question of why these children had previously remained so far behind their non-Aboriginal peers, through year after year of their schooling. One simple and unavoidable answer is that they had not been taught to read. Yet their teachers had all had the same training and professional skills as any teacher in an urban school. Their early years teachers knew the same strategies of alphabet and phonics drills, memorising 'sight words', shared, guided and individual reading, levelled reading books, letter formation, handwriting and story writing, that seemed to work, at least for the majority of urban students.

The key difference with the Pitjantjatjara children was not just that a non-English language was spoken in the home, since a high proportion of other Australian children also come from non-English speaking families, but that there was no parent-child reading in the home. International research has shown that children in literate families spend up to 1000 hours reading with their parents before they start school (Adams 1990). Could it be that the reading strategies their early years teachers were trained in simply did not work with children who had no experience of parent-child reading in the home?

Parent-child reading gives children an orientation to written ways of meaning, and equally importantly, to the talk around text that parents and children share. This experience provides an essential foundation to the reading and interaction practices of the early years classroom. The early years literacy strategies above (most of which have been used by teachers literally for centuries) build on this orientation to meaning and interaction, so that children with this home experience rapidly learn to read independently. They can then benefit from the common practice known as individual silent reading activity, in which children choose books to read, and the teacher circulates and listens to them read aloud.

However the consequences of this activity for some of the Pitjantjatjara children who had not learnt to read were heartbreaking to see. Through the 'sight word' strategy the children would memorise a small set of common words that they could recognise. When the teacher listened to them read a book they would say these words and stop when they got to a word they didn't know, often looking up to the teacher for help. The teacher would tell them the word, which they memorised in the sequence of the sentence. After repeating this procedure several times, they would memorise most or all of the words in a simple picture book, and appear to be reading. In an astounding feat of innovation, they invented their own version of reading, and could take years to learn otherwise.

2. The reading curriculum

But of course it is not only Indigenous Australian children who suffer such problems with reading in the school. The success achieved by the *Scaffolding Reading and Writing* project soon led to intense national interest, so that over the subsequent decade the program has continually expanded with education programs at all levels and all sectors, across Australia and internationally (Rose 2008, www.readingtolearn.com.au). What immediately became apparent in these wider

contexts is that a significant proportion of students in mainstream classrooms have similar problems to the Pitjantjatjara children, and further, that many more students in all classrooms have some degree of difficulty with the reading and writing required to succeed at their education level. Despite the best efforts of junior primary teachers to provide all children with reading skills, the gap between the most and least successful students continues to widen throughout the primary and secondary years.

Children arrive at school with very different home experiences. A minority will have had the intensive experience with reading that tertiary educated parents can give them, another large group will have had some experience with parent-child reading, but often with less talk around text that prepares others for classroom learning, while another group will have had little or no experience of reading in the home. In a large scale study, Williams (1999) showed consistent differences between the way that tertiary educated and other parents read with their children, even where they spend the same amount of time doing so. From the first day of school, all children are evaluated on a hierarchy of learning 'abilities', that are framed in psychological terms, but are largely attributable to their experience of literacy in the home.

By the end of Year 2, children who were well prepared by their home experience are usually independently reading with understanding and engagement, while other children have acquired lesser reading skills to varying degrees. The independent readers are then ready to start developing the key skill they will need in the upper primary; that is learning from reading. Now for young children, reading could appear a very strange form of communication, where the other person with whom we speak, laugh, and generally interact is replaced by an inert object, a book that is supposed to speak to us. Likewise in learning from reading, the person who teaches us, by modelling, explaining, guiding, and praising our efforts, is replaced by an inert printed monologue that provides information or instructions.

Thus the indispensable foundation for being able to learn from reading, is to be already engaged with reading as a meaningful form of communication. But after the early years, explicit teaching of reading falls away; the focus of teaching is now more on learning the content of the curriculum, and less on the skills needed to read it. Nevertheless, almost all of the content learning activities in the middle and upper primary involve or are associated with reading. Teachers guide their students through learning the content of their lessons, using a variety of media, but particularly printed text. This guidance enables students who are experienced readers to rapidly develop their skills in learning from reading, but children who are less experienced readers develop these skills more slowly, and will therefore be evaluated as less able learners.

By the end of primary school it is crucial to be independently learning from reading, because reading is the core mode of learning in the high school. Classroom lessons in high school prepare students for the reading based tasks they are expected to do on their own, particularly as homework, and the lessons that follow then build on what students have learnt from their reading and associated tasks. Although the overt curriculum focus is on the content that students are expected to learn, the curriculum content is actually secondary to the underlying development of reading and writing skills. Reading and writing across the curriculum over six years of high school gives students a wealth of experience in recognising, understanding, and using the language patterns of the written genres of formal education. This experience provides the

foundation for the independent learning that will be required of the top twenty percent of students when they get to university. As the teaching of reading, and how to learn from reading, is rarely an explicit part of the high school curriculum, students can only acquire these skills intuitively. To do so, they need the preparation that only those students get from primary school who have been well prepared in the home. For other students, their less adequate preparation for learning from reading in the primary school means that they will be less able to learn independently in the high school, will achieve less well in their written assessments, and will finish high school with lower grades.

3. The source of inequality

This system of unequal outcomes evolved in an economic context that demanded a small proportion of university trained professionals, a larger group of vocationally trained tradespeople, and a much larger proportion of workers with no further education beyond school. In Australia today these proportions of education outcomes are roughly 20:30:50 percent, and have changed only slightly for at least the past two generations (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994, 2004, Rose 2004, 2005). For teachers these proportions are very familiar: they correspond broadly to the proportions of students in the top, average, and lower ‘ability’ groups in their classes, varying with the socio-economic status of the community the school serves.

It seems hardly fair that the degree of preparation that children get in the home largely determines their position on the hierarchy of success throughout their years in school, and beyond. How is it that apparently the same teaching practices and curriculum contents produce such different outcomes for different students? I have come to believe that the answer lies with the way that school dislocates the elements of learning tasks, particularly the tasks of reading and writing, and teaches them segmentally or implicitly. Students who have been adequately prepared by preceding stages in their schooling are able to intuitively recognise relations between the dislocated elements, to synthesise them as meaningful wholes, and so develop the skills they need for learning at each stage. At the same time, students who are less well prepared may take longer to recognise the relationships, and so take longer to develop the skills they need.

This problem can be illustrated with the literacy practices of the early years, which address many of the dimensions of the tasks of reading and writing, but in separate segments of the school program, using different texts, sentences, words, sounds and letters. To appreciate why this is a problem for some students, we need to recognise the complexity of the reading and writing task, which derives from the immense complexity of language in general. For example language operates at three levels simultaneously: patterns of meanings in texts, or discourse, that are realised as patterns of wordings in sentences, or grammar, that are realised as patterns of letters or sounds within words. To be able to understand a text, or to write one coherently, we must be able to process all these patterns of patterns of patterns simultaneously and automatically. If we are struggling in any one of these dimensions, then our capacity for processing all the others will be severely reduced.

So to teach this complexity, it must be broken down into manageable chunks and sequenced in the curriculum. In the early years this is done at the level of sound and letter patterns with alphabet and phonics activities; at the word level with ‘sight word’

activities; at the level of sentences, and word groups within sentences, with basal picture books that present one sentence or word group to a page; at the level of paragraphs with group reading, in which children may take turns to read each paragraph in a book; and at the level of whole texts with shared book reading, in which the teacher reads and talks through a story with the class, and with individual reading in which children choose their own books. All of these activities have been used for centuries for teaching reading, and always in some combination. The so-called literacy wars between phonics and the whole word or whole language methods is a phony war; all teachers employ a more or less 'balanced approach' using a variety of strategies. But the rate at which children develop reading skills from such a balanced approach varies with their experience of reading in the home.

Children with the 1000 hours of reading and talking around text are already thoroughly prepared to understand each component of the reading task that the early years activities teach, and rapidly develop as independent readers. Children with less home reading experience have less preparation to synthesise these components, and so develop more slowly. The defining example are children with no home reading experience, such as the Pitjantjatjara children who take three or more years to read independently, from exactly the same activities, and no amount of phonics, phonemic awareness, sight word, or basal reader activities has any significant impact on this learning rate.

This has nothing to do with 'intelligence' or any other psychometric measures of learning 'ability', otherwise we would have to conclude that the smartest Pitjantjatjara children are vastly less 'intelligent' or 'able' than the average urban middle-class child. Rather it is explained by the stratified nature of language, in which lower level parts are comprehended in the context of higher level wholes. At the lowest level, sounds and letters have no meaning, they are literally meaningless, except in the context of words that we know; but individual words only occur in the context of word groups and sentences; and each sentence is only comprehensible in the context of a whole text. In order to understand the lower level parts of language, one must understand the higher level contexts in which they occur. For young children this higher level understanding is provided by parent-child reading in the home.

In the early years classroom it is shared book reading that provides such understanding, very much like parent-child reading. This is amply demonstrated in Aboriginal community schools, where early years teachers, who are typically monolingual in English, regularly enable children who have very little English, to understand and say all the words in a big book, after a week or two of shared book reading. Moreover the children are typically thoroughly engaged in the story and the reading activity, by means of the warm affirming relationship with the teacher. This amazing success should form a strong foundation for them to learn to read the book themselves, but rarely does. Instead the early years literacy activities, through which they are meant to learn to read, are typically conducted with other texts, other words, other sounds and letter patterns; the lower level parts of language are dislocated from the meaningful, engaging activity of shared reading, and taught as they always have been, as discrete elements of the school curriculum program, which such children experience as disconnected segments. Thus children who participate eagerly and intelligently in shared book reading, and experience it as a meaningful communicative

activity, can come to perceive reading individually as a meaningless activity of memorising strings of words in a basal picture book.

In the upper primary and high school years we can see a comparable dislocating of elements of learning tasks, but to interpret the nature of this dislocation we need to distinguish four dimensions in the social contexts of texts: the overall social purpose of the text, or genre; its subject matter, or field; the social relations it enacts, or tenor; and the roles that language plays in realising its genre, field and tenor (Martin and Rose 2003/2007, 2008).

In the primary school, beyond the early years, the focus of teaching is on the fields of the curriculum, and on the tenor of relationships between teacher and children, and between children. But there is a dislocation between the contents of the curriculum and the roles of language in learning those contents, particularly the role of reading. As writing is the mode in which learning is evaluated, there is some explicit focus on teaching writing, and during the last decade in Australia, on the written genres of the primary school. But the skills that children need to learn the curriculum content, through reading, are less explicitly taught. Although whole class and group reading are common primary school practices, they are primarily focused on story reading. As they do not explicitly teach the skills that all students need, they leave different students with different levels of reading skills. Accordingly, classes are often divided into 'reading groups' according to children's assessed abilities: better readers get more challenging books to read together, others get simpler books, ensuring that they will rarely catch up to the higher reading groups.

These reading activities are conducted in separate programme segments from other activities focused on curriculum contents. As the whole class needs to learn the same contents, we may not expect the same hierarchical divisions as in story reading. Nevertheless, rather than teaching all students to read the same texts, reading materials at different levels are now being produced across primary subject areas, for students with different reading skills. As skills in learning from reading are not explicitly taught in content focused activities, whether hierarchically divided or not, the better readers are naturally able to develop them more effectively than the weaker readers. The dislocation of reading instruction from curriculum content is then cemented in the high school, where there is much less explicit teaching of either reading or writing, despite the increasing importance and complexity of these skills from junior through to senior secondary. If the foundation for these skills has not been adequately laid in the primary, students thus have little chance of developing them in high school, and are thus doomed by the system to limited achievement.

4. Overcoming inequality

If the problem of unequal outcomes lies with the dislocation and segmentation of learning tasks, as I have suggested, then the solution would seem to lie with re-integrating these elements within an explicit wholistic pedagogy. This is the approach we have taken over the past decade in developing the methodology now known as *Reading to Learn*.

In the early years this means integrating the activities that address each dimension of the reading and writing task into a unified pedagogic sequence. The starting point for this sequence is at the top of the language task, with shared book reading, as early

years teachers so often use this activity brilliantly to engage children with reading, and provide the platform of understanding that is necessary to learn lower level skills. The next step is to enable children to recognise the written words that they have learnt to say aloud in the shared reading story. This is done by showing them how to point at each word in a familiar sentence from the story as they say them aloud, supported by the sequence of words, as well as their written forms. Once they can accurately point and say the words, various activities of cutting up and re-ordering the sentence (rewritten onto cardboard strips) are used to cement the children's recognition of both words and word groups, until they can accurately identify all its words in and out of the sentence.

This approach contrasts with the 'sight word' or 'whole word' activity traditionally used for word recognition, in which children may have weekly lists of decontextualised words to memorise, which they are then expected to recognise in books and use in their writing. The words used for memorising are often grammatical words – articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, and so on - which are only meaningful when used together with content words in a sentence (i.e. lexical words). On their own grammatical words are meaningless, making them harder to memorise than lexical words, especially for children with minimal reading experience.

Once children can accurately recognise the words in a sentence from the story, the next step is to cut up individual words into their letter patterns. Children are shown how to identify syllables in multisyllabic words, and then the initial consonants, or Onset of each syllable, and the remainder, or Rhyme of the syllable. As they say each letter pattern aloud, they learn to associate letter patterns and sounds, but in the context of words they already know and can say, from sentences they are familiar with. They then practise writing each letter pattern, and putting them together in whole words, on small white or blackboards.

This activity simultaneously addresses letter-sound correspondences, letter formation, handwriting and spelling. It can be contrasted with activities such as phonics programs that begin like the sight word activity, not with known words from familiar texts, but with decontextualised letters and digraphs, which children learn to say out of context, then put together into decontextualised words. Traditional letter formation, handwriting and spelling activities likewise use decontextualised letters and spelling words that are selected on the basis of lower level patterns rather than higher level meanings in familiar texts.

Once children can accurately write all the lexical or content words in a sentence, they are shown how to write the whole sentence they have been reading, at which point they practise writing the grammatical words that accompany the lexical words in the sentence. The same sequence is then repeated for the next sentences in the shared reading book, until children can independently write whole paragraphs of meaningful complex text.

This approach may be compared with learning to play a musical instrument, in which learners begin by practising tunes written by accomplished musicians, before they begin to improvise or compose their own. Here children learn the foundation skills in writing, by practising with a text written by an accomplished author. It is only when

they have mastered all these dimensions of the reading and writing task, that they begin writing stories of their own, and then only after the story writing process has been carefully guided by their teacher with the whole class, closely modelled on the stories they have learnt to read. This contrasts with the widely used activity of writing from personal experience, often called journal or process writing, which is supposed to encourage children to start writing about familiar topics without requiring explicit teaching. For children with little home reading experience, the complexity of the writing task makes this activity merely discouraging, particularly for Indigenous children who typically produce short repetitive recounts throughout their primary school years, using the few words they know how to write accurately, to avoid being corrected by the teacher.

These techniques are easy to learn and easy to train teachers to use. For example, the *Reading to Learn* programme provides Indigenous and other teaching assistants with one day's training in the early years strategies. They then go into the classroom to practise with children who have may not have learnt to read independently in three or more years of schooling, and are often diagnosed with a lack of alphabet or phonemic knowledge, or with learning disabilities. In less than one hour the teachers always have these children accurately reading sentences from shared reading books, as well as accurately spelling, forming letters and writing whole sentences. These strategies are plainly more effective than the centuries old activities that are currently used (whatever names they may be rebadged and sold with), because they integrate and contextualise each task within higher levels of meaning. In schools undertaking *Reading to Learn* training, children in kindergarten to Year 2, whose reading and writing has been assessed as well below the standard for their age, or at risk, consistently achieve at age appropriate levels within two to three terms. Children who began at average levels consistently achieve above the average for their age. As a result, large scale training programs are now being conducted in Australia, as well as by aid agencies in east Africa and central Asia.

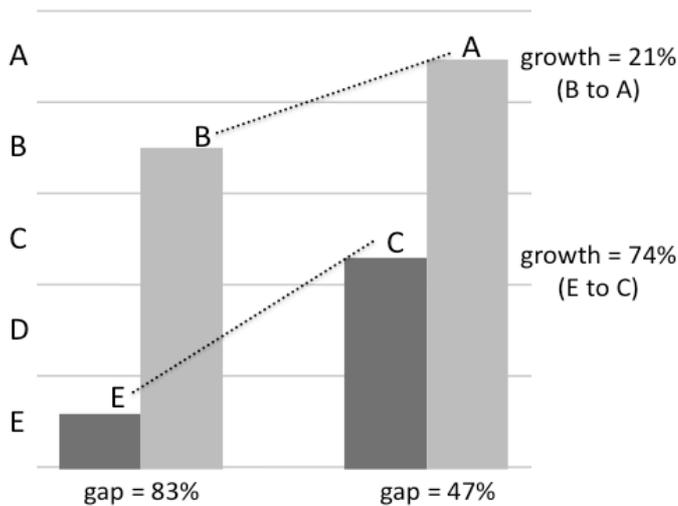
In the middle to upper primary and high school, re-integrating the learning task is more complex for several reasons. Firstly, teachers are often under pressure to cover a crowded curriculum in their lessons, particularly where their students do not have the reading skills to study independently. The curriculum thus appears to discourage them from taking time to teach the skills that students need to learn it. Secondly, the texts that students need to read and write are increasingly complex from year to year, and few teachers have the training in text analysis that is needed to analyse the language in these texts, in order to teach their students how to read and write it. Thirdly, all teachers are constrained by the wide range of so-called 'ability' levels in their classes. How can they advance the achievement of all their students, if they spend too much time on the literacy needs of their lower achievers, that should have been met in previous years?

To address these issues, *Reading to Learn* uses highly designed activities known as Detailed Reading and Joint Rewriting. In Detailed Reading, key passages from curriculum texts are selected, that may challenge even the top students, and the teacher guides the whole class to recognise and understand the word groups in each sentence of the passage. Students highlight the wordings as they identify them, and their understanding is then deepened by defining, explaining, or discussing their meaning. This highly explicit technique enables all students to read the passage with

complete understanding, and to recognise the language choices the author made in writing it. It is integrated with curriculum teaching as it deepens students' understanding of the topic they are studying, accelerating the learning of all students, at the same time as it narrows the gap between higher and lower achievers. In Joint Rewriting, the teacher then guides the class to write a new text that is patterned closely on the reading passage, using either its field content for factual texts, or its language patterns for stories and arguments. This technique cements the comprehension and language recognition skills provided by Detailed Reading, and explicitly shows students how to borrow the language resources of accomplished authors into their own writing, as all successful writers do. Detailed Reading and Rewriting are used on short text passages, but they are used in combination with strategies that prepare students for reading whole curriculum texts, and guide them to write whole texts. As they take just one or two half hour lessons for each passage, and focus on curriculum topics, they can be readily integrated with crowded primary and secondary programs. If this is done regularly, all students develop the skills they need for independent study within two or three school terms, allowing teachers to accelerate the pace of curriculum coverage.

As these strategies involve interacting systematically with all students in a class, around the language in a complex text, they are initially difficult to use, and always require very careful planning. To this end the *Reading to Learn* professional learning program trains teachers in the educational linguistics they need to select appropriate texts in their curriculum, and to analyse them closely, to plan Detailed Reading lessons. This linguistic training also contributes to teachers' capacity for guiding students systematically in writing activities, and in analysing their students' language resources in writing assessment. To date several thousand teachers have been trained across Australia and internationally.

As in the early years, their students' results are consistently double to more than four times the learning rates expected with standard current teaching practices (Culican 2006). Chart 1 shows writing improvements for the 2008 training program, involving around 90 schools in NSW. Results are averaged across Year 1 to Year 8. Writing assessments (see Rose et al 2008) were conducted before and after two or three terms of classroom implementation. They are grouped in A-E grades used in Australian schools, in which a C grading is considered the acceptable standard. The chart compares growth rates of the top and bottom groups, and the gap between these groups before and after the program. The top groups' growth, from C to A levels, is equivalent to over a year of expected growth. The bottom groups' growth from E to C levels is equivalent to three years expected growth. The gap between them has almost halved.

Chart 1: Averaged writing results 2008**Conclusion**

Through the *Reading to Learn* program, teachers are consistently showing that there is no need to accept the grossly unequal outcomes that have plagued education systems for so long, and disadvantaged so many children, particularly those from Indigenous backgrounds. Using the techniques outlined here, early years teachers are showing that there is no reason why all children cannot be independently reading, and successfully writing whole texts, within their first year of schooling, and so be thoroughly prepared for learning from reading in the years that follow. Likewise, upper primary and secondary teachers are showing that they can teach all their students the skills they need to learn the curriculum independently, at the same time as they are teaching that curriculum in the classroom.

The principle for making this possible is integration of the skills required for school learning, of both language and its contexts. Effective integration does not mean a hands-off approach that leaves children to try and construct their own learning. Rather it can only be built on systematic analysis of the nature of learning tasks in school, and careful design of teaching activities that will enable all students to achieve them. As these tasks always involve language, these analyses can only be built on a systematic understanding of the language task. With these tools it is possible to imagine an education system designed to serve a democratic society, with social equality as its guiding ideal.

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