



Good practice guide

The need for intensive reading approaches in adult literacy

Reading is often viewed as a *passive*, even mysterious language skill, difficult to observe and therefore to teach. (Burns & de Silva Joyce 2000, p.x)

Reading is a crucial skill for enabling adults to participate in social and work contexts, perhaps even more crucial than writing (Barton & Ivanic 1991; Baynham 1995), yet its significance can be frequently overlooked in programming adult literacy classes. Where time is given specifically to reading in adult literacy and English as second language (ESL) classes, activities are very often assessment focused, rather than teaching focused. Many of the activities used in language tests, such as answering questions or matching items, are about seeing who can and who cannot already read. They do not generally extend the reading abilities of students.

Adult literacy programs are characterised by low intensity courses that are relatively short in duration, and have sporadic attendance patterns, mid-course commencements and non-completion of courses. These characteristics all present major challenges to the teaching of reading and make it important to program carefully structured and sustained reading sessions. This guide outlines how to pay more systematic attention to the teaching of reading in adult literacy and adult ESL classes. The explicit, tightly programmed methodology presented here supports all students in making significant progress in reading and writing in the limited time available.

An explicit approach: Reading-to-Learn

The Reading-to-Learn methodology is a commercial product developed by Dr David Rose and is primarily based on his work in the schools sector. The methodology progresses students through detailed reading of texts to joint rewriting and independent writing. The intensive reading pedagogy helps teachers to:

- Carefully select relevant topics, genres and texts**
Importantly, the chosen texts need to be a little beyond the current reading ability of students. They should be texts which students find challenging to read independently.
- Design and implement carefully crafted scaffolding moves**
'Scaffolding' refers to a type of pedagogy that supports and guides learning and development through collaboration, discussion and negotiation between learner and teacher. The scaffolding moves build very deliberate preparation into every aspect of classroom tasks. Here the notion of task extends down to asking the student, for example, to find the words in a text that represent a particular meaning. Every small task must be prepared to sustain teaching and to avoid simply testing.
- Carefully guide student attention to meanings and wordings**
Teachers need to alert students to the relationships between meanings and wordings within texts. To do this, teachers need to understand the structure and grammatical characteristics of texts. Without such knowledge they are ill-equipped to provide the necessary scaffolding.

Six stages of Reading-to-Learn

Stage 1: Preparing before reading	This stage orients students to the genre and field of the text.
Stage 2: Detailed reading	The teacher supports all students to read each sentence in a short passage.
Stage 3: Preparing for writing	Students plan exactly what they are going to write, based closely on the passage they have studied in stage 2.
Stage 4: Joint rewriting	The teacher supports the class to write a new text that is patterned on the reading text.
Stage 5: Individual rewriting	Before attempting to write independently, students practise writing a new text using the same patterns as the reading and joint rewriting texts.
Stage 6: Independent writing	Students use what they have learnt from the preceding stages to write an independent text. This is then assessed by the teacher.



This good practice guide is based on the report, *Investigating the impact of intensive reading pedagogy in adult literacy*, by Helen de Silva Joyce, Susan Hood & David Rose and is available from the NCVER website at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2064.html>.

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Things to consider in implementing a more explicit approach to reading

- ☑ Common classroom reading activities often amount more to testing than teaching, such as read-and-answer-questions activities. Explicit teaching of reading makes a clear distinction between testing and teaching, and carefully prepares all students for each task before they attempt it.
- ☑ Initial reading assessments should use texts that challenge students to properly estimate the ability of the student. Explicit teaching of reading makes the actual reading levels of students clear. It guides students to read texts well beyond their independent abilities, providing continual supported practice with high-level texts.
- ☑ As reading activities are often done individually, an artificial separation arises between reading, writing, speaking and listening. Explicit teaching of reading involves all skills, simultaneously building spoken language skills through discussion of written texts.
- ☑ Individual activities such as read-and-answer-questions split language learning into isolated features, whereas the explicit reading approach begins from patterns of meaning in whole texts and moves down to patterns of wordings in sentences and patterns of soundings in words.
- ☑ Teachers are accustomed to making on-the-go decisions about what to do next in classrooms. The explicit reading approach relies on careful planning of lessons at two levels: selection and analysis of texts, and discussion of relations of wording and meaning within texts.
- ☑ In carefully considering how to continually prepare students for success, teachers need to unlearn some common practices, such as asking unprepared questions that students cannot respond to successfully. Such shifts in practice require time for teachers to adapt.
- ☑ A more broadly-based introduction of Reading-to-Learn requires professional development workshops for teachers interwoven with periods of implementation, reflection and classroom observation.

Useful web-sourced references

The following reports and papers can be downloaded at <<http://www.readingtolearn.com.au>>:

- Carbines, R, Wyatt, T & Robb, L 2005, *Evaluation of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal support pilot project: Final report*, Office of the NSW Board of Studies, Sydney, <<http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/resources>>.
- Culican, S 2006, *Reading to Learn: A middle years literacy intervention research project, Final report 2003–04*, Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, <<http://www.cecv.melb.catholic.edu.au/Research and Seminar Papers>>.
- Martin, J & Rose, D 2007, 'Designing literacy pedagogy: Scaffolding asymmetries', *Continuing discourse on language*, R Hasan, C Matthiessen & J Webster (eds), pp.251–80, Equinox, London, <<http://www.equinoxpub.com>>.
- Rose, D 2006, 'A reading based model of schooling' in *Pesquisas em Discurso Pedagógico*, vol.4, no.2, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, <<http://www.maxwell.lambda.ele.puc-rio.br>>.
- Rose, D & Acevedo, C 2007, *Pen 157: Reading (and writing) to learn in the middle years of schooling*, Primary English Teaching Association, Sydney, <<http://www.peta.edu.au>>.
- Rose, D, Rose, M, Farrington, S & Page, S 2008, 'Scaffolding literacy for Indigenous health sciences students', in *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, vol.7, no.3, Elsevier, Oxford, United Kingdom, <<http://www.readingtolearn.com.au>>.

Other useful references

- Burns, A & de Silva Joyce, H (eds) 2000, *Teachers' voices 5: A new look at reading practices*, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Sydney.
- Burns, A & de Silva Joyce, H (eds) 2005, *Teachers' voices 8: Explicitly supporting reading and writing in the classroom*, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Sydney.
- Hood, S, Solomon, N & Burns, A 1996, *Focus on reading: New edition*, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Sydney.



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