Closing the gap and accelerating learning in the Middle Years of Schooling

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Abstract

This paper describes an innovative literacy program that is achieving remarkable success in closing the gap between successful and 'at risk' students in the Middle Years of schooling (Yrs 5-9), at the same time as it accelerates the learning of all students, regardless of their starting points. The program, known as *Learning to Read:Reading to Learn*, has been implemented over three years with over 1000 students, as part of a Middle Years professional learning project of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM). Results include average literacy gains at twice expected rates of development and up to four times expected rates, when implemented during a few lessons per week with whole classes. A major advantage of the program for Middle Years practice is that it integrates teaching of high level skills in reading and writing with normal classroom programs across the curriculum.

The Middle Years of Schooling

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)* recognise the Middle Years as a distinct stage of learning where students' literacy and numeracy becomes more sophisticated, and important discipline-based and interdisciplinary capacities are progressively introduced, building breadth and depth (VCAA, 2005).

Research into the Middle Years of schooling in Australia (ACSA, 1996, Barratt, 1998, DET, 2001) has emphasised that the period of early adolescence in Years 5-9 represents a critical phase of development in students' lives. It is well documented that this is a period of rapid physical, emotional and intellectual development. Students must juggle the demands of schooling while simultaneously establishing their own identity and place in the world. Research has now confirmed what has been common knowledge to those in the field, that while responding to these new challenges, students' engagement in learning and satisfaction with schooling may suffer a decline. This is especially relevant to students with low levels of achievement in literacy that have been shown to be those most 'at risk' of not completing schooling (Hill et al.,1993).

In relation to student progress in literacy The Victorian Quality Schools Project, a longitudinal study of school and teacher effectiveness found that:
- students make the most progress in learning during the early years and the least progress during the early adolescent years
- the gap between the top and bottom 10 per cent of students grows rapidly
- transition problems (primary to secondary) are most severe for low achieving students
- there is a significant underachievement problem among young adolescent boys (Hill & Russell, 1999).

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Some key implications for teaching and learning in the Middle Years of schooling have emerged from this research and provide the context for effective literacy pedagogy. There needs to be a more in depth exploration of the links between literacy and learning in Years 5 -9. Account must be taken of the higher volume of factual texts and an increased use of text books in the Middle Years at the same time as curriculum specialisation occurs. The increased emphasis on factual texts requires an understanding of how knowledge is constructed differently within the discipline areas, that is, an understanding of Curriculum Literacies (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003). This differentiation and specialisation requires the explicit teaching of literacy by teachers in all subject areas.

The development of literacy pedagogy responsive to the specific needs of middle years learners requires an understanding of research into the areas of the adolescent learner, Middle Years pedagogy and literacy. The recent report about the literacy and numeracy development of target group students in the Middle Years of schooling in Australia, *Beyond the Middle* emphasises the importance of 'mainstreaming' approaches to literacy in Years 5-9 and in relation to professional learning it states that "a strong multi-partner professional learning focus on middle years curriculum and pedagogy is required. One that engages teachers, researchers, consultants and teacher-educators in working together and training each other in school and cluster-based activities, teacher moderation of standards of student work, staff exchanges, and within classroom modelling activities" (Luke et al., 2003). Consequently, the challenge for the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) was to create a new system wide model of teacher professional learning that would lead teachers into this previously unchartered area of sustained, cross sectorial change in student and teacher learning for literacy development.

The Middle Years Literacy Project

The Middle years Literacy Project designed by the CEOM aims to create new learning communities to support schools in improving literacy teaching and learning in the Middle Years (5-9) and to promote continuity of literacy education in the transition from primary to secondary schooling. In order to bridge the traditional primary/secondary divide, the professional learning model is that of an ongoing project operating at multiple sites. After the initial off-site professional learning workshops, the project is driven by Professional Action Learning Teams (PALTs) at the cluster and school levels, as shown in Figure 1.
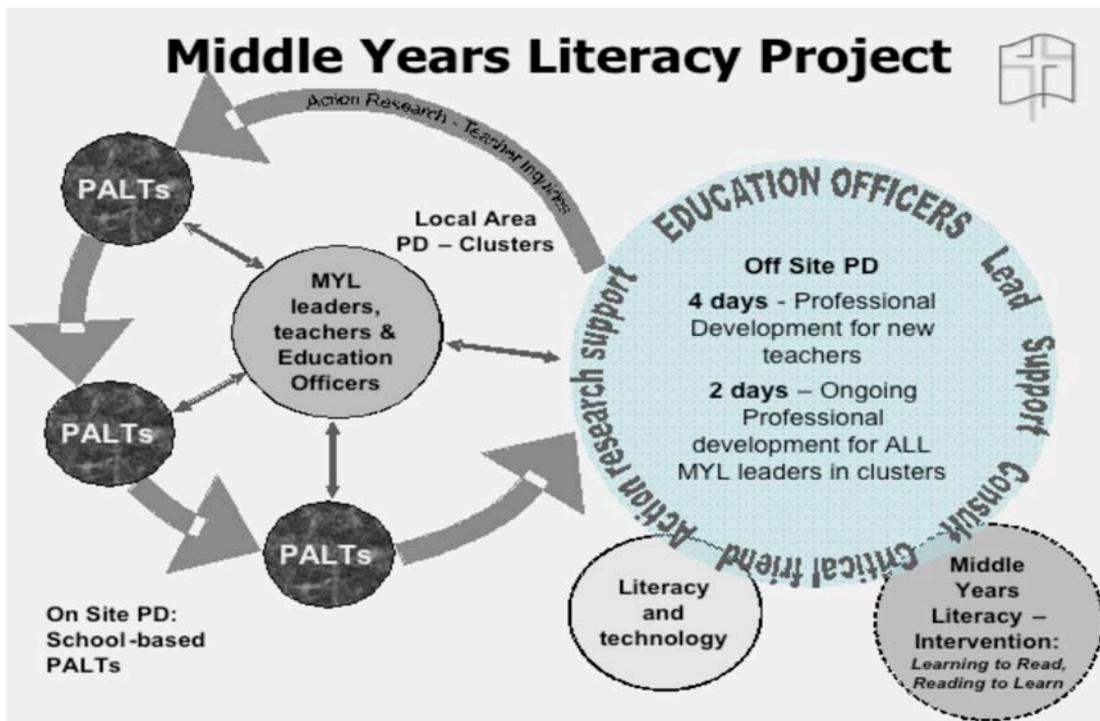
Figure 1: CEOM Middle Years Literacy Project

New Learning Communities

The Middle Years Literacy Project comprises multiple layers of professional learning. These layers include the Off-site Professional Learning Program, local Area Professional Learning Clusters and School-based Professional Action Learning Teams. Each layer represents a learning community, connected and interacting with others to initiate, guide and critically evaluate professional practice and research in Middle Years literacy teaching and learning, as described below.

Off-site

The initial stage of professional learning for all teachers takes place at off-school sites. Teachers from associate primary and secondary schools come together in geographical groupings for an expert-led four-day professional learning program. The purpose of the program is to provide participants with the opportunity to engage with the research on teaching and learning in the Middle Years and to consider the implications for effective and continuous literacy teaching. It aims to achieve this through enhancement of teacher knowledge about language in the Middle Years of schooling, and by exploring appropriate models of literacy and a range of pedagogical approaches to effectively engage all students in Middle Years literacy.

Opportunities for Years 5-9 professional dialogue are provided so that participants develop a 'Middle Years literacy mindset'. One aspect of this involves establishing ongoing relationships between primary and secondary schools to ensure continuity of literacy provision across the Middle Years of schooling. A further aim is to enhance participants' ability to facilitate the professional learning of their colleagues in Middle Years literacy by exploring models of action learning and developing leadership skills.

All teachers involved in the Middle Years Literacy Project also come together at least twice per year at the off-site Ongoing Professional Learning days organised by CEOM. The focus of these days is a combination of continued expert-led teacher learning and teacher-led professional learning based on action research.

Local Area Professional Learning: Clusters

Alongside the off-site professional learning component, primary and secondary teachers continue to work together to implement Middle Years literacy initiatives in their local area Middle Years Literacy Clusters. Education Officers from CEOM meet with teachers in their cluster groups to support and guide professional learning. Ongoing funding is provided to enable the clusters to meet at least once per school term (4 times per year). Additional funding is available for clusters to undertake Action Learning Projects to implement specified aspects of Middle Years literacy that draw on current research and recommended literacy frameworks.

School–based Professional Action Learning Teams

School-based Professional Action Learning Teams (PALTs) provide a site-specific context for ongoing professional inquiries into Middle Years literacy teaching and learning. These inquiries focus on the literacy priorities and needs of specific school communities. This layer of professional learning is largely teacher-led and draws on an action learning model. This process is monitored by peers and Literacy Education Officers from CEOM. The inquiries are reported at the local area cluster level, and at the central off-site Ongoing Professional Learning days.

The Middle Years Literacy Intervention Project: *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*

Schools need to make a concerted effort to adequately address the needs of all learners in the middle years and there has remains a gap in literacy provision for adolescent learners, particularly those defined as 'educationally disadvantaged' or 'at risk' (Masters & Forster 1997; DEETYA 1998). Many literacy intervention programs offered to underachieving adolescents fail to articulate to mainstream curriculum and assessment practices, or to scaffold students adequately in meeting the literacy demands of an increasingly abstract and specialised curriculum. Often attributing literacy failure to individual deficit, many intervention programs, albeit well-intentioned, lead to a differentiated curriculum which potentially compounds educational disadvantage and maintains stratified outcomes.

A number of middle years studies emphasise the need for literacy intervention programs to take account of the particular educational needs of adolescent learners, and to be firmly connected with the mainstream curriculum and assessment practices. The national report *Beyond the Middle* found that

> …many schools have instituted various forms of withdrawal programs as interventions aimed at students at risk of poor literacy achievement in the middle years. Many of these remain focussed on deficit or remedial approaches, drawing heavily from dated special education materials with an emphasis on individual worksheets, levelled texts and base-line decoding of printed text… Characteristic of these pullout programs was a mismatch with the practices and pedagogies of the mainstream classroom (Luke et al. 2003: 116).

It is within this context that, in 2003, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne established a two-year intervention research project as part of the broader Middle Years Literacy Project. It was specifically designed to improve the outcomes of 'at risk' learners (Years 5-9), by using an intensive approach to scaffolding student literacy, known as *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (Rose, 2005a, 2005b). The distinctive features of this approach are that it uses high quality, challenging, age-appropriate texts, articulates strongly to mainstream curriculum and assessment practices and redesigns classroom teaching patterns to enable success for all learners. The approach can be used in mainstream or withdrawal contexts and models literate language features in both fiction and factual texts.

Furthermore it is capable of extending the learning of the most competent students in the class or group.

This predominantly off-site program enhances teacher knowledge and understandings about student literacy development, and is supported by school visits from a Project Officer. It enables teachers to use mainstream texts to scaffold student learning using a carefully sequenced series of reading and writing activities which can be applied in all discipline areas. The project needs to be viewed as an integral and ongoing component of effective literacy provision. It requires ongoing teacher data collection and analysis and is part of a whole school approach to improving literacy outcomes for all students in the Middle Years. The teacher professional learning contributes to the learning of all teachers in the Middle Years PALTs and needs to be supported by appropriate and flexible school structures and organisation to enable the best possible outcomes for students. Data from the Research phase of the Project 2003-2004 demonstrates significant improvement in literacy outcomes for students targeted by the approach.

> Analysis of pre and post DART scores, and corresponding CSF-rated scores, showed that average literacy gains across all schools and classes, and among students from all backgrounds and ability ranges, was consistently more than a CSF level in improvement within approximately three school terms, or approximately double the expected rate of literacy development. Furthermore, 20% of students made gains of two or more CSF levels, or four times the expected rate of literacy development (Culican 2006: 6).

Following the success of the research phase, the Middle Years Literacy Intervention Project: *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* has now become the recommended approach to accelerate the literacy development of "at risk" learners in the Middle Years at the CEOM.

Principles of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* program

The *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* program (LRRL) provides teachers with two sets of skills for accelerating learning and closing the 'ability' gap in their classrooms. The first is a set of skills for interacting with students around written texts, that supports all students in a class to read high level texts with critical comprehension, and to use what they have learnt from their reading to write successful texts. The second is a set of skills for selecting key texts in the curriculum to work with intensively, and to analyse the language patterns in these texts to plan their lessons.

A key principle of the LRRL approach, that also underlies much teaching practice in general, is that learning takes place through successful performance of tasks, whether this is reading a sentence in a new book, or learning a manual activity. However what is emphasised in this approach is that learners must always be adequately prepared to perform each task successfully, before they are asked to do it. Once they have successfully performed the task they are then cognitively prepared for a third step that elaborates their understanding of the activity they have completed. This three part cycle of Prepare-Task-Elaborate is applied at all levels of the LRRL program, from curriculum planning to micro-interactions in the classroom. It has been termed the *scaffolding interaction cycle* (Rose 2004, 2005a&b, 2006), illustrated in Figure 2.
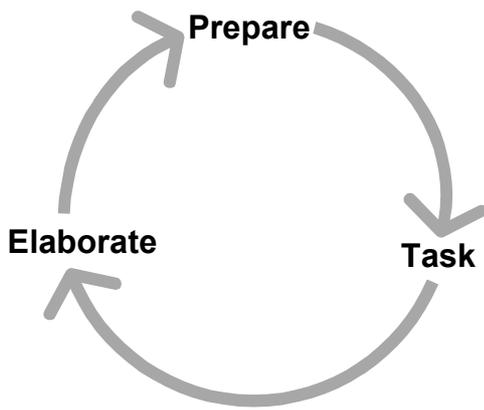
Figure 2: Scaffolding interaction cycle

The scaffolding interaction cycle extends the model of scaffolded learning advocated by Bruner and others (e.g. Ninio & Bruner 1978, Mercer 2000, Wells 2000), following Vygotsky's social learning theory. Vygotsky insisted that learning takes place in the zone between what learners can do independently, and what they can do with the support of teachers, in what he called the 'zone of proximal development'. The scaffolding interaction cycle describes precisely how this social learning takes place over time, emphasising both the preparation and elaboration steps, in which teachers provide the scaffolding support. For example, if the learning task is to read a sentence or a passage of text, then the teacher must be satisfied that a learner is adequately prepared to read it with fluency and comprehension, and the teacher then uses the successful reading to elaborate on aspects of it that learners need to understand.

This approach can be contrasted with many common literacy strategies. For example, students are often asked to read aloud from a text, reading a sentence or paragraph in turns, followed by a discussion or teacher explanation about its meanings. In approaches such as this there is an elaboration step that follows the task, but there may be no preparation for students to do the reading task, other than skills they may have acquired elsewhere. As a result, such activities often involve separating students into 'ability groups', that read texts at different levels according to their assessed independent reading skills. In primary classrooms this is a common practice in activities such as 'guided reading'. Far from closing the gap, these kinds of classroom practices ensure that less successful students are unlikely to catch up with their more successful peers, as they are always working on lower level texts. In contrast, the LRRL approach carefully prepares all students to read a text at the same high level. Elaborating steps then engage all students in higher level understanding of the text's meanings and language patterns.

This is the key to accelerating learning of all students across the curriculum, while closing the so-called 'ability' gap between them. Practices that give students different levels of tasks, according to their assessed 'abilities', widen the gap over time between more and less successful students. But if we reconceptualise innate 'abilities' instead as skills that can be taught and learnt over time, then we can narrow the gap by explicitly teaching these skills as part of our normal classroom practice. These contrasting approaches are shown in Figure 3.
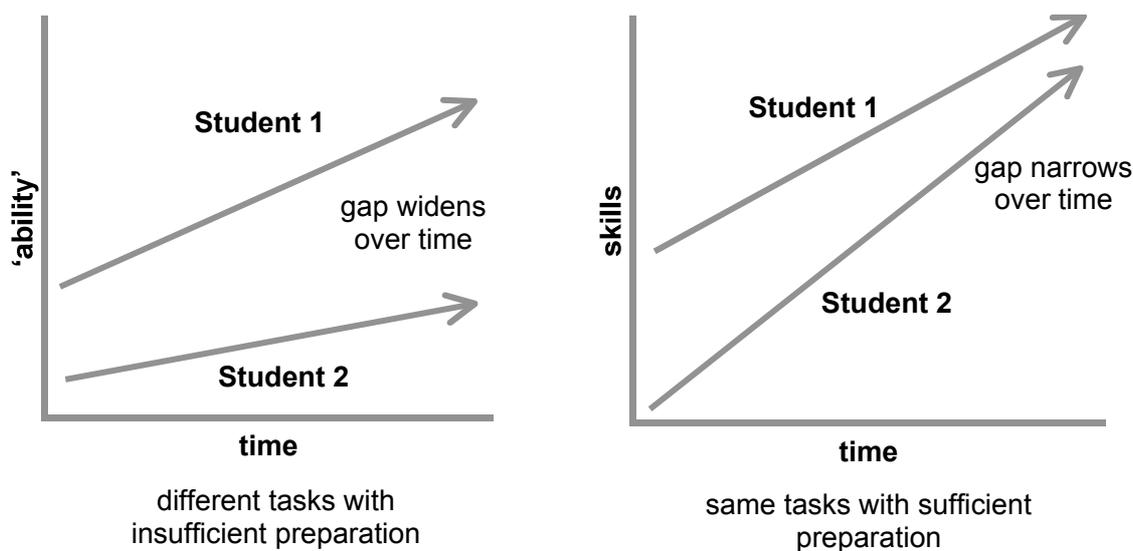
Figure 3: Widening or closing the 'ability' gap

In order to support students adequately, we must have a clear idea of the learning tasks we are asking of them, and how to give them sufficient preparation. Perhaps the most difficult task we ask of students is to demonstrate what they have learnt in writing. Writing involves multiple complex skills, from selecting and arranging elements of a topic, through organising a text in coherent stages, constructing a logical sequence of activities, statements or arguments, to selecting appropriate words that evoke the topic with sufficient richness, and arranging them coherently in phrases and sentences, and finally managing the complex spelling patterns of written English. Yet a common type of writing activity in primary schools is to ask students to write stories from personal experience, with little more preparation than reading a model text and brainstorming ideas for a topic (sometimes called 'conferencing'). The elaboration step in these kinds of activities involves editing the drafts that students produce, correcting problems with students' writing after they have performed the task. Naturally there is always a gap between texts produced by students who are experienced readers, and students with less reading experience, particularly those from less literate family backgrounds. The reason of course is that extensive reading provides the preparation that students need to perform these writing tasks successfully. But as much of this reading takes place outside the school, particularly in parent-child reading in the home (Williams 1999), this preparation is often invisible to teachers and theorists. On one hand this has given rise to romantic notions of creativity emerging 'spontaneously' if children are surrounded with print, associated with the whole language and process writing movements of the 1970s and 80s (e.g. Cambourne et al 1988). On the other hand, recognition of the value of parent-child reading has often sparked calls to train parents to read to their children.

Both types of response avoid the simple and unarguable fact that schools should be able to prepare all students to write successfully. As preparation for successful writing involves extensive reading, then schools should also be able to prepare all students to read successfully, and with sufficient insight to use what they learn from reading in their writing. To help teachers meet these responsibilities of schools to their pupils, the LRRL program uses a six stage curriculum cycle that begins with Preparation before Reading and finishes with Independent Writing.

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The *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* curriculum cycle

Preparation before Reading grounds the reading activity in the topic of study, whether this is studying a novel or play in English, or some aspect of the natural world in science. A passage is selected for intensive reading that is a key text in the topic, and will provide a good model for students to later practice writing. The teacher provides sufficient background knowledge for students to understand the text in general, then summarises what happens in each step of the text, before reading it aloud. This preparation enables all students to follow the words as the text is read aloud, without struggling to understand what it is going on at each step, and without struggling to decode lots of unfamiliar words on the page. The task is to listen to the text with general comprehension. An elaboration step after reading may involve discussing various features of the text, defining new words, explaining unfamiliar concepts, or relating it to students' experience.

The second step is known as Detailed Reading. Here the task is for students to read the text themselves, with full critical comprehension, but just a sentence at a time. Preparation now happens on a micro-level, with the teacher first explaining and reading the sentence, and then asking students to read just one phrase at a time, in their copies of the text. The teacher prepares by giving the meaning of the words or phrase in terms the students can understand, telling them where to look, and asking one or more students to say it aloud. All students then highlight the words or phrase in their copy. Elaboration may then involve defining, explaining and discussing the meaning of each phrase as it is read. Each phrase and sentence is continually related back up to the meanings of the text as a whole, so that it never becomes a low level mechanical activity. Detailed Reading enables all students in a class to read a text with fluency and comprehension, no matter what their starting level, and no matter how difficult the text is, if it is within the range for their age. Crucially it enables all students to recognise how the author has used patterns of language to construct the text, so that they will be able to consciously use these patterns themselves in their writing, and to recognise them in other texts. It is this critical deconstruction of authors' writing strategies that accelerates the learning of even the most advanced students in a class, at the same time as it enables all students to read a high level text.

The third step is Preparing for Writing. At this point notes are scribed on the class board which will be used to write a new text that is patterned on the Detailed Reading passage. For factual texts these notes are the wordings that have been highlighted in the passage during Detailed Reading. Students take turns to act as scribes on the board, while other students dictate the wordings to write and how to spell them. As all students are thoroughly familiar with these wordings, they are in control of the note making, and the teacher's role is to prompt and support with spelling skills and other features. For story texts the aim is to generate elements that will be used to write a new story that closely follows the patterns of the original text. For each element of the original story, such as characters, activities and locations, students generate ideas that are all scribed on the board. Particular ideas are then chosen for a class story, and others can later be used for individual writing.

Step four is known as Joint Rewriting. The teacher guides the class to jointly write a text that is patterned closely on the passage from Detailed Reading. For factual texts this involves rewriting the notes in wordings that are closer to what the students would use themselves. In Detailed Reading the teacher supported them to read technical and abstract wordings in the original text. These are the wordings scribed on the board as notes. Now the teacher supports the class to practise rewriting these in wordings that may be less technical and abstract. Students take turns to scribe the new text on the board, as

the class generates new sentences for them to write, using the notes, and the teacher supports with new wordings and ways to arrange them in sentences. These four steps thus support students to practise four key skills for learning across the curriculum: 1) reading factual texts with understanding, 2) identifying key information in texts, 3) taking this information out as notes, and 4) using it to write their own texts. At the same time the teacher guides them to intensively read, discuss and write key information in the topic under study.

For story texts, Joint Rewriting involves rewriting the original text with new characters, events, locations, descriptions, and so on. Once sufficient new ideas have been selected and scribed as notes, the teacher supports the class to generate new sentences with the same patterns as the original text, but with new content. Again students take turns as scribes, as the class tells them what to write, and the teacher supports with new ideas, grammar, spelling and other features. The four steps to this point thus support students to practise four key skills for reading and writing fiction: 1) reading stories with understanding and engagement, 2) recognising how authors have used language to construct literary texts, 3) creating the elements of new stories at various levels, from the overall plot, to the characters and sequences of events, to selecting and arranging literary wordings in sentences, paragraphs and stanzas, and 4) using these elements to write a new literary text. These skills can be practised in any literary mode, including prose, drama and poetry.

Once the teacher has supported students to jointly write a successful text, the fifth step is then for students to practise these skills themselves, in Individual Rewriting. For factual texts this may involve erasing the class text from the board, but leaving the notes for students to practise writing their own text from the notes. For stories, students now have both the original text and the class text as models, to help them write a new text patterned on these models, but with new content. In both cases, the teacher can circulate in the class and give support to students who need it, while other students may practise more independently. The LRRL strategies thus cater for the range of students' experience with reading and writing at each step. In Detailed Reading the teacher deliberately draws on more experienced students, particularly in elaboration moves when higher level meanings are discussed, but all students are equally involved in identifying wordings from the teacher's preparations. In Joint Rewriting it is often the more experienced students that offer most ideas for the new text, but all students are equally involved in using ideas to construct the new text. Crucially the teacher's support in these steps extends all students' understanding of the topic and the use of language to construct successful writing.

Only after these five steps of preparation and supported practice in reading and writing do we demand Independent Writing. In this final step, students use what they have learnt to perform independent tasks on which they may be assessed. For factual texts this may involve a research project, in which students select and read source texts in the topic, identify the key information and write it as notes, and then write a new text on the topic, using the genre and language patterns that have been practised earlier. For stories this may involve writing an entirely new text in the genre that has been practised in preceding steps, using many of the literary language patterns from the original and joint texts. For text responses in the English curriculum, and argument texts, similar steps may be followed as story writing. That is, model responses and arguments are used for Detailed Reading, and their text patterns are followed closely for Joint and Individual Rewriting, but used to respond to new literary texts, or to argue about new issues. And again, Independent Writing of responses and arguments follows the five steps of preparation.

The six steps of the LRRL curriculum cycle are set out in Figure 3. They are overlaid on the three steps in the genre writing cycle that many teachers are familiar with, to show how LRRL provides more intensive support for students to read closely, and use what they learn from reading in their writing. Genre approaches begin with 'joint deconstruction' of model texts, in which the teacher guides the class to recognise the purpose and stages of the model text, and some of its language features. But LRRL uses two steps here to support all students to read texts with full understanding, and to recognise all the language features that the author has used to construct it. In genre approaches the teacher then guides the class to use the stages and some language features of the model text for 'joint construction' of a new text. Here again LRRL uses two steps, to plan and rewrite the text patterns of the model text. Rewriting the text in this way provides far more support for students to use the sophisticated language features of model texts written by accomplished authors. Thirdly, genre approaches then move straight into 'independent construction' of new texts, in which students use the stages and some language of the model and joint texts to write their own. But LRRL provides an additional step for students to practise rewriting the model and joint texts, before they write independently. Genre approaches provide more scaffolding support for reading and writing than other common classroom practices, but the LRRL cycle ensures that all students are able to successfully read and write high level texts, and rapidly accelerates learning skills across the range of students.
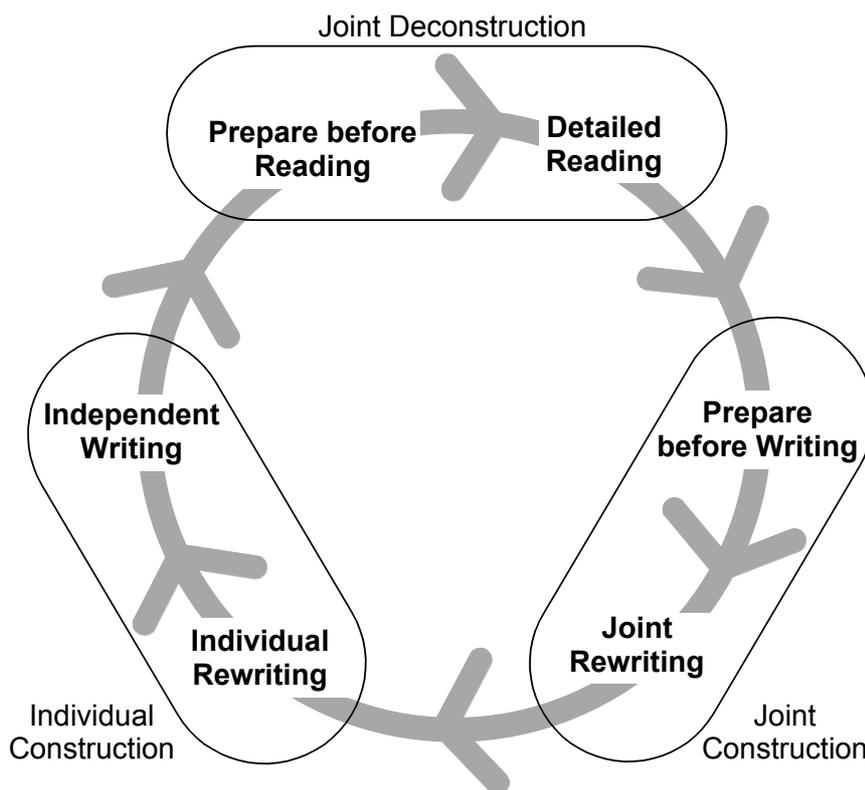

Figure 3: LRRL curriculum cycle

Language model

The second strand of the LRRL program is a model of language that enables teachers to select and analyse texts for scaffolding lessons, and to talk through their language patterns with students. This model is based on a three level model of text-in-context developed in systemic functional linguistics, and used in the genre approach and much

language teaching in Australia and internationally. This model is described in accessible terms in Martin & Rose 2003 and Martin & Rose in press. The LRRL program takes key features of the model that are most useful for teachers, and applies them to analysing texts across the school curriculum. This analysis allows us to identify what is difficult about the tasks of reading and writing, and what we need to teach our students explicitly, using the scaffolding strategies described above.

Firstly we are generally aware that written language comes in the form of texts, that written texts are made up of sentences, and that sentences are made up of words, which are expressed in letters of the alphabet. But there are also layers of structure within each of these levels that we are more or less aware of. For example, a text is never just a string of sentences, but is organised in phases of meaning that are often expressed as paragraphs. Likewise a sentence is not just a string of words, but is organised in phrases or word groups, that express meanings such as who the sentence is about, what they were doing, where and when. And a word is not just a string of letters, but is organised in syllables, each of which consists of letter patterns at the beginning and end of the syllable. There are thus three levels of language that we must attend to simultaneously as we are reading and writing – patterns within the text, patterns within the sentence, and patterns within the word, illustrated in Figure 4.
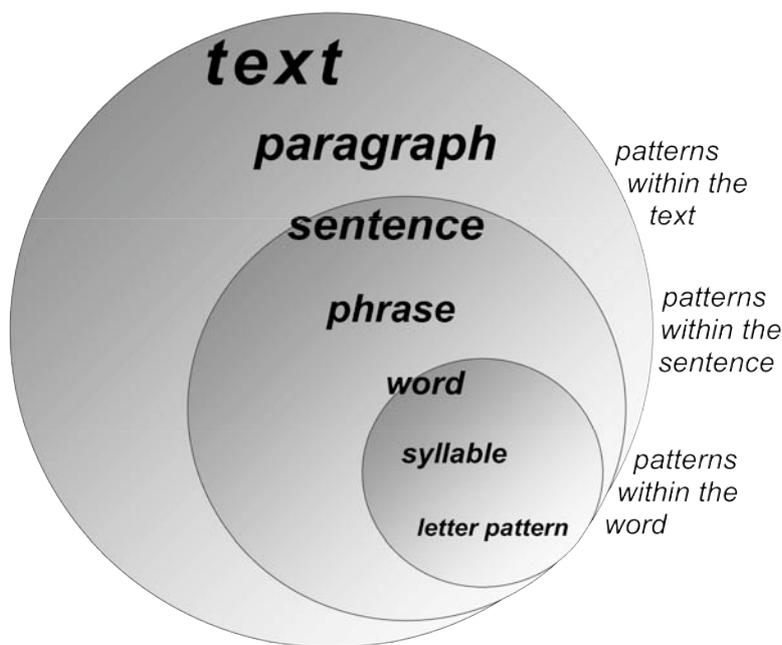

Figure 4: Three levels of language patterns

So reading and writing are very complex tasks, even without taking into consideration the context of text, such as the topic of study or critical perspectives. Common approaches to teaching literacy often attempt to manage this complexity by ignoring one or another level of language patterns. Phonics programs treat reading as primarily 'decoding' letter patterns, and ignore the higher level complexity of real texts. Basal reading programs may focus on the level of words and phrases in sentences, but ignore higher levels of meaning. At the other extreme, whole language programs treat texts as lakes of meanings for readers to 'immerse' in, and ignore the complexity of patterns at the levels of the text, the sentence and the word. So-called critical literacy approaches focus on a few higher level meanings in texts, but ignore the complexity of patterns in which they are expressed. For

these reasons, each of these approaches falls short of the learning needs of one or another group of students.

In order to meet the needs of all students, the LRRL program has been designed to systematically tackle the complexity of written language, but from the top down, rather than the bottom up. Teachers begin with the context of the text, including the background knowledge that students need to understand it, and then summarise the larger patterns of meaning at the level of its paragraphs, before reading it aloud. In Detailed Reading we then prepare and read each sentence, then each group of words within a sentence. This preparation at the levels of meaning in the text, paragraph, sentence, phrase and word, enable all students to read it, whether or not they can spell all its words. The level of spelling may then be addressed as notes are written on the board in Preparing before Writing, and the text is then jointly rewritten from the levels of the phrase, the sentence and the paragraph. Additional activities to practise skills in word recognition, spelling, and fluent writing are also employed where students have needs in these areas, using the same high level texts. The contrast could not be greater with literacy approaches that insist on starting at the bottom with sounds, letters and words, before students can start to read, or with approaches that expect students to read without addressing the complexity of written texts.

Using this model of language to scaffold reading and writing requires a high investment in professional learning for teachers. However the payoff over time is that all students are better able to engage successfully in classroom learning, and are more able to succeed at independent tasks. Teachers consistently report that their whole approach to teaching is transformed through the LRRL program (Carbines, Wyatt & Robb 2005, Culican 2005, 2006, McRae et al 2000, Rose 2006a).

Implementation of the CEOM *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* project

The CEOM LRRL project was designed to combine principles of best practice in teacher professional learning programs and classroom-based action research. The project components are as follows:

Teacher professional learning
Teachers in their first year of the project receive eight days of off-site professional learning (two days per term) and continuing teachers receive four days (one per term). The sequence of PL workshops in the first year is:
1. *Preparing for reading and writing*, in which the strategies are introduced and participants practise using prepared detailed lesson plans.
2. *Planning lessons and programs*, which introduces the language model, and participants practise selecting texts and planning lessons across the curriculum.
3. *Analysing reading texts*, in which high level skills in discourse analysis are introduced and applied to lesson planning.
4. *Assessing students writing*, in which skills in discourse analysis are applied to student writing samples.

The model of spaced learning, allows for staged implementation with students in the classroom, collecting and analysing data, monitoring and evaluating student progress and reflecting on outcomes. The off-site professional learning combines expert input from workshop leaders, with opportunities for participants to work in small groups to practise the approach on texts that are currently being used in the classroom. Continuing teachers act as 'experts' or 'mentors' for new teachers from their own or other schools as they continue

to deepen their knowledge and expertise in the theory and practice of the scaffolding approach in *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*.

Selection of target students and model of delivery
Teachers are required to nominate a minimum of six students (to be referred to as the 'target' students) for *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*. Target students are usually selected using various data sources such as: existing student information and profiles, standardised measures/tests (DART, TORCH, PROBE etc), transition procedures and documents and teacher referrals.

Once students are selected, teachers nominate one of the following models of delivery to be used:
- small withdrawal group containing the target students
- target students working as a separate group within the whole class
- target students working as part of the whole class
- combination of the above.

School-based support
Ongoing support is provided to schools through scheduled school visits, telephone and email support. Teachers have emphasised the importance of this aspect of the project as on-site problem solving is essential for successful classroom implementation. The school-based support provides an additional layer of informal professional learning which builds relationships with teachers and schools and creates a sense of partnership. It is also important in ensuring a consistent approach to implementation of the scaffolding approach and to data collection.

Collection of school, teacher and student data
The emphasis on pre and post data collection and analysis that was established during the research phase of the Project has continued to be a key aspect of the ongoing implementation. Teachers administer the Reading component of the Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART) to target students and to a representative group of students at the same year levels as those being targeted in the project. They also collect samples of scaffolded and unscaffolded narrative and factual writing from target students which are assessed against an agreed framework.

Development of print and DVD resources
Two schools, one secondary and one primary, participated in the production of DVD material for the project. This material has proven to be a key resource for teacher learning both during the workshops and on-site at the school for reviewing the process and providing information for other members of the school community.

Establishment of a networked learning community
Initially the use of an email group and more recently the secure networked learning community available to Catholic schools has been a means of disseminating information from the CEOM to schools and is now being used for professional dialogue and 'question and answer' between participants and program convenors.

Teacher reflection and evaluation
In the research phase of the project teachers kept a journal but more recently have been required to keep a Record of Scaffolding Sessions as well as a timetable of scaffolding. The CEOM collects teacher evaluations of all professional learning sessions. A selection of these evaluations follows.

I was thrilled to see the students get so much enjoyment from the lessons. This enjoyment came largely from the confidence they gained from really understanding what it was all about.

Students who are usually 'invisible' in the mainstream class are confident and engaged in the process.

I have seen non-readers achieving through this project which other methods have not achieved.

For the middle years, intervention programs have not been age appropriate. This one allows those students who struggle to access texts at the right level. It prepares them for the challenge they will have in secondary school.

Excellent way to address the issue of struggling learners within the classroom, reduces need for withdrawal and purchased programs.

…structured, staged, step-by-step nature of the program assists students, especially ESL students

Can be used as a whole-school Years 7 and 8 approach to literacy in most key learning areas.

It fits in with scaffolding and four resources model and allows children to make more connections between their reading and writing.

Excellent Professional learning for teachers who are forced to consider their teaching practices - I learned that I was excluding some students from class activities because they did not understand the content of the text.

While I was not completely convinced at the start I have increasing discovered the benefits of the program. Students have really begun to enjoy the approach. I have had to vary the pace quite a bit but the benefits in terms of results have been excellent in the quality of their writing and understanding.

Conclusion

The Middle Years Literacy team at CEOM together with consultancy support from Dr David Rose continue to build on the success of *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* by refining the teacher professional learning and the implementation of the Project at the cluster and school level in response to feedback from teachers and schools and the ongoing analysis of data on student achievement. The advantages of improved literacy outcomes and student engagement, together with the benefits of developing teachers' professional knowledge about language and learning, attest to the success of the Project. The results of the Project in providing success for our most 'at risk' learners, while accelerating the learning of all students, places this initiative at the forefront of teaching and learning in the Middle Years of Schooling.

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