Democratising the classroom: a literacy pedagogy for the new generation

David Rose

Abstract

South African secondary students see themselves as a 'new generation', the first to come of age in the democratic nation. They are intelligent, politically aware and highly motivated, but very few currently stand a chance of achieving their goals of further education and professional careers (Taylor, Muller, Vinjevold, 2003). If the new South Africa is to realise the possibility of a just society this situation urgently needs to change. But we are hamstrung, not just by the history of schooling in South Africa, but by classroom practices that have evolved in western education systems to reward the elite and marginalise the majority. This paper contends that the basis of inequality in the classroom, and hence in the society, is in students' differing capacities to independently learn from reading, which is the fundamental mode of learning in secondary and tertiary education. Whether teaching practices are promoted as 'learner-centred' or 'teacher-centred' has little impact on the central problem of students' differing capacities to engage in and benefit from them. This problem can be overcome if we focus squarely on teaching all learners in a class to read and write the texts expected of their level and area of study, as part of everyday teaching practice. I argue here that democratising the classroom is the primary condition for achieving the kinds of educational outcomes needed to build a democratic South Africa, and outline a literacy pedagogy that can enable us to do so.

Learning to read: reading to learn

The goal of the paper is to describe a methodology for teaching reading and writing that has been developed in a long term action research project with teachers in Australia at all levels of education, from early primary through secondary to tertiary study, across curriculum areas. The methodology, known as *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*, has been developed in response to current urgent needs, particularly of Indigenous and other marginalised learners, to rapidly improve reading and writing for educational access and success. To this end it draws on three theoretical traditions: a Vygotskyan model of learning as social process, a Hallidayan model of language as text in social context, and a Bernsteinian model of education as pedagogic discourse. These theoretical foundations are integrated in a set of teaching strategies that

have been developed with teachers to be optimally practical in diverse classroom settings, and optimally practicable for teachers to acquire and use as part of their ordinary practice in their grade or curriculum area. The strategies have been independently evaluated as four times as effective as other literacy approaches at accelerating reading and writing development, capable of improving learners' reading ability from junior primary to secondary levels within one year (McRae, Ainsworth, Cumming, Hughes, Mackay, Price, Rowland, Warhurst, Woods and Zbar, 2000; Carbines, Wyatt and Robb, 2005; Cullican, 2006). They are currently being applied in primary, secondary and tertiary contexts in Australia, Africa and Latin America, with learners from a wide spectrum of language, cultural and educational backgrounds. However before outlining the strategies I first need to address the broad educational context in which they have been developed and applied, and the theoretical bases from which they have evolved.

Tools for democratising the classroom: Bernstein, Vygotsky and Halliday

I will take as a theoretical starting point Bernstein's model of teaching and learning as pedagogic discourse. Bernstein described pedagogic discourse as including two dimensions: "the discourse which creates specialised skills and their relationship to each other as *instructional discourse*, and the moral discourse which creates order, relations and identity [as] *regulative discourse*. . . the instructional discourse is embedded in the regulative discourse, and the regulative discourse is the dominant discourse" (1996, p.46). Crucially Bernstein saw these not as separate entities, but as aspects of a single process: "Often people in schools and in classrooms make a distinction between what they call the transmission of skills and the transmission of values. These are always kept apart as if there were a conspiracy to disguise the fact that there is only one discourse. In my opinion there is only one discourse, not two, because the secret voice of this discourse is to disguise the fact that there is only one" (*ibid.*).

If we accept Bernstein's view, one implication is that the dominant function of pedagogic discourse is not so much transmission of skills and knowledge, which is what we generally assume we are teaching, but rather of 'order, relations and identity'. What then is the nature of this order, these relations and identities? I want to suggest that these are continually apparent to all teachers in all classrooms in every day of our practice. The dominant moral order in our classrooms is one of inequality. Teachers are confronted by this

inequality from the day we first walk into a classroom, ill-prepared by our training to manage it, let alone overcome it. Every one of the teachers we work with in our in service programs, from early years on, report that a minority of learners are consistently able to actively engage in classroom activities, to respond successfully to teacher questions (the primary means by which we interact with our students), and to succeed in assessment tasks. Another group are sometimes able to actively engage, to respond to questions, and achieve average success, while a third group are often unable to engage, rarely respond, and are frequently unsuccessful in tasks. Relations in other words, between learners within every classroom and school, are unequal. As a result the learner identities that are produced and maintained by the moral order of the classroom and school are stratified as successful, average or unsuccessful. This inequality is universally construed at all levels of education, whether overtly or not, as differences in learning 'ability'. The entire educational edifice of assessment, progression and specialisation is predicated on this assumption. The naturalisation of inequality as differences in 'ability' serves to internalise these identities, so that successful learners come to experience schooling as their pathway to the future, while unsuccessful learners eventually come to experience it as irrelevant, even alienating.

Education and socioeconomic inequality

I now want to propose that this moral order within the classroom, these unequal relations between students, that specialise learner identities as successful, average or unsuccessful, is the primary engine in modern industrial societies for reproducing socioeconomic inequality. In other words the evolved (rather than designed) function of pedagogic discourse in modern education systems is to reproduce an unequal social order. The broad function of instructional discourses embedded in this regulative function is then to specialise occupational roles as 'professional', 'vocational' or 'manual' (Rose, 1998). That is the instructional function of pedagogic discourse is to specialise economic roles, while its regulative function is to naturalise this specialisation by formation of differing learner identities.

This relation drawn between classroom inequality and social hierarchy is materially supported by statistics of educational outcomes. Over the past twenty years there are has been relatively little change in outcomes in Australia, as displayed in Figure 1. The high proportion of Australians with no post-school qualifications has decreased marginally from over 60% to above 50%, while the proportion of those with bachelor or higher degrees has

increased from about 7% to 17%. In between, the proportion with vocational diplomas or lower certificates has remained constant at about 30% (ABS, 1994; 2004). Given the resources poured into the Australian education system over this time, and the energy devoted to educational debates and changing teacher practices, a 10% change in 20 years represents a very slight improvement. Yet even this change is much less than it appears, as a large fraction of increased post-school qualifications are basic certificates and on the job-training, while much of the increase in bachelor degrees represents amalgamation of technical colleges with universities, and reaccredidation of diplomas as degrees.

Figure 1:   Educational outcomes in Australia 1984-2004
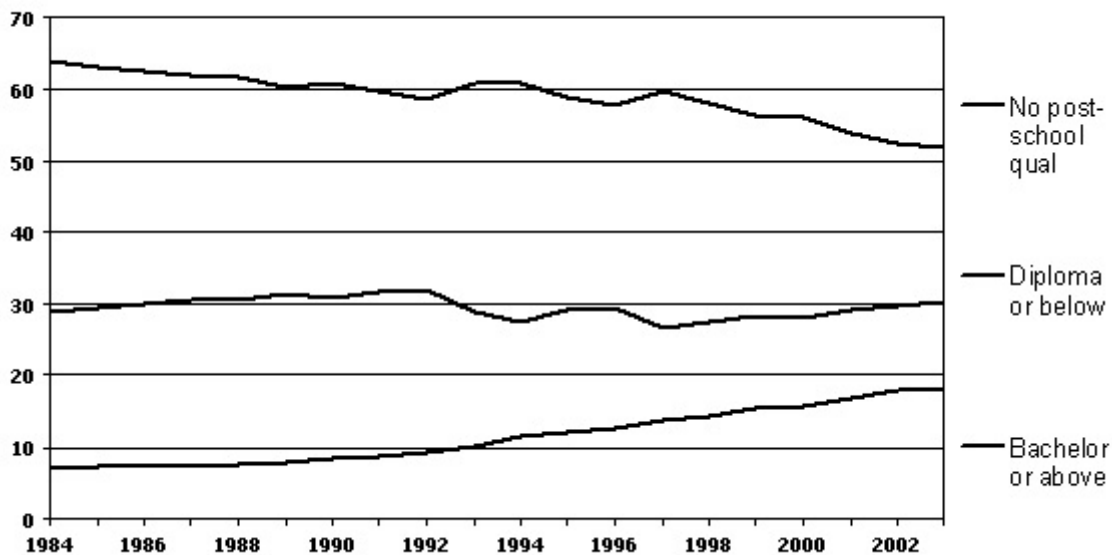
The constancy of these proportions is significant from two perspectives. One is that they reflect occupational strata in developed economies, with a relatively small professional elite, a larger segment of vocationally trained trades people, and a larger pool of on-the-job trained or unskilled manual workers. The latter unskilled occupational fraction has shrunk drastically in post-Fordist economies (Harvey, 1989), leading to crises such as youth unemployment. The failure of educational outcomes to keep pace with this socioeconomic change has focused attention on literacy in schools, and led to imposition by the state of testing regimes in an effort to force improvements. Secondly they strikingly reflect the proportions of groupings that teachers report in their classrooms, of successful, average and unsuccessful learners. These proportions vary from school to school and region to region, but they

persist despite apparent major changes in prevailing pedagogic practices. The twenty year span of Figure 1 covers a period in which teacher training in Australia has been entirely dominated by the set of practices and philosophies known as progressivism. As progressivist practices are legitimated on principles of access and equity, of inclusiveness and 'learner-centredness', it is ironic that they appear to have had negligible effects on inequality of outcomes for the majority of less advantaged learners in this wealthy nation.

It may be argued that at least outcomes have not gotten worse (as some commentators claim), but for those in the least successful group, our failure to improve outcomes has been an accelerating calamity. This includes those school leavers who would formerly have gone into unskilled manual labour, but today make up the 30–40% of unemployed young people in Australia (and many more in South Africa). Nowhere is this failure more calamitous than in Indigenous Australian communities, who were formerly excluded from educational access by racist policies, and desperately needed rapid improvement in outcomes to gain employment, manage their communities and negotiate with the colonising society. Instead our failure to educate recent generations of Indigenous students has resulted in unemployment rates of 60–90% in many communities, endemic intergenerational welfare dependency, and concomitant social disasters (Pearson, 2002; Rose, 1999). The experience of Indigenous Australian learners with the hegemony of progressivist pedagogy sounds an ominous warning for the many South African educators who have embraced its promise of liberation from authoritarian past practices. From the perspective of actual outcomes this promise now sounds increasingly hollow.[1]

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[1] Concern over the outcomes of progressivist pedagogy has been echoed by diverse secondary and tertiary educators I have met around South Africa, who are finding literacy levels deteriorating at a time when they need to be rapidly improving. It is now crucial that we look beyond the seductive rhetoric of progressivism to the reality of its outcomes for the most vulnerable learners. A sceptical eye needs to be cast over the cluster of associated practices and philosophies that oppose explicit teaching of school knowledge and school language in favour of self-discovery, including notions such as 'language experience', 'whole language', 'process writing', 'discovery learning', 'reading circles', 'peer scaffolding', 'social constructivism', and so on. Proponents of these ideas are often consummate persuaders but their primary interest is not in providing equal outcomes for all (cf. Muller, 2000).

The hidden curriculum of reading development

I would like to suggest here that the ideological struggle between progressivist and traditional pedagogies[2] is marginal to the core function of schooling to service the needs of a stratified socioeconomic order, by reproducing occupational specialisation as professional, vocational and manual labour. The engine of this reproduction is not primarily in the overt content of the curriculum, nor in an emphasis on learner-centred or teacher-centred philosophies, but in persistent evolved classroom practices that engage and enable different learners unequally. The term 'hidden curriculum' has been used to refer to positioning of learners through ideologically loaded curriculum (e.g. Muller, 2000), or to 'invisible' forms of control characteristic of progressivist pedagogies (Bernstein, 1996). Here I would like to use the term in a very specific sense to refer to practices that construct, maintain and evaluate inequalities between learners. The content of this hidden curriculum is inequality in students' abilities to participate and perform successfully. The process by which this is achieved is ordinary classroom discourse, including the 'triadic dialogue' of question-response-feedback described by many analysts as endemic to classroom interaction (see further discussion below). The superficiality of the progressive/traditional ideological conflict, supervening on the underlying iceberg of unequal 'abilities', is represented in Figure 2.

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[2]   Bernstein refers to progressive and traditional pedagogies as 'competence' and 'performance' models respectively (1990, 1996, Muller, 2000; Rose, 1999).

Figure 2:   Superficiality of progressive/traditional pedagogic conflict
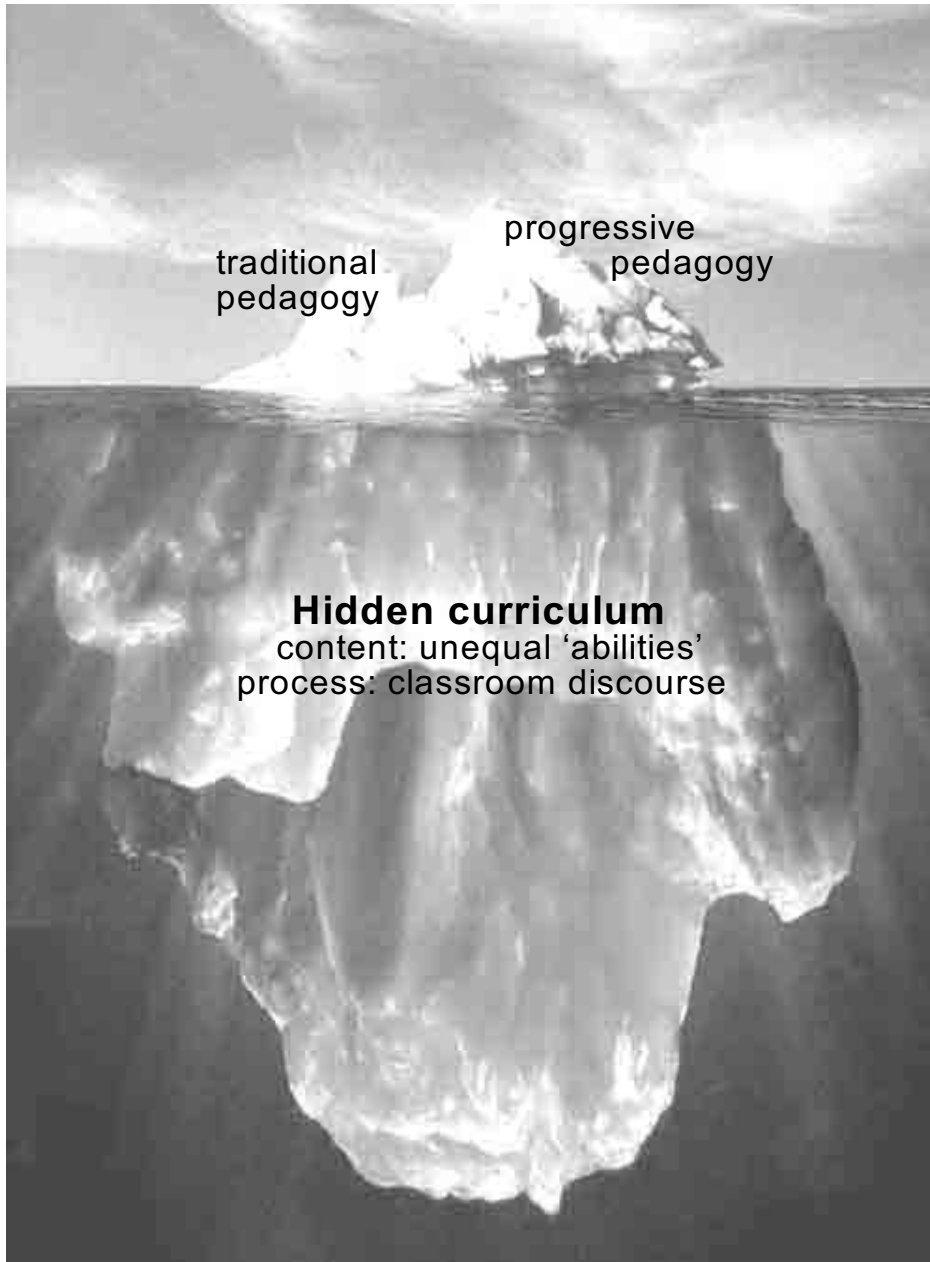
From where does the inequality in 'ability' arise? Few of us now accept that its basis is in biology, in some as yet undiscovered differences in the structures of learners' brains. Rather it is generally accepted as cultural in origin, and specifically in different kinds of preparation and support for the demands of school learning, provided by children's primary socialisation in the home. The most obvious and relevant difference in this respect is in the experience of parent-child reading, of which children in literate middle class families

experience an average of 1000 hours before starting school (Bergin, 2001), whereas those from oral cultural backgrounds may experience little or none. I have suggested that parent-child reading before school is the first stage in a curriculum of reading skills that underlies the content and processes of the overt curriculum in each stage of schooling (Rose, 2004a). Children with this wealth of experience are in a position to benefit most from the next stage of the underlying curriculum – the literacy practices of junior primary teaching (whether these are construed as traditional or progressive), and rapidly learn to become independent readers. It is crucial that these children are independently reading with understanding and engagement by the end of Year 2 or 3, in order to be ready for the next stage of the curriculum in middle to upper primary, in which they learn to learn from reading, and to demonstrate what they have learnt in written assessment tasks. These skills are in turn essential for these learners to be ready for secondary school, in which the fundamental pedagogic mode is through independently learning from reading. Skills in learning from reading are rarely taught explicitly in upper primary or secondary school; rather successful learners acquire them tacitly over years of practising reading and writing the overt curriculum content in class and homework. The accelerating volume of this content in the secondary years forces successful students to develop the skills they will need in tertiary study for independently reading academic texts, and reproducing and interpreting what they have read in assignments.

So each stage of the reading development curriculum, from parent-child reading onwards, prepares learners with the skills they will need for the next stage. But as these skills are not explicitly taught in the following stage, what learners are evaluated on are actually skills they have acquired in the preceding stage. That is junior primary teaching evaluates children on reading orientations they have acquired in the home, upper primary practices evaluate them on independent reading skills acquired in junior primary, and so on. Those learners who have acquired skills in each preceding stage are continually affirmed as 'able' in the next stage, while those learners who have not acquired the skills are evaluated as 'unable'. Evaluation is not simply or primarily through formal assessments, but continues relentlessly in the form of ordinary classroom interaction, in which teachers ask questions of the class that serve to differentiate learners on their ability to respond successfully. By these means, relations between learners are constructed as unequal from the very beginning of schooling, and their identities are continually reinforced as successful, average or unsuccessful. This reading development curriculum

underlying the overt content focused curriculum sequence of schooling is diagrammed here in Figure 3.

Figure 3:   Reading development sequence
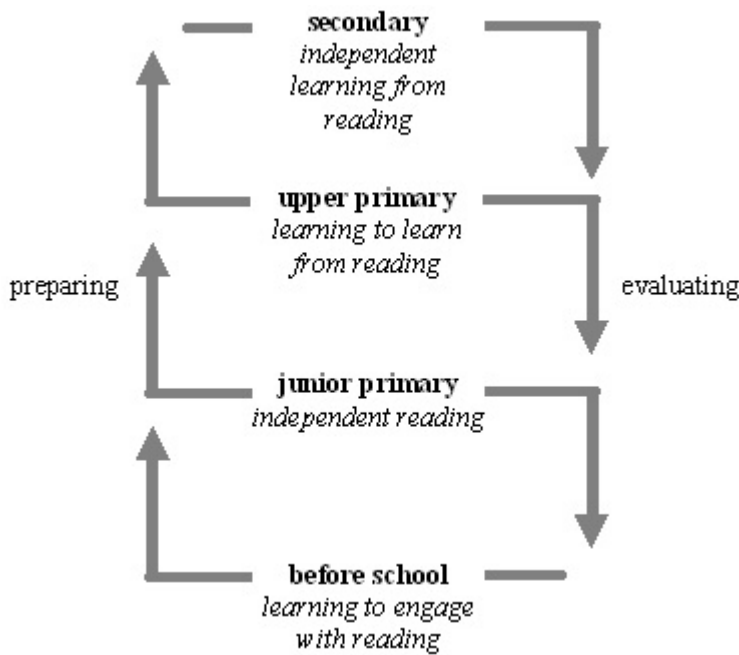
It must be emphasised that the reading development curriculum has evolved as mass schooling has emerged in stages from earlier systems for preparing elites for professional training; it is not a designed system, there is no conspiracy, and the overwhelming majority of teachers would prefer that all their students were successful. But as it underlies the overt content curriculum, beneath the notice of practitioners, and is acquired tacitly by elite learners, it serves a double function. One is to prepare the successful few for university, the other is ensure that other learners do not acquire the same skills. The first function is achieved by forcing able learners to continually practise reading and writing across the accelerating content curriculum; the second is achieved by not allowing time to teach these reading and writing skills explicitly. However as with Bernstein's pedagogic discourse, this evolved double function is really one, to reproduce a stratified social order. The good news is that it is possible for all learners to rapidly acquire skills in reading and writing at any stage of the curriculum, by teaching them explicitly instead of leaving them for tacit acquisition. It takes successful learners six years each of primary and secondary schooling to acquire these skills, precisely because they are not taught explicitly. But we have demonstrated that they can be acquired by the weakest of secondary students in a year of explicit teaching, with a mere 2 or 3

lessons per week. The *Reading to Learn* strategies are designed to by applied at any point in the reading development sequence, as either repair or part of ordinary teaching practice.

The Vygotskyan model of social learning

Although progressivist philosophies are rhetorically opposed to so-called traditional practices – as learner-centred vs teacher-centred, inclusive vs exclusive, wholistic vs atomistic, discovery vs rote, and so on – they have failed to significantly change outcomes because they share fundamentally the same model of learning that is tacitly assumed in schooling in general. In this model, learning is presumed to happen within individuals in increments as they master one step after another. The incremental learning model did not originate as a theory but as a tacitly held view that appears to have evolved with the vocation of school teaching.[3] That is its context of evolution was a pedagogic discourse that produces unequal order, relations and identities. It can be contrasted with tacit models of learning that underlie other pedagogic domains. Examples include trades training, where apprentices are expected to emerge with a common set of vocational skills and identities, and are explicitly supported to achieve these outcomes, from the 'outside in', by repeated modelling and practice (Gamble, 2003); or in the home where children are expected to acquire a common set of linguistic and cultural skills and identities, and are explicitly supported by their parents to acquire them through repeated modelling and practice (Painter, 1984; 1996; 1998; 2004).

As teaching became professionalised the incremental learning model was theoretically legitimated and formalised in Piagetian child psychology which privileges relations between learning and innate developmental stages, i.e. that learning takes place from the 'inside out' (Piaget, 1928). On the other hand the Piagetian model of innate development did lead to rejection of evolved traditional teaching practices that were construed as teacher dominated, i.e. from the 'outside in'. Instead learners are given tasks matching their assessed 'ability' level, and learning is assumed to occur as individuals do these activities. This model demands that learners are continually evaluated to assess their readiness for advancement. In traditional practices these assessments may inform and legitimate streaming into different 'ability' classes. In progressivist practices they may inform individuated learning activities that differentiate

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[3]   The origin of the incremental learning model may be associated with the medieval approach to teaching classical languages, beginning with the smallest units of syntax and building up in prescribed steps.

learners within classes, and this hierarchical differentiation is then legitimated as 'learner-centred'. The incremental learning model is schematised in Figure 4, in which learners complete a series of independent tasks at their various 'ability' levels, leading to summative assessment tasks. As the rate of development of less successful learners cannot exceed the rate of more successful learners, this model ensures that the 'ability' gap can never be closed.

Figure 4:   Incremental learning model: unequal outcomes
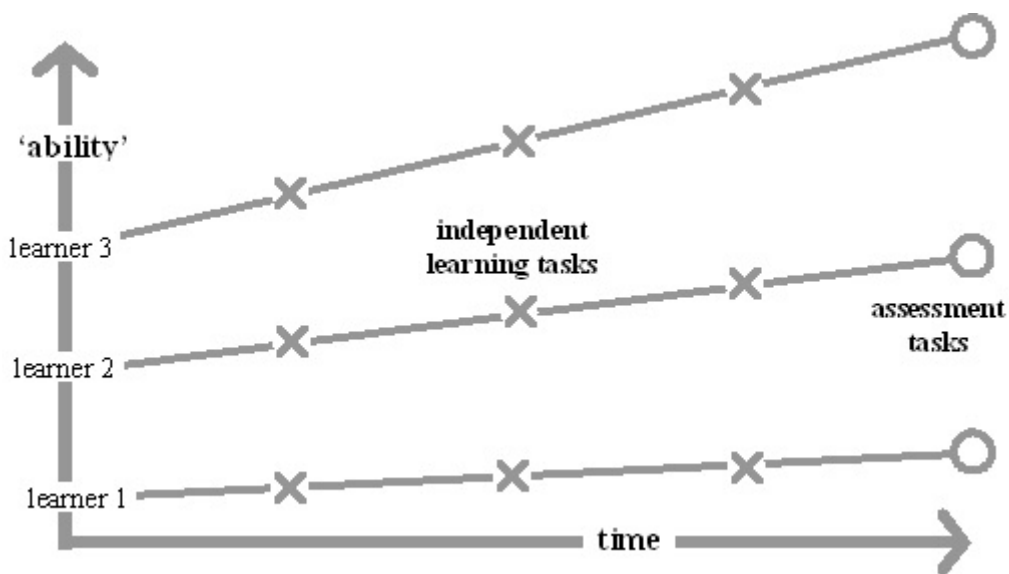
In such an individuated view of learning, teaching is wholly constrained by the independent competence of the learner. If some learners fail where others succeed, there is little teachers can do beyond individual 'remediation'. Since learning is assumed to occur through independent activity, and assessment is continuous, learning activities and assessment tasks are not clearly differentiated. What teachers perceive as learning activities, learners may perceive as evaluation tasks, particularly those learners who are least successful. Thus all manner of activities, from formal reading and writing tasks, through maths and other short exercises, to the question-response-feedback routines of classroom interaction, all serve to produce and maintain learner identities as more or less successful, no matter what their instructional intent.

An entirely different view of learning is the Vygotskyan model (Vygotsky, 1978; 1981), which claims that learning takes place in the 'zone' between what learners can do independently and what they can do with the support of a teacher. We can apply this view to reflect on traditional and progressive pedagogies which depend on learners' independent competence. In teacher-centred modes this can take the form of presenting information to learners and relying on them to assimilate and use it independently. In learner-centred modes a context is provided in which learners are expected to 'discover' concepts for themselves. But in the Vygotskyan view learning takes place in both modes only insofar as learners are supported by a teacher or by a text that mediates the teacher's support. Teacher-centred activities clearly provide sufficient support for some learners to acquire the information presented, but insufficient support for others. Learner-centred activities provide a modicum of support for all learners, but the level of task is higher for some and lower for others. Both sets of practices advantage more advanced learners, as they are pitched just beyond their independent competence. Both also disadvantage less advanced learners: teacher-centred ones because they are too far beyond their independent competence and provide insufficient support to bridge the gap; learner-centred ones because they 'dumb down' tasks below the levels achieved by more successful learners, so that their rate of incremental development falls further and further behind that of the more successful learners.

In contrast to both these sets of practices, the Vygotskyan model suggests that a teacher can potentially support learners to operate at a high level no matter what their independent ability. The *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* pedagogy assumes this possibility, but takes it further to support all learners in a class to simultaneously operate at the same high level. In this model the teacher is neither simply an authority presenting information, nor simply a facilitator managing a learning context, but a guide providing what Bruner has called 'scaffolding' (first in Woods, Bruner and Ross, 1976; cf. Mercer, 2000; Wells, 1999). In the *Reading to Learn* methodology, scaffolding supports all learners to do the same high level tasks, but provides the greatest support for the weakest learners. Rather than developing in incremental steps, learners acquire independent competence through repeated practice with high level tasks, and the scaffolding support is gradually withdrawn as learners take control. This then is the principle by which an unequal moral order can be transformed into a democratic classroom, where successful learner identities can be distributed equally to all students.

The Hallidayan language model and reading

The goal of democratising the classroom is not a utopian dream. It is basic practice in the *Reading to Learn* program, made possible by the contribution of Halliday's functional model of language to understanding and so explicitly teaching the tasks of reading and writing across curricula (Halliday, 1975; 1978; 1993). Central to Halliday's theory is the notion of **realisation**, where meaning is realised as wording (i.e. 'expressed/ symbolised/ manifested'), and wording is realised as sounding or lettering. Theories of reading in early schooling tend to be polarised between those that focus on comprehension of meaning, often advocating 'immersion' of learners in whole texts ('whole language'), versus those that advocate explicit teaching of sound-letter correspondences, followed by words, phrases and sentences ('phonics' and 'basal readers'). In Halliday's stratified model of language, this polarisation dissolves into different perspectives on the same phenomenon, from the stratum 'above' of meaning or **discourse semantics**, and from the stratum 'below' of sounding and lettering or **phonology**/**graphology** (Halliday 1996). It is the stratum between, of wording or **lexicogrammar**, that is typically conceived as what we are reading, since the written page consists of words organised into sentences. The acrimony in reading theory is over whether it is primarily 'decoding' sequences of letters, or 'predicting' sequences of meanings, that enables us to read words. The answer flowing from the Hallidayan functional model is of course both. Layers of structure in these three language strata are represented schematically in Figure 5.

Figure 5:   Complexity of the reading task by strata and rank
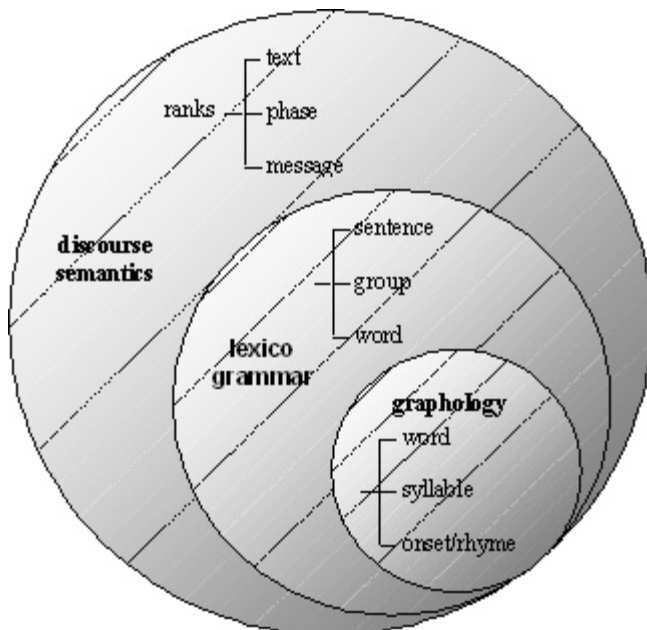
The medium of expression, of sounding versus lettering, is an obvious difference between speaking and writing, so explicit teaching of reading has traditionally started with teaching the graphic medium. But Halliday (1989) has also shown us significant grammatical differences between spoken and written modes of meaning, between the 'recursive' structures typical of speech and 'crystalline' structures typical of written sentences. Essential for recognising these differences is his model of grammatical ranks: while a written sentence may appear visually as a string of words, its meanings are also organised in intermediate ranks of word groups or phrases. For example the sentence *A frog was swimming in a pond after a rainstorm* consists of four word groups, denoting who its about, what they were doing, where and when. Where lexical 'content words' tend to be sparsely strung out in speech, in writing they are densely packed into groups within each sentence, as well as into technical and abstract words. The practice of packing complex meanings into abstract wordings is known as grammatical metaphor (Halliday, 1994; Martin and Rose, 2003; Rose, 2000b). Where experienced readers are able to automatically process such lexical density, inexperienced readers may labour to 'unpack' dense wordings, often without success.

Likewise, a word appears visually as a string of letters, but these are actually organised in intermediate ranks of syllables and their components. A layer of structure above the letter is acknowledged in phonics approaches to reading, as letter 'blends' that are drilled in lists of sound-letter correspondences. But the sounds associated with letter patterns in English vary with the particular word in which they occur (the 'ough' pattern is one obvious example), and with their structural position in the syllable, as onset (e.g. 'thr-') or rhyme (e.g. '-ough'). The entire English spelling system is thus very complex, but like all language systems consists of regular predictable contrasts (Mountford, 1998). These can be learnt, not from drilling sound-letter paradigms and sounding out words, but only from recognising recurrent instances in meaningful discourse, as we learn language in general. Experienced readers recognise words by visually processing letter patterns, whereas weak readers often struggle to sound out words letter-by-letter, a strategy encouraged by phonics approaches.

But it is not through processing letter patterns alone that we recognise written words; while the spelling system is complex, the systems of meaning that wordings realise are immeasurably more so, and it is equally our experience of these systems that enables us to read. Again there are intermediate layers of structure in the discourse semantic stratum, between the sentence and the text, in particular the stages that different genres go through to achieve their purposes, as well as shorter phases of meaning within each stage that are more

variable. Examples of such phases include episodes in a short story, as well characters' reactions, descriptions and so on. And aside from stages and phases, there are other kinds of structure in written discourse, including links between people, things and places from sentence to sentence, varieties of logical relations between their activities, and swelling and diminishing attitudes, all packaged within waves of information (see Martin and Rose, 2003, in press 2006; Rose, in press 2006 for accessible introductions to these discourse patterns). Experienced readers continually recognise, predict and recall written patterns of meaning, whereas inexperienced readers cannot recognise patterns they are unfamiliar with, and so cannot read with comprehension.[4]

A literacy pedagogy for democratising the classroom

How can we support all learners to manage such complexity when reading and writing? Phonics and basal reader approaches attempt to simplify the task by treating the language system as though it were 'bricks-&-mortar',[5] building up from smallest to larger units, from letters to blends to words, then through hierarchies of basal reading books, from single words to word groups to sentences. Whole language approaches attempt to avoid complexity by

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[4] This is a richer interpretation of reading than can be offered by cognitive reading theories, because it is grounded in large scale detailed analyses of how language actually makes meaning, rather than hypotheses of how the mind/brain works. In contrast cognitive theories are necessarily speculative, as 'mind' can only be observed indirectly through behaviour. Cognitive theories may converge with the model presented here insofar as they advocate strategies based on observation of successful reading behaviour, and because they are working with the same phenomenon – language. The major difference is that they skirt around this phenomenon, touching on it at certain points, but at the heart of their discourse there lies a vacuum left by the absence of an articulated theory of language in social context. The same absence lies in the discourse of 'New Literacies' theorists, whose perspectives tend to the social rather than cognitive (e.g. Gee 1998; Street 1999), but who lack a detailed understanding of the object of their expertise – language – and how to actually teach it.

[5] Halliday (1996) critiques structuralist language models, on which phonics and related literacy approaches are based, as 'bricks-&-mortar'. These models, derived from Aristotelian grammatics, are focused on forms rather than meaning, beginning with letters/phonemes that make up words, which make up sentences, which make up texts. So some literacy approaches insist on learners knowing 'sounds' before they can learn to 'decode' words, others insist they build up 'vocabulary' before they can learn to read texts. These approaches are popular in remedial programs but do not enable many learners to read beyond basic levels.

treating texts as undifferentiated lakes of meaning for learners to immerse in. But the Hallidayan language model enables us to systematically deconstruct the complexity of the reading and writing task and support learners to practise each component in turn, but always starting with meaning.

This is achieved in the *Reading to Learn* approach through a six stage curriculum cycle. The first stage, *Preparing before Reading*, reduces complexity by providing support at the levels of both discourse and graphology. It enables learners to follow the words of a text as it is read aloud, by the teacher first orally summarising its overall sequence of meanings, in terms all learners can understand. As a result they need not struggle to work out what is going on in the text, nor to decode unfamiliar words, as they listen to the words read aloud. General understanding of the text then provides a foundation for the key stage of *Detailed Reading* when learners must read the wordings themselves, but this task is made easy by reading a short passage sentence-by-sentence, with the support of meaning cues provided by the teacher. These cues enable learners to actively identify wordings from their meanings, and so to apply what they learn to other texts. *Detailed Reading* enables all learners to read the passage with full comprehension and accuracy, and provides the foundation for the third stage of *Preparing before Writing*. This stage varies with the type of text and level of schooling: with story texts in primary years it may involve manipulating sentences on cardboard strips, followed by practice in spelling and fluent writing; with factual texts at all levels it involves making notes from the text, in which spelling can also be practised. The movement through these three stages is thus 'top-down', from overall meanings in text, through wordings in sentences, to letter patterns in words.

The next three stages then move back up to construct patterns of meaning in new texts. The fourth stage is *Joint Reconstruction* of the text, in which the teacher guides the class to write a new text, with all learners taking turns to scribe on the class board. With story texts, *Joint Reconstruction* uses the same literate language patterns as the original passage, with new content – events, characters, settings and so on. This supports learners to use the literary resources of the accomplished author they have learnt to read, and apply them to a new story. With factual texts, *Joint Reconstruction* uses the same content as the original text, via the notes scribed from it, but the new text is written in wordings that are closer to what the learners might use themselves in assignments. In the fifth stage *Individual Reconstruction*, learners use the text patterns or notes they have practised using with the class to write a text of their own. Again with stories this involves the same text patterns with new

content, while factual texts involve the same content with new wordings. Skills developed through each of these supportive stages finally lead to an *Independent Writing* task on which learners can be assessed. These writing activities flowing from detailed reading extend and intensify the approach of genre-based writing pedagogies (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Martin, 1993, 1999; Martin and Painter, 1986; Martin and Rose, 2005; Rothery, 1989, 1996). This six stage curriculum cycle is schematised in Figure 6.

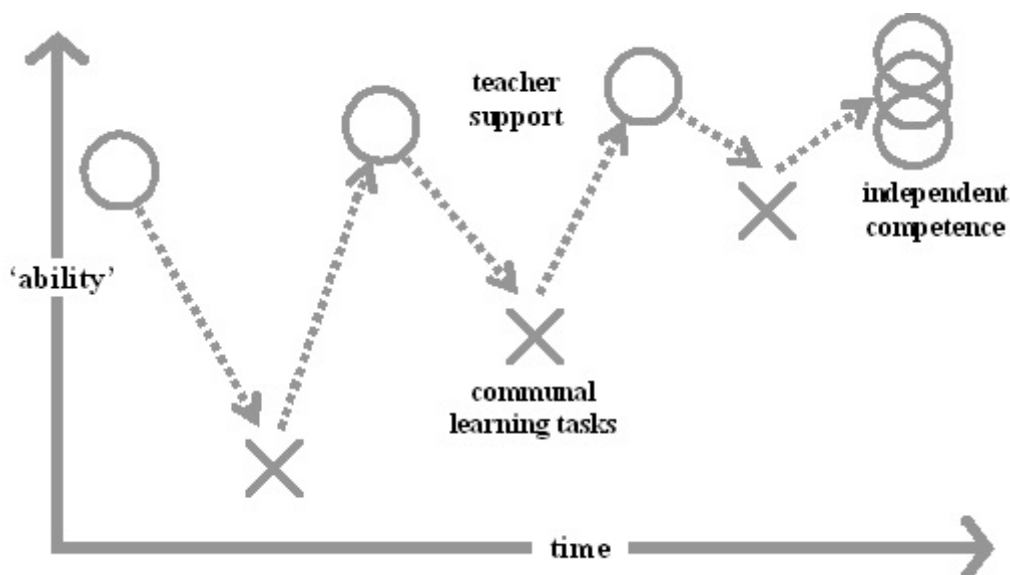Figure 6:   Learning to read: reading to learn curriculum cycle
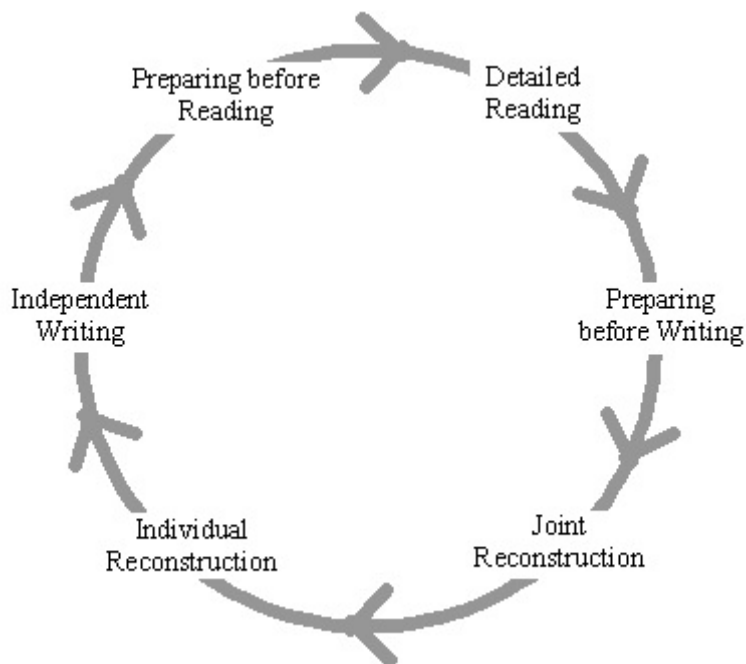
This curriculum model resonates with and recursively puts into practice Vygotsky's social model of learning:

> Any function in the [learner]'s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the [learner] as an intra-psychological category (1981, p.163).

In each stage of the *Reading to Learn* cycle, one or more components of reading and writing tasks are practised first as a communal activity, with the teacher as authoritative guide, and then as an individual activity. This interactive process is schematised in Figure 7. The level of support provided by the teacher is initially well beyond the independent competence of the weakest learners, such as the text synopsis provided in *Preparation before*

Reading, but this enables all learners to do the first task, such as listening with general comprehension as the text is read aloud. The 'inter-psychological' synopsis provided by the teacher thus becomes the learners' 'intra-psychological' understanding of the text's field. The teacher can then provide support for a more complex task, such as the preparations in *Detailed Reading* that enable all learners to identify wordings for themselves. The teacher's preparations, grounded in a shared understanding of the field, thus become the learners' recognition of each wording. Likewise, writing tasks are first practised jointly with the teacher's guidance, and then independently. In each successive stage, the complexity of the learning task increases, and the gap between the most and least successful learners decreases, so that they are ultimately able to do the same high level assessment task, with comparable success.[6]

Figure 7:   Scaffolded learning model, equitable outcomes

In the following sections, the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* strategies are outlined for reading and writing in early years, for stories in middle school years, and for factual texts at primary, secondary or tertiary levels.

Reading and writing in early years

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[6]   The scaffolded learning process of repeated successful supported practice also resonates with our current understanding of brain functioning (Edelman & Tononi 2000), in which conceptual processing is reinforced and expanded through repeated experience associated with positive affect.

Learning to Read strategies in the early years of schooling capitalise on the standard junior primary practice of *Shared Reading* (Rose, 2004b). In this activity the teacher reads a children's book to learners repeatedly over 2 or 3 weeks, explaining it and engaging them until they understand it and can say almost every word in the story, or part of it. Commonly a big book is used which enables the teacher to point to the words as she and the children say them together, illustrated in Figure 8. The *Shared Reading* activity is partly modelled on parent-child reading practices, in which books are read repeatedly until children know them intimately. It serves to engage children in the pleasure of reading, a pleasure that derives from the communal activity with the teacher as surrogate parent, affirming, supporting and encouraging the children.

Figure 8:   Shared reading

Shared Reading is unquestionably the most valuable standard activity in junior primary for preparing children to become readers, as it tunes them into the joy of reading for pleasure and constructs shared identities as participants in reading as meaningful communication. For learners from literate family backgrounds it reinforces the experience of parent-child reading, contributing to their rapid development as independent readers. For children from oral family backgrounds it introduces them to these pleasures and identities for the first time. But then there is a gap. As the teacher reads the big book, pointing to the words, children with a developed concept of the printed word as communication, from experience of reading along with their parents, are soon

able to recognise the words as the teacher points. But children without this experience are frequently unable to recognise the communicative function of the printed words, to relate the printed objects to the spoken words they are reciting. For many of these children, concomitant activities teaching the alphabet and sound-letter correspondences have no effect, as they do not have a sufficient meaning base to apply these abstract symbols to recognising their function in expressing meaning. In Indigenous community schools in central Australia, where parent-child reading does not occur, we found that no children had learnt to read before Year 3, and most were still on basal readers at the end of primary school (Rose, Gray and Cowey, 1999). Some form of this problem undoubtedly occurs in many contexts, where the home culture is oral rather than literate or where parent-child reading is not a regular activity (cf. Williams, 1999 on differences between middle and working class orientations to parent-child reading).

This gap is a terrible waste of opportunity to make all children successful engaged readers, which could then give them sound preparation for learning from reading in upper primary, and so to succeed in secondary school. The gap results from our failure to train junior primary teachers in techniques to teach children from oral backgrounds to recognise the words they are reading, and so to independently read the books used in shared reading. Yet these techniques are very simple, and are developed from strategies often used by experienced primary teachers in the past, that were abandoned as progressivist philosophy took over early childhood teacher training, and vilified them as rote learning.

As *Shared Reading* constitutes the curriculum stage of preparing for reading in early years, the next stage of detailed reading involves supporting children in *Recognising Words*. Here the first sentence of the story they know thoroughly is written out on a cardboard strip. The teacher and children then point at each word as they say them together, until each child can read the sentence accurately, pointing at and saying the words. This may initially involve the teacher pointing at the words as they jointly read the sentence 2 or 3 times, then holding the child's hand as they point and read again 2 or 3 times, before the child is able to point and say the words themselves, as shown in Figure 9. With these simple strategies on a well known sentence, accurate reading can be achieved in a matter of minutes, even with children who previously had no concept of words. In large classes, children simply take turns to point at the words with the strip on an easel, as the whole class recites them.

Figure 9:   Recognising words

Once they can read the sentence accurately, the teacher asks children to point out particular words, then to cut off these words or groups of words, put them back in the sentence, and read it again. The cut up words can then be mixed up, so that learners put them back together, and read the sentence again. These activities firstly support young children to recognise the relation between written words as material objects and the meanings they express, and secondly to recognise graphic differences between each word in the sequence of meanings in a sentence. At this stage they need not recognise the spelling patterns of each word, but can differentiate them by visual cues such as first and last letters, supported by the sequence of the sentence.[7]

Once all children can recognise words in and out of the sentence, they are ready for the next stage of *Spelling*, as a first step from reading to preparing for writing. Here the teacher shows learners how to cut up a word into its letter patterns, including syllables and onset and rhyme patterns. Children then practise writing each letter pattern on slates (small white or black boards), before practising to write the whole word, shown in Figure 10. At each step, they observe the letter pattern or word, write it from memory, and then check for themselves if they are correct, in order to encourage self-correction.

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[7]   Sentence Making techniques resemble strategies used in the *Breakthrough to Literacy* program (Mackay, Thompson, Schaub, 1978), but use known sentences from reading books, rather than composing new ones. They also resemble strategies used in the *Reading Recovery* program (Clay, 1994), but this is an incremental learning program with over 20 assessed levels.

Repeated practice of letter patterns and whole words, whose meanings they are thoroughly familiar with, rapidly enables young children to remember how to spell them. The practise with letter patterns then enables them to transfer this knowledge to recognising other words.

Figure 10: Spelling letter patterns

The sequence of acquisition is thus from meaning to wording to lettering, the reverse of incremental learning models, that treat written language compositionally as letters making up words making up sentences. In contrast, the *Learning to Read* approach does not depend on the ability to name or sound out letters of the alphabet, but takes meaning in context as the starting point for teaching the components of the reading task in manageable steps. On the same principle, accurate letter formation can also be taught in the context of spelling, as the teacher demonstrates and learners practise on their slates.

When learners can automatically spell the main words in the sentence they can jointly reconstruct the whole sentence on their slates, with the teacher supporting by writing words not spelt and the children writing the words they know. The sentence can then be rubbed out and practised again until each child can independently reconstruct the whole sentence. The entire process can then be repeated for the next sentence, and so on until they are able to independently read and write whole paragraphs. Eventually the class can begin to practise writing new stories patterned on the stories they have been reading. This technique is described below for stories in the middle years.

Stories in the middle years

Techniques for reading and writing stories in primary and junior secondary school support learners to read with engagement and enjoyment, to develop identities as readers, and to recognise and use literate language patterns in their own writing (Rose, 2004b). In the first stage, *Preparing before Reading*, the story or part of it is read aloud with the class, but learners are first prepared to follow the words with understanding, by giving them the background knowledge they need to access it, by telling them what the story is about, and by summarising the sequence in which it unfolds.

Learners' understanding of the overall meanings of a text then provides a sound context for recognising the more detailed meanings within each sentence in the *Detailed Reading* stage. At this stage of the pedagogy, students can begin to read the wordings for themselves, but the complexity of this task is alleviated by selecting a short passage and reading it sentence-by-sentence, while providing adequate support for all learners to recognise wordings from the perspective of their meaning. This involves three preparation cues: firstly a paraphrase or summary of the meaning of the whole sentence in commonsense terms; secondly a position cue that tells learners where to look for the wording; and thirdly the meaning of the wording in general or commonsense terms. Learners then have to reason from the meaning cue to the actual wording on the page, and so identify and then highlight the wording, as shown in Figure 11.
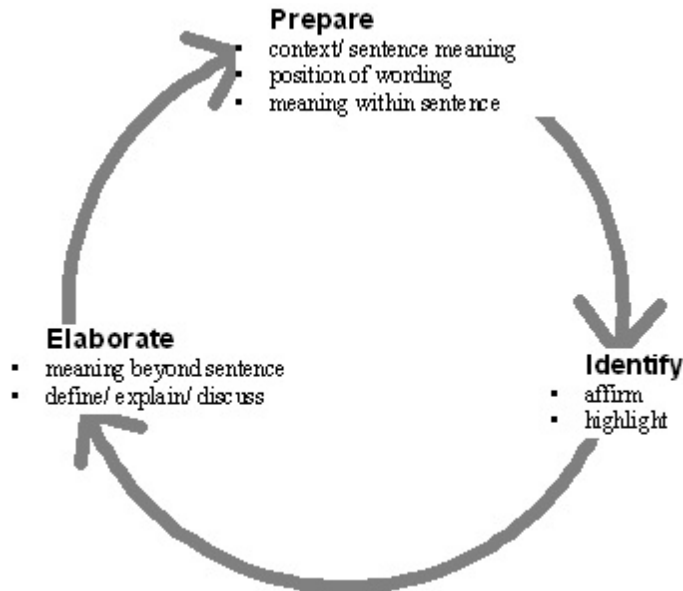
Figure 11:   Detailed reading

Once they have successfully identified a wording, learners are prepared for an elaboration of its meaning, by defining technical or literate wordings, by explaining new concepts or metaphors, or by discussing students' relevant experience. In general the distinction between the meanings used for preparing to identify wordings, and the elaborations that follow, is between local meanings within the sentence and more abstract meanings beyond the sentence. The local meaning cue gives all learners initial access to the wording, but the elaboration explores its meaning in depth. Through this double move learners gain control of the total complexity of language patterns in the text, but in manageable steps. The interactive process of detailed reading allows every learner to read a grade appropriate text with fluency and comprehension, no matter what their independent reading level.

We have termed the cycle of preparing, identifying and elaborating the **scaffolding interaction cycle**, diagrammed in Figure 12. This cycle formally describes the micro-interactions involved in parent-child reading (Rose, 2000a). The formal description enables teachers to carefully plan a discussion around the language features in a text, to think through which language features will be focused on at each step, how the teacher will prepare students to identify them, and how they will elaborate on them.

Figure 12: Detailed reading interaction cycle

Prepare
- context/ sentence meaning
- position of wording
- meaning within sentence

Elaborate
- meaning beyond sentence
- define/ explain/ discuss

Identify
- affirm
- highlight

The scaffolding cycle systematically renovates the 'triadic dialogue' or 'IRF' (Initiation-Response-Feedback) pattern, described by Nassaji and Wells (2000) among many others as endemic to classroom discourse. But there are three crucial differences between the typical IRF classroom pattern and scaffolding interactions. Firstly the initial scaffolding move is not simply a question eliciting a response from learners, but consistently *prepares* <u>all</u> learners to respond successfully; secondly the followup move is not simply feedback that evaluates or comments on responses, but consistently *elaborates* on shared knowledge about text features; and thirdly responses are always affirmed, whereas responses that are inadequately prepared in IRF discourse are frequently negated or ignored. By these means I suggest that IRF has evolved as the invisible central motor of classroom inequality that continually but imperceptibly differentiates learners on their ability to respond, from the first to last years of schooling. In contrast scaffolding interactions are explicitly designed to enable all students in a class to always respond successfully. One of the greatest difficulties teachers find in our in service training is shifting from habituated IRF discourse to preparing each move, i.e. from continually demanding to giving information. This is because IRF discourse is not directly taught in teacher training, but is habituated through twelve or more years of our socialisation as learners in classrooms, a minimum 12 000 hours of intensive conditioning that can be very hard to undo.

Following *Detailed Reading*, activities that then prepare for writing include *Sentence Making*, *Spelling,* and *Sentence Writing*. As in the early years, *Sentence Making* involves writing sentences on cardboard strips, but at this level using a whole selected paragraph. The teacher guides learners to identify and cut out wordings, using same discussion as for *Detailed Reading*, but less preparation is now needed for them to identify words and groups, and these can be elaborated with more detail and discussion. In groups learners take turns to cut up sentences into phrases, and then words, put them back together, mix them up, rearrange them and construct new sentences with the cards. *Sentence Making* has three broad functions: it intensifies the identification and discussion of meanings and wordings from *Detailed Reading*, it enables learners to manipulate wordings to create meaningful sequences without the added load of writing, and as individual words are cut out they can be used to practise spelling. In *Sentence Making* activities the learners are taking greater control of the reading and writing process, whether in groups (shown in Figure 13) or individually. The scaffolding movement from 'outside-in' is thus from whole class with teacher guidance, to group practice, to independence.

Figure 13: Sentence making in groups

Spelling activities are essentially the same as those described for early reading. Learners can cut up words into syllables, onsets and rhymes and practise writing them on slates, using the standard practice of look-cover-write-check. Once all learners can automatically spell most of the words in the paragraph, they can practise writing the whole paragraph from memory on their slates. The value of this *Sentence Writing* activity is that they are supported to practise fluently writing long stretches of meaningful text, without the load of inventing a story for themselves. To support them to do so, most of the words

in the paragraph are turned over, leaving only a few items such as sentence beginnings and grammatical words, as a framework to help them recall the sequence of meanings. When they have finished writing, the words can be turned back over for them to check their wording and spelling for themselves.

The next stage involves reconstructing the text patterns of the passage used for *Detailed Reading*, with new events, characters, settings and so on. This *Text Patterning* begins with the whole class as a joint activity before moving to independent writing. The first step is to read the whole passage again and reiterate the discussion of its global structures and key features. The class then brainstorms new story elements, the teacher scribes all ideas on the board or paper sheets for later use, and the class votes on which ideas will be used for the joint story. In the joint writing process learners take turns to scribe (shown in Figure 14), but the whole class thinks of what to write and how to say it, closely following the original text patterns. This activity supports all learners to use the literate language of the accomplished author they have been reading, at the same time as creating a new story. Independent writing then involves using the same text patterns again, but with individual stories, using and expanding ideas discussed with the class. As with all other stages of the curriculum cycle, some students will be able to do this activity more independently, enabling the teacher to provide support for weaker writers in the class.

Figure 14: Text patterning with stories
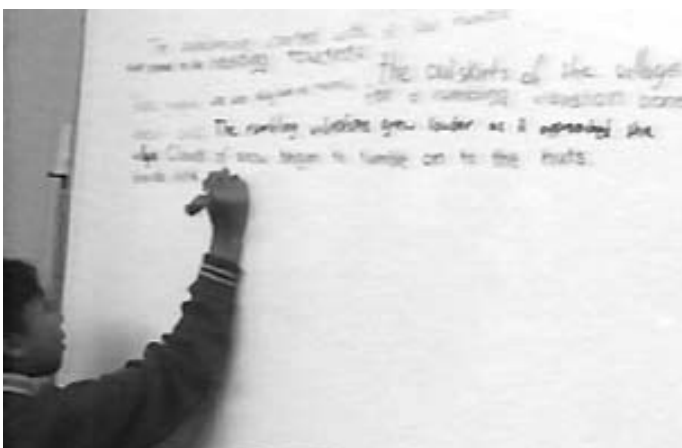
Factual texts

Techniques for reading and writing factual texts can be used at any level, from primary to tertiary study, in any curriculum area. They support learners to develop skills in reading texts with understanding, identifying key information, selecting information for notes, and using it to write texts of their own. Along the way they also develop skills in interpreting and critiquing both the content of texts and how they are constructed (Rose, 2004c).

As with stories, the first stage is *Preparing before Reading*, but this may include more extensive exploration of the overall field, as the text is typically embedded in curriculum topic. Again the teacher summarises the topic of the text and the sequence in which it unfolds, in words all learners can understand, but also using some of the terms in the text for learners to key into as it is read aloud. During and after reading, key terms and concepts may also be briefly explained. In *Detailed Reading*, meaning cues are more often paraphrases of technical or abstract wordings. These may draw from commonsense, or from previously built up knowledge in the field. Elaborations will tend to be definitions of technical terms, explanations of new concepts or discussion building on students' field knowledge.

In the *Note Making* stage students take turns to scribe, on the class board as a dot-point list, the wordings that have been highlighted during detailed reading, illustrated in Figure 15. At this point the students take over control, as the class dictates wordings and spellings that they can all read, prompted by the teacher where necessary. This stage provides many opportunities to practise spelling (and pronunciation), and to further discuss the field and organisation of the text.

Figure 15: Note Making from factual texts

When one side of the board has been filled with notes, students take turns to scribe a new text on the other side. The teacher now steps in to support the class, firstly by pointing out discourse patterns and other key elements in the notes. This preparation before writing gives students the general framework of genre and field within which to rewrite the text. The teacher then prepares students to imagine new texts, by drawing attention to notes, suggesting alternative wordings, and further discussing the field. Now instead of identifying literate wordings from commonsense cues, students select more commonsense paraphrases for the literate wordings in the notes. Then the teacher may elaborate by rephrasing the selection, supporting them to check issues such grammar, letter cases, punctuation or spelling, and encouraging critical discussion of the way the original author constructed the field, and how they may reconstruct it. Such high level critical analysis is possible because of the supported practice in deconstructing and reconstructing meanings at all levels of the text. The scaffolding interaction cycle is thus employed for supporting writing, in the form of prepare-select-elaborate. Following the whole class joint construction, the text can be rubbed off and students can practise writing their own text from the same notes, in groups and individually, as a step towards independent research.

Conclusion: resources for scaffolding reading and writing

This has been the merest sketch of some the literacy teaching strategies developed in the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* project. (Training videos that explain the strategies in more detail are listed in the references below.) As the research has expanded, involving more teachers in more educational domains, the possibilities have continued to open up. Each development has occurred through examining the nature of the learning task, using the functional language model, and devising ways to support all learners to practise each component of the task, using the social learning model. The strategies applied depend on the degree of scaffolding support required by the learners for the task, at each stage of a lesson sequence and learning program.

We have then an expanding repertoire of resources for scaffolding that can be arranged on a cline, from least to most supportive. Least supportive teaching practices include not reading in class, not preparing students to read, using inappropriate texts for readings, and not modelling writing tasks. More support can be provided simply by selecting appropriate texts in curriculum planning, for learners to read independently, on the criteria of **genre** (readings that model the kinds of text we want learners to write), **field** (using key texts in the topic under study, or in fields of interest to learners), **mode** (i.e. the level of literate or technical language) and **ideology** (whether the message of the text is worth reading). The next level of support for independent reading can be provided by preparing before reading, including the background (overall field), what the text's about (text field) and what happens in the text (how the field unfolds through it).

More supportive again is to jointly read texts in the class, paragraph-by-paragraph, with learners taking turns to read. Scaffolding support can be provided for this by preparing with a brief synopsis of the paragraph before reading, so enabling all learners to understand as it is read, and then elaborating after reading with definitions, explanations or discussion of key elements, where necessary. That is the scaffolding interaction cycle of prepare-task-elaborate is applied to each paragraph in joint reading. The combination of preparing the whole text, and then jointly reading the first few pages can be enough for many learners to read the remainder with high comprehension. Support can then be intensified for joint reading by highlighting the word groups realising key information in each paragraph. Learners can be shown how to systematically identify key information, including the paragraph topic in the first or second sentence, its point towards

the end, and other key elements where required. These highlighted wordings can then be written as notes, and learners can be supported to write summaries from the notes, and to use them in the construction of new texts drawing on multiple sources.

More support is provided for reading a short passage sentence-by-sentence using the detailed reading strategies discussed above, preparing with sentence meanings, position and meaning cues, and elaborating on each identified wording. Together with preparing the whole text (and joint reading where appropriate), detailed reading of a selected passage can enable learners to read the whole text with high comprehension. It also forms the basis for joint and individual reconstruction of the passage, that in turn enables independent writing. Sentence making, spelling and sentence writing activities then provide the highest level of support for weaker and beginning readers and writers, manipulating and writing just one or two sentences or paragraphs. These six degrees of scaffolding support are set out as follows:

1. Selecting appropriate texts – according to genre, field, mode, ideology
2. Preparation before reading (whole text)
3. Paragraph-by-paragraph reading (eg. chapter/article)
4. Paragraph-by-paragraph text marking (key information)
5. Detailed reading (sentence-by-sentence text marking) (half to one page)
6. Sentence making, spelling & sentence writing (one or two paragraphs)

This set of scaffolding literacy resources can be drawn on at various levels in the education sequence, from early primary to tertiary study. The first two are recommended as part of normal teaching practice in undergraduate classes, to prepare students for academic readings. Strategies 1-5 are recommended as part of normal practice in primary and secondary classrooms, and in tertiary preparation and support programs. The last can be used in early to middle primary as part of everyday practice, and in upper primary and secondary where students need additional support. All these strategies can be applied across curricula to enable learners from any language or cultural background to learn to read with understanding and enjoyment, to use reading for learning, and to write successfully. For these reasons they are uniquely useful to the needs of the great diversity of learners in the South African education system, and to a democratic society in which education offers all its citizens equal opportunities for a better life.

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