

Myth making and meaning making: the school and Indigenous children

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Introduction

The themes of this volume bring together two fields of study that seem only distantly related at first sight, a sociological study of governance in education and the semiotic study of communicative modalities. But the breadth of these themes gives me an opportunity to tie together two perspectives on schools and Indigenous children, that I hope the reader will find illuminating and useful. One perspective is on the governance of the colonising modern European culture over what happens to Indigenous children in school (beyond the formal role of government); the other is on the realisation of the colonising culture in the modalities of teaching and learning that Indigenous children are subjected to in school. However the chapter is not merely a complaint, it contains two parts: the first part is an analysis of these factors and effects, using a framework from social theory, the second is a procedure for overcoming them, developed and proven in a long term action research program.

The background to the chapter starts from my own long term commitment to education for Indigenous people, from the Pitjantjatjara homelands in central Australia (Rose 1999, 2011a) to metropolitan universities (Rose, Lui-Chivize, McKnight & Smith 2004, Rose, Rose, Farrington & Page 2008). My experience working with a generation of Pitjantjatjara children who had completed primary school but remained almost entirely illiterate, and addicted to petrol sniffing, led me to ask why their schooling had been so unsuccessful, and what role this may have played in their self-destructive activity. At the urging of their elders, it also led me to seek out how to teach literacy more effectively, culminating over the last 15 years, in the development of a teacher professional learning program known as *Reading to Learn*.

Reading to Learn began with an action research project, *Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children in School* (Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999), that worked with teachers to synthesise strategies for teaching reading and writing that had been developing in Australia over the previous decade (Rose & Martin 2012). At the start of the project, no students tested in the Pitjantjatjara community primary schools were reading more than basal picture books by the end of primary school, and no Pitjantjatjara students tested in urban secondary schools were reading above junior primary levels. By the end of the project's first year, most of these students were reading at age appropriate levels, and independent evaluation showed average literacy growth at a rate normally expected over four years (McCrae et al 2000). Since then *Reading to Learn* has grown in scope as a classroom and professional learning program for primary, secondary and tertiary teachers, and in scale across Australia, south and east Africa (Dell 2011, Millin 2011) and western Europe (Coffin, Acevedo & Löfstedt 2013). The results of up to four times typical literacy growth rates have been consistently replicated (Culican 2006, Rose 2011b, Rose & Martin 2013). Central to the program's effectiveness are on one hand, an analysis of governmental factors in education

systems that constrain effective teaching for disadvantaged students, and on the other hand, a design of multimodal strategies to enhance literacy learning for all students.

Governmentality and Indigenous education

Although 'western culture' is often opposed to 'Indigenous culture' as though they were polar contrasts, the opposition is highly misleading. To begin with, what aspects of each culture are being contrasted? One aspect that could reasonably be compared is social hierarchy. Whereas Indigenous communities tend to favour an ideology of 'egalitarian mutuality' (Maddock 1972), the dominant organising principle of modern western societies remains social stratification. The colonising culture is organised by socio-economic class, whether or not the political system is democratic. Colonised communities do not sit outside the class system, but are more or less integrated in it, often in the lowest economic stratum, with high unemployment, low education, poor health, high welfare dependency, incarceration and various other markers of social disadvantage.

For this reason, the problems that Indigenous children experience with school are not entirely different from the problems that many other children experience from economically disadvantaged groups. Poor education outcomes are frequently associated with families' lower socio-economic class positions; the poorer the family, the poorer their children's school outcomes are likely to be. Indigenous children's lack of school success is not just because they are Indigenous, but is widely associated with economic disadvantage in the modern societies they are part of. If we are serious about improving the education outcomes of Indigenous students, we have to start with an analysis of the school's role in reproducing socio-economic disadvantage. To this end I will draw on Basil Bernstein's (1990/2003, 2000) analysis of what he calls 'the pedagogic device'.

Like the societies they serve, Bernstein points out that education systems are also highly stratified. He analyses their organisation in terms of the division of labour in the exchange of knowledge. At one level is the production of knowledge, primarily by researchers and theorists in the upper echelons of academe. The second level he describes as the recontextualising field, in which knowledge is transformed for pedagogic purposes. The third level he calls the field of reproduction, where recontextualised knowledge is exchanged between teachers and learners. Bernstein compares this hierarchy of pedagogic fields to religious hierarchies, from which it evolved in the early modern period, of prophets, priests and laity. Crucially, Bernstein draws two broad divisions in the recontextualising field, a pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF) including teacher education faculties and educational publishers, and an official recontextualising field (ORF) that includes state education departments and boards of studies.

The official and pedagogic recontextualising fields are often in conflict over what each considers appropriate pedagogies, curriculum contents, and assessments. Bernstein suggests that these struggles are associated with conflicts between class fractions in the society served by the education system, primarily between fractions of the modern middle class, that have evolved over the past century in tandem with the evolution of schooling. Bernstein distinguishes an 'old middle class', whose base is in economic production, and in professions such as management, engineering, law, medicine, and a 'new middle class',

whose base is in the production and exchange of symbolic commodities, such as education and media. These groups have different economic interests, and tend to hold different positions over what constitutes valid curriculum and pedagogy. Where the old middle class tends to favour pedagogies in which teachers' authority, transmission of knowledge, and criteria for assessment are explicit, the new middle class tends to prefer pedagogies in which learners appear to have more control, discovering knowledge for themselves at their own pace, achieving criteria unique to their own person. These types of pedagogy have long been characterised as 'traditional' and 'progressive' respectively. Bernstein contrasts them as 'visible' and 'invisible', since hierarchy, sequencing and criteria are explicit in the traditional mode, but masked in the progressive mode.

The progressivist movement swept Australian education faculties from the late 1970s, as 'whole language' literacy pedagogy, and more specifically 'process writing', in which children were expected to spontaneously develop literacy competences through 'immersion' in 'language rich environments', and teachers were proscribed from intervening in and hence constraining children's creative development (Christie 2004, 2010). These ideas are alive and well today in many parts of the world, with the term constructivist now generally used to refer to the approach. Alexander, in his revealing study of primary school pedagogy around the world, notes the following piece of progressive philosophy (2000:548), prominently displayed on the classroom wall of one of his Michigan, USA schools.

Important issues to me –

*Process orientation vs product orientation
Teaching students vs teaching programs
Teacher as facilitator vs teacher as manager
Developing a set of strategies vs mastering a set of skills
Celebrating approximation vs celebrating perfection
Promoting independence in learning vs dependence on teacher*

The ideological polarising of process vs product and independent learning vs teaching of skills arguably advantaged children from literate middle-class families, who typically arrive at school with an average 1000 hours experience of parent-child reading, in contrast with children who start with little or no such experience (Adams 1990, Williams 1995). For Indigenous children, whose family culture is often purely oral, with little or no home reading, and may also be non-English speaking, it has remained an on-going calamity. All over Australia, Indigenous children right through primary school typically produced short texts of a few sentences, in response to the progressivist instruction to 'write from personal experience'. The texts were brief recounts or observation/comments, using only words they knew how to spell, and sentences they knew would not be corrected by the teacher, in the so-called 'editing' stage of process writing (Gray 1990, Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999, Rose & Martin 2012). Text 1 illustrates a common standard for many students in upper primary school, after four or five years of process writing.

Text 1: Example of process writing in upper primary

On the holiday

I went my dads for 3 ~~week~~

weeks an we went to ante Jhins hous

for crismus. I got Leogo and a humonic

I was vere happy to se her.

From BLak

It was not that children writing such texts lacked the resources of spoken English, but that they could not use these resources as a basis for learning to read and write, as whole language and process writing expected them to. Hence a pedagogic movement that was ostensibly liberatory failed to provide many Indigenous children with the resources they need to succeed in school, and to go on to further education. This has been a double tragedy for Indigenous people, as progressivism/constructivism took over in an era when they needed access to high level education more than ever before. Until the 1970s in Australia, education for Indigenous children was often restricted, and the lives of Indigenous people were controlled under racist legislation. As the ideological climate shifted, authoritative pedagogic practices were often associated with authoritarian political regimes, and abandoned in favour of progressivist pedagogies. This kind of polarisation continues today as constructivism is promoted in post-colonial contexts. Examples include the 'new literacies' advocate, Street, who opposes teaching of technical literacies as "simply imposing western conceptions of literacy onto other cultures" (1996:2). In the South African context, Street associates literacy "attached to formal education" with "vested interests which depend upon the old views for their legitimacy" (ibid), smearing state literacy programs by association with apartheid.

Bernstein's analysis helps to show why this kind of polarisation is not helpful for Indigenous and other disadvantaged student groups, as the pedagogic conflict does not originate with their interests or needs. Whereas progressivism/constructivism has long been legitimated with values such as creativity, personal development, freedom of expression, and learner-centred practice, versus 'traditional' reproductive, teacher-centred rote-learning, at bottom is a struggle for control of education, between elite middle class fractions.

The opposition between these fractions of the middle class is an opposition not over the distribution of power but over principles of social control. At economic and political levels the opposition is an opposition over the role of the State. (Bernstein 1990/2003:212).

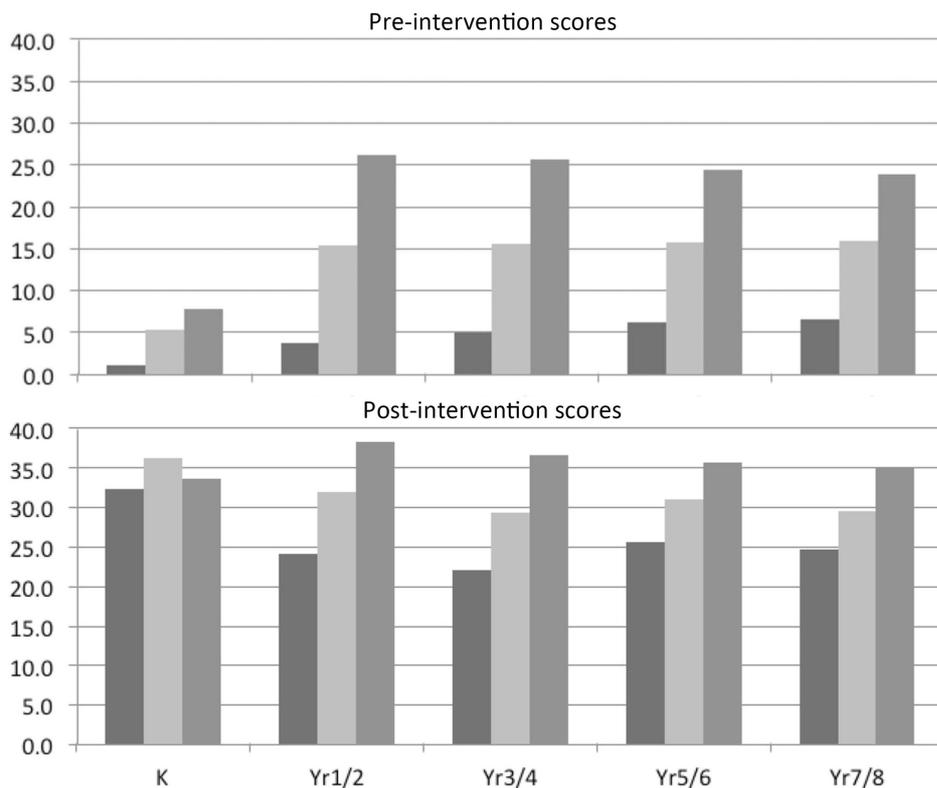
This analysis shines a different light on objections within the PRF to state sponsored literacy assessments, as constraining freedom of expression in favour of "objective and processable representations" (DeVault, 2008:40). These testing regimes were certainly introduced by conservative governments, such as the UK Thatcher government in the 1980s, in response to perceived failures to improve education outcomes, and are clearly associated with the struggle between the state controlled ORF and the university based PRF. However, they have been continued and expanded by social democratic parties, such as the Rudd-Gillard Australian government of 2007-2013, that represent the interests of less privileged groups, alongside the old and new middle classes.

One such assessment regime, introduced by the Hawke-Keating Labor government in the 1990s, and continued by the conservative Howard government, was the Australian National Profiles for literacy and numeracy. These National Profiles were organised into 8 assessment levels, and each level was considered to correspond with expected literacy growth over 1.5 school years. The enormous gap revealed by this and other assessments, between the literacy of Indigenous and other student groups, led to large scale funding of education research programs, of which *Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children* was one. Within the first year of this project, independent evaluators reported average improvements for junior secondary students at '2.5 Profile levels' (McCrae et al 2000:69). As this growth would normally be expected over four years, the project received national publicity, ultimately leading to the development of the *Reading to Learn* program.

Hence *Reading to Learn* did not emerge from a commitment to one ideology of pedagogic practice or another, but to the needs of Indigenous students and their communities. It has been taken up and expanded in Australia, Africa and Europe in response to the needs of other less advantaged student groups. How the program meets these needs is illustrated below. However in the course of the training, teachers are asked to track the literacy growth of students in the top, middle and bottom bands of their classes. The purpose of the assessment is for teachers to analyse how their practice is enhancing the skills of all the students in their classes, moderated against standards for each stage of school.

The assessment enables teachers to objectively identify the language resources that students are using in their writing. Fourteen criteria are scored from 0-3, giving a potential total score of 42. Criteria cover dimensions of social context, text organisation, discourse patterns, grammar and graphic features. Teachers collect text samples from their students before starting the professional learning program, and at the end. Figure 1 shows results for these 'pre-intervention' and 'post-intervention' writing samples, averaged across assessments by 400 teachers in one training program in 2010, representing at least 10,000 students. This program included schools with up to 50% enrolments of Indigenous students. Pre-intervention and post-intervention scores are for the same students, in the top, middle and bottom cohorts in each school stage.

Figure 1: Pre- and post-intervention scores show gap between student groups



The pre-intervention scores in Figure 1 show the mean differences in written language resources of high, middle and low achieving students in each school stage. As this is a large sample across classes and schools, it may be read as approximating differences in the Australian and similar education systems as a whole. What is particularly interesting is that the gap between top and bottom groups is comparatively narrow at the start of school, labelled K for kindergarten, but that after a year or two (Yr1-2) the gap has tripled, and remains steady through each following school stage. The top group in Yr 1-2 has clearly benefited from the literacy practices of their early years teachers, as their average results have shot up to the median standard for the school stage. These children are now reading and writing independently, and are likely to be actively engaged in learning from reading. The middle group has also obtained some benefit, but the bottom group appears to have received very little benefit from these literacy practices; their results are still near zero, and improve only slightly through each subsequent stage. The children who were failing at the start of primary school are still failing at the start of secondary, despite all the interventions prescribed by various literacy theories. These large-scale data confirm what teachers know intuitively, that the gap between the top and bottom students in their classes and schools will essentially be the same at the end of each year, and each student's school career, as it was at the start.

The pre-intervention scores also support the view introduced above, that problems that Indigenous children experience with school are similar to the problems that many other children experience. A key difference is that a much larger proportion of Indigenous students fall into the failing group, with serious consequences for their future lives, and for their whole communities. As such, the data also support the view presented in Gray 1990,

Rose 1999 that the problems of Indigenous students cannot be addressed merely by a focus on cultural difference, but only by significant changes in mainstream teaching practices. Central to this position is the recognition that teachers need more effective tools to enable all their students to succeed at similar levels, if the achievement gap in each classroom is to be narrowed.

The gap has clearly narrowed in the post-intervention scores in Figure 1. Each column shows results for the same teachers and same students as the pre-intervention scores above. The post-intervention results are 6-8 months after the pre-intervention, achieved while teachers were learning to use the strategies outlined above. Post-intervention scores show average growth in Kindergarten is 70% above pre-intervention scores, and the gap between low and high achieving groups is halved. All these children are now independently reading and writing, at an average high standard for Kindergarten, and are well prepared for the start of junior primary. In the other year levels, growth is 30-40% above the pre-intervention scores, and the gap is reduced to 20-30%. Students who normally remain in the failing range are now reading and writing at an acceptable average standard for their grade levels. However, the top groups have also accelerated to an average very high standard for their grade levels. These data are discussed in more detail in Rose (2011b, in press a&b), Rose & Martin (2012, 2013).

In sum, relations between governmentality and Indigenous students' problems in school have been discussed here more broadly in terms of the interests of various groups in contemporary societies. Control measures such as state literacy assessments and national curricula are interpreted in terms of a struggle between the official and pedagogic recontextualising fields, to influence practices in schools. While these measures may be experienced by agents in the PRF as constraining freedom of expression, they can also be used to serve the interests of groups whose needs have not yet been effectively met by progressivist theories and practices advocated in the PRF, particularly the needs of Indigenous students.

Modalities of teaching and learning literacy

In this section, I compare some current literacy practices of the school with the designed practices of *Reading to Learn*, in terms of semiotic modalities. Modalities of meaning have been a major focus of research in recent decades, as represented by the papers in this volume. However, classroom teaching and learning are particularly complex as multiple semiotic dimensions are unfolding simultaneously, moment-by-moment, in a social context involving 20-30 or more learners, exchanging knowledge through various modalities in a great variety of activities.

By way of example, a common activity in the early years of school is Shared Book Reading. In this activity, the teacher reads a picture book with the class, often in the form of a 'big book' mounted on an easel that all children can see. Typically the teacher begins by talking through the pictures, using them to orient the children to the plot, settings and characters of the story before reading the words to them. This may be done interactively, by asking children what they can see in the pictures and what they know about their themes. In addition, other modalities may be used to orient children to the field, such as pictures,

video, toys, objects, activities. The teacher may read the text after or while discussing the pictures. A common practice is for the teacher to point at the words in the book as they are read aloud. Typically a shared reading book may be read repeatedly, until the children are thoroughly familiar with the story, and can say many of its words along with the teacher as she reads.

Shared Book Reading shares many features with the practices of parent-child reading in literate middle class families (Williams 1995). The goal of both is to engage children in written modes of meaning, through a pleasurable social activity, in which the parent or teacher is the guide. Parent-child reading appears to have evolved as a middle class cultural practice, alongside the evolution of schooling in the last century, and Shared Book Reading appears to have evolved in parallel. Although it is often discussed and advocated in the PRF, many of its features seem to be intuitively practiced by teachers, as reading in the home is intuitively practiced by carers. It can be highly effective in engaging children from all backgrounds in the pleasure of reading. I have often witnessed early years teachers engage Indigenous children in understanding, enjoying, and saying the words in English picture books, although they may have no reading and little English in the home.

To understand why it is effective, we can analyse its components using a functional model of language as text-in-context (Martin & Rose 2007, 2008). In this model, language and its social contexts are complementary dimensions of the process of making meaning, in which language enacts relation between interactants, and construes their experience. Social relations and social activity are realised as unfolding patterns of discourse in texts, that are in turn realised as patterns of wordings, or grammar, that are in turn realised as patterns of sounds in speech and letters in writing. We can thus distinguish three levels to language: patterns of discourse, patterns of grammar, and patterns of sounds or letters, together realising patterns of social relations and activities. These three levels of language underpin common understandings of tasks in reading: recognising written words and their letter patterns is widely known as 'decoding'; recognising meanings of words in sentences is known as 'literal comprehension'; recognising connections between meanings in discourse is often termed 'inferential comprehension'; and interpreting texts in terms of the readers' knowledge and values is often called 'interpretive comprehension'.

Shared Book Reading provides students with interpretive comprehension by relating their experience to images in the book, and other sources such as pictures, video, toys, objects, activities. It provides inferential comprehension by talking through the sequence of the story, using the images for support. It provides literal comprehension by discussing the meanings of words as they are read in the context of the unfolding story. Crucially these understandings are built through the modality of spoken interaction between teacher and learners; comprehending the story is interwoven in the social relations enacted between teacher and child. The only level of the reading task not directly addressed in Shared Book Reading or parent-child reading is decoding of written words.

The engagement with written ways of meaning afforded by Shared Book Reading should form a solid basis for children to develop as readers, and for many children it certainly appears to do so. But many Indigenous and other children do not go on to become independent readers, as the the pre-intervention data in Figure 1 illustrate. The problem lies

with the other literacy activities of the early years classroom, that 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 discrete elements of the daily program, which many children experience as disconnected segments.

Despite the dominant progressivist philosophy of early childhood education, many of these activities used for teaching beginning literacy have very old origins, involve a good deal of rote memorisation, and operate with a rudimentary bricks-&-mortar model of language, in contrast to the social semiotic model outline above. It is widely assumed that children must recognise the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent, before they can begin to read, so the alphabet system is practised by rote memorisation. Children repeat the names of letters, as they are pointed to, often with pictures illustrating words that start with the sound represented by the letter ('a' is for apple), and practise writing the letters. This practice originated in the classical period. However, as the Roman alphabet does not cover the sounds of northern European languages such as English, children must also memorise systems of digraphs that represent these sounds, commonly known as phonics. This practice originated in the monasteries of medieval Europe. The next level in the bricks-&-mortar model is word recognition, widely taught using the 'sight word' or 'whole word' activity, in which children may have weekly lists of decontextualised words to memorise. The next level is then to put these words into sentences, for which children are given basal picture books that build in levels, from a word or phrase on a page, to a sentence, to a paragraph, and so on. The theory of language here is a) componential, building larger bricks out of smaller bricks, and b) representational, assuming that words represent concepts, that written words represent spoken words, and written letters represent spoken sounds.

Nevertheless, these practices often do work for learners who already have extensive experience and understanding of written ways of meaning. Children who start school with 1000 hours of parent-child reading are clearly advantaged in this regard, and this may be a key factor in the evolution of this middle class cultural practice. However, children who do not have this experience often find it difficult to associate these decontextualised practices with meanings in texts, so that their reading skills develop more slowly. 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. This helps to explain why otherwise intelligent children may still be unable to read more than basal picture books by the end of primary, and still be reading at junior primary levels in secondary school, as discussed for Pitjantjatjara students above (for more detailed discussion see Rose 2010).

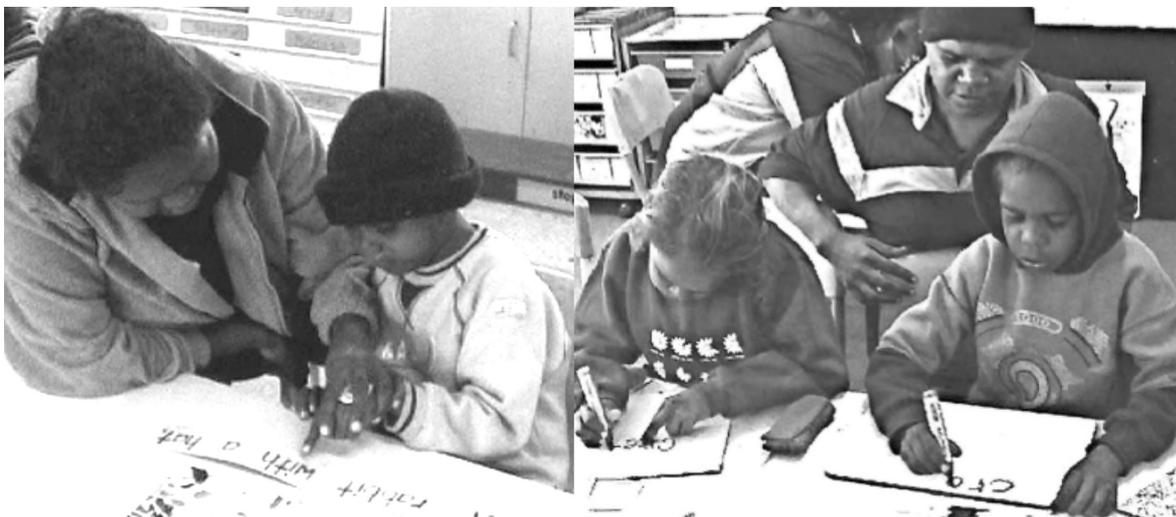
These problems are addressed in the *Reading to Learn* program, by using the comprehension and engagement provided by Shared Book Reading as the starting point for a carefully designed sequence of multimodal activities. The representational theory is replaced by a realisational theory of meaning, in which social relations and experience are realised by patterns of discourse, realised by wordings, realised by sounding and lettering. That is, words make sense in the context of sentences, that make sense in the context of texts, and sounds and letters are alternative modes of realising words.

Hence beginning literacy activities start with sentences from a shared reading book that students are thoroughly familiar with, understand and can say each word in sequence. A sentence is written on a cardboard strip, and the teacher guides students to point at each written word as they say them aloud. In two or three repetitions, children are usually able to point and say the familiar words accurately. This activity is more effective for teaching one-for-one word recognition than the standard decontextualised 'sight/whole word' activity, as learners are supported by their grasp of meanings in context, along with the visual and manual modalities of pointing, enabling them to recognise the written words as equivalent expressions of the spoken words they already know.

Once children can point and say the words accurately, the teacher guides them to cut the sentence into groups of words expressing meaning segments such as who or what it is about, what they are doing, where and when, and then to cut up individual words. This manual activity is enhanced by learners mixing up the cards and re-arranging them, first into their original order, and then into alternative orders to make new sentences. This creative activity is known as Sentence Making.

Only after children have a thorough grasp of the patterns of wordings in the sentence, are they guided to recognise and spell the patterns of letters that realise each of its words. In this step they are guided to cut up the words into their letter patterns, and to practise writing them on slates (small white or blackboards). Figure 2 shows guided word recognition and guided spelling activities with Pitjantjatjara teachers and students.

Figure 2: Guiding word recognition and guided spelling activities



Once they can accurately spell each word, and form its letters, they are then guided to write whole sentences using these words. These activities may be repeated with a series of sentences from a shared reading book, and then again with the next shared book. In this way, children's written language resources are built up in cycles that begin with engagement and comprehension of texts in context, followed by manipulation of wordings in sentences, followed by practice with writing letter patterns in words, and writing patterns of words in sentences.

The goal is ultimately for children to use these resources to create texts of their own. This strategy of building up written resources through reading and guided practice contrasts with a more common approach that asks children to write from personal experience whether or not they have developed these resources. Texts 2 and 3 contrast results after a full year of standard early years literacy activities, with results for the same student after two months of the *Reading to Learn* strategies outlined above. In the 'pre' sample the child is only able to write a name and a few other words, which were illustrated with a simple stick figure. This child would fall in the bottom Yr1-2 group in Figure 1. The post sample is a coherent description of a topic the class has been studying. The accompanying illustration showed the seal, the hole in the ice and the terrible storms above.

Text 2: Outcome of standard literacy practices in the first year of school

*John simon
He 10 sogd
~~and~~ h and he
He is happy*

Text 3: Outcome with same student after 2 months of Reading to Learn

*The seal is on the ice
She had to get her baby some food.
~~They~~ The seal went through a
hole in the ice. She dives down deep
to get some squid for
the baby seal waiting. The
mummy and the baby
go in to the water. When terrible
storms come they stay all winter.*

An effective professional learning program

This brief outline of early years strategies is just one component of the *Reading to Learn* professional learning program. On demand from teachers and schools, the program has grown to meet the needs of early years, primary and secondary teachers, across subject areas. Other sets of strategies include *Preparing for Reading*, which enables all students in a class to follow challenging texts with comprehension; *Paragraph-by-paragraph reading*, in which dense texts may be read and key information identified; *Detailed Reading*, in which short passages are read and discussed in detail; *Joint Rewriting*, which guides students to appropriate the language resources of accomplished authors; and *Joint Construction*, which guides students to write whole texts successfully. These are all multimodal activities, involving spoken, written, visual and manual modalities, as written wordings are orally discussed, and students visually and manually identify wordings in texts using highlighters, and take turns to write on the board. Crucially they are also whole class activities, in which the teacher guides all students to identify, comprehend, discuss and write meanings, step-by-step. The students are in control for each task, but the teacher is their authoritative guide (Christie 2004). This practice addresses the fundamental problems that all teachers face: the wide range of 'learning abilities' in every classroom, and the low reading and writing skills of many students. Whereas classroom interactions in most classrooms typically involve just a few top students who consistently respond to teacher questions (Nuttall 2005, Rose &

Martin 2013), the interactions in these R2L activities are carefully designed to engage every student in the classroom talk-around-text, by enabling them to successfully identify meanings in the texts being read, and propose wordings in the texts being written. Predictably, this practice has been criticised from progressivist/constructivist positions as 'teacher-centred', but the aim of *Reading to Learn* is to democratise the classroom (Rose 2005). The problem we see in current classrooms is not the power difference between teacher and students, but the hierarchy of success and failure between students.

Conclusion

Learning to read and write, and learning from reading, are multimodal activities that children of the most privileged groups in our society are immersed in from the earliest age, so that their transitions from home to school, and from primary to secondary, and secondary to further education are relatively smooth and assured. The skills that teachers are given in their pre-service training generally mesh with the needs of these groups of students, and ensure their successful progression. In contrast the same training does not meet the needs of non-middle class students as effectively, and often barely at all, especially for Indigenous students. Teachers are not trained to teach these students to read at the levels they should be for their ages and grades, nor how to write successfully for assessment, so that too many remain in a low or failing range throughout their school careers, affording them few options for their lives to come.

The state, through the official recontextualising field, attempts to pressure teachers to improve outcomes by imposing standardised assessment regimes and curricula. Indirectly this puts pressure on the pedagogic recontextualising field, that may be experienced as constraining freedom and creativity. Bernstein contextualises these conflicts in a struggle between fractions of the global middle class for control over the production, reproduction and changes in forms of consciousness that education affords. Literacy is at the heart of this struggle, as it is the primary modality through which the symbolic resources of modern culture are acquired. Reading and learning from reading are the means by which semiotic capital is exchanged and accumulated in the institutions of modernity. Families who lack this capital know this even more keenly than those who were born into it. Indigenous families and communities know it only too well, as so many were deliberately excluded from it in days gone by. Today there is no need for openly racist practices of exclusion, if teachers do not know how to teach their children to read and learn from reading. This is one form that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonising culture now takes. It cannot simply be blamed on the state restricting academic freedom, any more than it can be blamed on the cultural or linguistic differences of students. Surely the primary responsibility for teachers' capacities to meet the needs of their most disadvantaged students must lie with those responsible for educating teachers.

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