

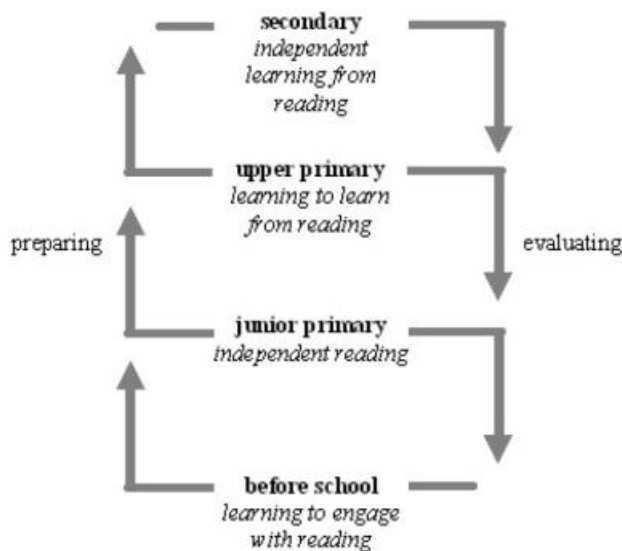


## An Evaluation of Democratising the classroom: a literacy pedagogy for the new generation (David Rose 2005)

Evaluation of how far such a teaching–learning approach might modify or substantially change (even transform) a teaching and learning context.

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The article is attempting to tackle the problem of inequality in the classroom. This inequality is manifested as different levels of capabilities within the student group and their capacity to learn from reading (Rose, 2005). This puts students who have difficulties in the ability to learn from reading at a disadvantage. This is further compounded by Rose’s assertion that, ‘Skills in learning from reading are rarely taught explicitly in upper primary or secondary school’ (Rose, 2005, p.138). Children (from middle class backgrounds) that have been exposed to large amounts of parent-child reading before they start school have an enormous advantage over children from more orally focused cultural backgrounds (Bergin, 2011). Furthermore, the skills needed to be successful in any curriculum stage are acquired in the previous stage and are not explicitly taught in the stage being studied. This is shown in the diagram below (Rose, 2005, p.139):



The implications of this are that children who bring this previous experience of pre-school parent-child reading with them to the classroom have a huge advantage, one which in the current education system makes it difficult for the lesser able students to catch up. This leads to inequality in the classroom, which Rose contends in his paper is not dealt with by the current curriculum and teaching methods in the classroom.

Rose's solution is a methodology known as learning to Read: Reading to Learn, based on the theories of Vygotsky, Halliday, and Bernstein. This consists of a six stage curriculum cycle, which provides students a level of in class support and scaffolding which enables students of differing abilities the means to complete the same high level task in the classroom. Classrooms which set the same high challenge content for all students contain students which are able to achieve at a higher level (Gibbons, 2008). These high challenge, high support classrooms are what Rose is attempting to achieve with his six stage approach.

Rose's methodology includes 5 supportive stages (stages 1-5) which lead to an independent stage (stage 6) in which the student (of all ability levels) is able to produce an independently constructed piece of work. The support that is provided in the classroom for each stage is what Bruner called scaffolding (Bruner in Maybin et al, 1992). In educational terms this term has come to be extremely useful in classifying that level of support that is provided in the classroom by a teacher; a level of support that makes it easier for the learner to succeed in a learning task, 'by reducing the scope for failure in the task the learner is attempting' (Maybin et al, 1992, p.188). Bruner's idea of scaffolding builds upon the work of Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (from now on known as ZPD). This ZPD is Vygotsky's idea of the difference between what an independent learner can achieve and what can be achieved by the same learner through guidance from a teacher or a more able peer (Vygotsky, 1994 (1978)). In a formal education context, this could be a more able student. Added to this idea that guided participation is important for learner development is that the most effective learning takes place when support is *needed* as this is when the learner will be working within the ZPD (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005.). Also, crucially important within this scaffolding process is a process where the learner gradually takes more responsibility for the learning as he moves through each stage of learning. The intended outcome is that learners become more able to study independently (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

A brief breakdown of the six stages follows:

### **1 Preparing before Reading**

This enables students to understand the text before engaging in the task of reading it. It could start with a group discussion to 'build the field' (Martin & Rose, 2007, p.13). This is followed by the teacher summarising the meaning of the text orally in terms understandable by all learners or it could be a shared reading activity using the interaction cycle of 'prepare-task-elaborate' (Rose, 2005, p.160). During the reading, the teacher can elaborate on the social function of each section of text (the field).

### **2 Detailed Reading**

Learners read for themselves, but with the support of meaning cues from the teacher. In factual texts, this could be providing more commonsensical words for their technical equivalent.



### **3 Preparing before Writing**

This can be a variety of ‘top-down’ pair/group activities in order to allow students to become familiar with word and sentence structures from the text in stages 1 and 2 in a context in which they understand.

### **4 Joint Reconstruction**

This is teacher guided activity in which the teacher acts as an enabler for the class in writing a new text using previous language patterns from the already read text together with elicited variables from the students.

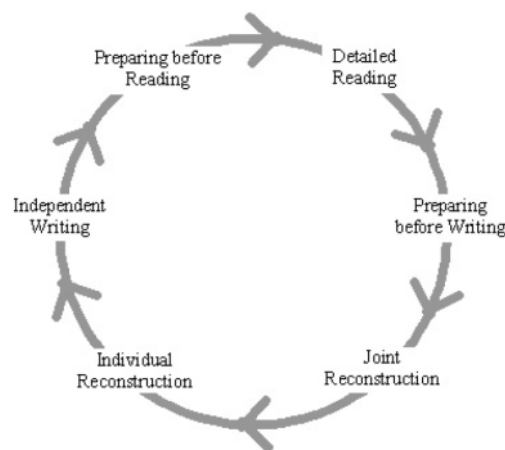
### **5 Individual Reconstruction**

Students build on the work in the previous stages and using the text patterns learned to construct a text of their own.

### **6 Independent Writing**

Students produce a new text independently based on the previous 5 stages of learning.

This six stage approach is shown in the diagram below (Rose, 2005, p.147):



Every stage of this model has components of the task which enable it to be practised as a communal activity and as an individual activity. This gives the weaker students confidence in attempting the task as part of the group or individually as well as enabling the higher level students to provide a level of support to these students. This fits Vygotsky’s idea that any development appears twice, first on the social plane (collaborative learning), and then on the psychological plane (individual task) (Vygotsky, 1994 (1978)). This learning model also supports the theories of Halliday in which he describes learning language as a social activity in which a learner learns how to construct meaning of the world around him (Halliday, 2005).

Genre-based learning is a top-down approach pedagogy which takes the social function of a text as its starting point. Genre-based learning starts with the idea that all language use is goal-oriented (Derewianka, 2003). Texts such as technical reports/literature review/historical report are some examples of types of genre. The table below highlights some common academic genres and their field together with the stages of learning students go through to reach their goals (Martin & Rose, 2007, p.3)

Table 1: Some common academic genres

genre	purposes	typical stages
<b>descriptive report</b>	classifying & describing things of the natural and social worlds	Classification Description
<b>explanation</b>	explaining processes of the natural and social worlds	Phenomenon Explanation
<b>historical recount</b>	recounting historical events	Background Record of events
<b>procedure</b>	steps in experiments & observations	Purpose Equipment Steps
<b>technical report</b>	recounting experiments & observations	Technical problem Method Results Recommendations
<b>research report</b>	recounting and interpreting results of research activity	Research problem Method Results Discussion
<b>exposition</b>	arguing for a point of view	Thesis Arguments Reiteration of thesis
<b>discussion</b>	discussing two or more points of view	Issue Sides Resolution
<b>literature review</b>	discussing multiple positions on a topic	Topic Issues Resolution

Genre-based learning helps the students to recognise the field/tenor/mode of a text by the teacher using scaffolding techniques.

Field The ideational meaning – What a text is about (the social activity taking place).

Tenor Interpersonal meaning – The nature of relationship between author and reader (who is interacting with whom).

Mode Textual meaning – How spoken or written the language is (The degree of interactivity/spontaneity).

(Derewianka, 2003)

The students can recognize the way the language is used in this model text and after an amount of work (the 5 supportive stages Rose highlights) are able to produce a similar text using the language newly learned. This method with the correct level of scaffolding from the teacher, both designed-in (pre-planned) and interactional scaffolding (in the class, ‘on the job’ scaffolding), enables the teacher to ‘support up’ the weaker students rather than ‘dumbing down’ the curriculum (Hammond&Gibbons 2005). When a weaker student is working with a more able student or teacher in the above activities, it allows the student to develop his own meaning of his world in a social context which is shared with ‘significant others’ (Halliday, 2005, p.312). The level of support from the teacher is crucial to making this model work. One of the most important parts of the designed-in scaffolding is in the

selection of appropriate texts. By selecting appropriate texts using the criteria of genre/field/mode/ the teacher prepares for success in the classroom.

This model provides the students with more than one opportunity to discover the new learning being presented. As the teacher and students progress through the six stages there is an opportunity to use different modes of language: spoken, written (teacher or student provided) as well as additional semiotic systems. This provides the learners with a variety of sources to enable them to grasp the new learning that is available. This message abundance (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005) gives the weaker students more opportunities to develop the new language in a way that fits with their own meaning; a way to 'own' and use the language that is compatible to their preferred mode of learning. Essential for success in this method of teaching/learning is careful use of classroom talk. This includes dialogue between the teacher and students, but just as important talk between students. The traditional classroom interaction of IRF – Initiation – Response – Feedback (Evaluate) is criticized for being too narrow, too closed and teacher driven (Alexander, 2008). A more appropriate model for classroom talk is one outlined by Mercer (2013). This dialogic discourse includes cumulative discourse, in which the student collaborate and agree on the ideas presented, disputational, where students challenge each other's ideas, and exploratory, where students are critically assessing views more constructively ( Mercer, 2013). This type of discourse further allows students to work within their ZPD in collaboration with their peers.

This type of genre based learning does have its critics. These include Freedman and Medway who feel that genres are too ineffable to be taught, social practice theorists, who argue that genres are too complex to be removed from their original contexts, and by critical theorists who are unsure if genre-based pedagogy just reinforces the status quo (Derewianka, 2003,). Consequentially, this reinforcing of the status quo could result in stifling students' creativity. It is conceivable that after resourcing a text for language styles and meaning making resources, a student would have the idea that this is the '*correct*' method of using this particular language learned, and any other use would be '*wrong*'. However, the teacher plays a big part in highlighting this issue and providing a platform for the students to feel confident in expressing their creativity. A teacher needs to be able to encourage students to use any new language learned to incorporate it into their own understanding of the world in a way which resonates with their own individual and social identity.

This six stage approach that Rose has developed would be of use in the teaching- learning context that I currently operate in. The group that I teach is mixed ability and each student came into the group with a varying level of English. This fits the model of classroom inequality that Rose highlights. I feel that this teacher guided, collaborative approach will improve the ability of the students to use English and will enable the learners to be successful. This use of scaffolding is a way of providing the students with the language needed and the means to be able to make meaning within their own social and professional context; it is also important for L2 learners as, 'cognitive and conceptual understanding may outstrip English language development' (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). This approach can be



used for the students to learn a language (Halliday, 2005) by providing appropriate meditational materials for use in the classroom for the students to gain a better understanding of the language, as well learning through language (Halliday, 2005) using more technical curriculum content.

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