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Access to Literacy: Scaffolded reading strategies in the South African context

ABSTRACT This paper explores the application of Rose's (2004) *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (LRRL) scaffolded reading strategies to the reading, writing and academic problems of a grade 11 learner, Phindi, in a Pietermaritzburg school. Phindi's problems are placed in the context of the deepening crisis in the literacy levels being distributed by the South African schooling system. An exploration of Phindi's progress through the school system indicates how inappropriate teaching, systemic constraints, and a progressivist OBE curriculum have contributed to her problems with reading to learn from grade-appropriate texts. The theoretical basis (Bernstein, Vygotsky and Halliday) and methodology of Rose's LRRL programme is explained, and its application to Phindi's reading and learning problems described and evaluated. The paper charts how one teacher, Jean Moore, applied and adapted Rose's scaffolded strategies with Phindi, and her significant progress as a result of the intervention. The paper concludes with the authors' belief that Rose's strategies are applicable in the South African context, especially as they provide a means, and an appropriate methodology, to address the urgent need for systematic and explicit teaching of reading across the curriculum and through the different levels of schooling.

Keywords: South African literacy crisis, teaching reading, scaffolded reading strategies, literacy development intervention, case study

1. Introduction

A growing body of research and debate indicates a deepening crisis in our schooling system inextricably linked to the low levels of literacy being achieved by learners at all levels of the education system (Pretorius 2002; Macdonald 2002). In this paper we argue that:

- the root of these problems is the ineffective teaching of reading in the schools and learners' consequent inability to learn from reading across the curriculum independently;

- reading is primary and unless attention is paid to the explicit teaching of reading through all levels of schooling, schooling will continue to be a vehicle for widening inequality in our society rather than the opposite; and
- while the legacy of apartheid education policies is a factor in this situation, the introduction of progressivist outcomes-based curricula of C2005, the subsequent Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and National Curriculum Statement (NCS), have contributed to the deepening crisis.

This situation will be illustrated through a case study of the literacy problems of a Grade 11 English Additional Language (EAL) learner in an urban secondary school in Pietermaritzburg, and an evaluation of the application and adaptation of scaffolded reading strategies, as developed in Rose's (2004, 2005) *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (LRRL) programme, to these problems. Although the paper describes and evaluates the experiences of one teacher, Jean Moore, with an individual learner, the application and implications of this intervention will be explored and linked to the literacy crisis in South African schooling.

2. The context of literacy teaching and learning in South African schools

Apartheid created an extremely negative environment for literacy development in South African schooling. There are still low levels of literacy nationally: 24% of African adults in South Africa over the age of 20 are illiterate, while 7.4 million adults (34% of all adults) are functionally illiterate (*ERA Initiative* 1999:34). A 2001 audit also found that 17% (58,000) of teachers were underqualified (Sukhraj *et al*, 2000). Furthermore, many rural and urban African schools have inadequate infrastructure. Over 50% of schools lack school libraries, and overcrowded classrooms, coupled with a lack of learning materials such as exercise books, textbooks and appropriate reading materials, create a situation not conducive to effective literacy development. Pretorius (2002) points to teaching practices in the first three years of schooling that focus on decoding skills at the expense of comprehension. The result is that many children resort to 'barking at print' (Macdonald, 1990), reading with accurate pronunciation but with little understanding of what they read. In a situation where many learners come from materially impoverished backgrounds where texts are not part of daily experiences, and reading is not seen as a meaningful activity, the poor resources and inadequate teaching in schools have serious consequences for learners' literacy development and academic success at school.

Furthermore, the progressivist theoretical and pedagogical model underpinning the new curriculum has a number of consequences for teachers and learners (Harley & Wedekind, 2003). Firstly, the emphasis on the concept of the teacher as a facilitator, 'the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage', signals a radical shift in identity for the majority of South African teachers. Secondly, official documents proclaim that South Africa has '... embarked on transformation OBE. This involves the most radical form of integrated curriculum ...' (cited in Taylor 2001: 5). In Bernstein's terms, these developments signal a radical weakening of *classification* and *framing* in C2005. Classification refers to the degree of 'boundary strength' between discipline areas, and framing to the relationship between teachers and learners and the degree of control they have 'over the selection, organisation, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted' (Bernstein, 1982: 159). The broader learning areas of the present curriculum are examples of an integrated curriculum, while weak framing means that teachers

are no longer seen as curriculum deliverers, but as independent curriculum and materials developers promoting and developing cooperative learning environments with learners and other teachers for the achievement of integrated learning outcomes. For Bernstein (1996), this means that teachers would need to acquire new *recognition* and *realisation* rules whereby individuals are able 'to recognize the speciality of the context' (31) in which they are operating, and be able to produce contextually legitimate communication (realisation rules). Harley and Parker (1999) warn that the weak classification and framing of C2005 'could be creating a new set of recognition rules unfamiliar to both teachers and learners' (92) which could create confusion and serious obstacles to effective curriculum implementation.

The impact of these curriculum changes on learners' literacy development is manifested in a number of ways. Macdonald (2002) illustrates the confusing signals of C2005 by pointing out that in designing the new curriculum the processes of early literacy were effectively ignored. At a training workshop in the Eastern Cape Foundation Phase teachers were told that learners '... can learn to read and write by themselves. You don't have to explicitly teach this – they will pick this up incidentally' (Macdonald, 2002: 131). The President's Education Initiative (PEI) research (1999) and Hart (2000) found very little extended writing happening in classrooms they observed and that books are rarely used. The PEI studies found that 'children sit in groups and talk about their everyday experiences, often with little or no conceptual content or direction to this activity' (Taylor, 2001: 6). That these practices severely undermine learners' literacy development is confirmed by research on literacy levels at all levels of the school system. Strauss (1995) found Grade 6 English second language (ESL) learners reading at less than 30% comprehension level with similar results found in Learner Assessment Studies of literacy levels of grade 3 and 6 undertaken by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) in 2004 (Morrow). In secondary school the READ Annual Report (1999) indicated that Grade 8 ESL learners in rural areas with an average age of 14.4 were reading at age levels 7.6. At tertiary level, Webb (1999) found that many first year ESL students were reading at grade 8 level, and Pretorius (2000) reported first year Psychology and Sociology students at UNISA read with 53% comprehension.

The likely outcome of this situation is widening inequality across school contexts, the very antithesis of the declared aims of C2005, RNCS and NCS. Privileged schools, with highly qualified teachers and strong frameworks of knowledge, will be able to fill the gaps created by the unsystematic approach to knowledge and learning of C2005. However, extreme poverty means that the majority of learners come from either illiterate or semiliterate homes with little or no access to empowering literacy resources such as books, newspapers or libraries. Many teachers are first generation literates and therefore without the types and levels of literacy that would enable them to develop their learners' literacy skills effectively. As Cope and Kalantzis (1993) and Johnson (1994) argue, the progressivist curriculum acknowledges differences but does not challenge the social relations of inequality. Taylor (2001) sums up the disjunction between the social equity agenda of C2005 and its likely outcomes when he states that 'the stronger the learner-centred element of a curriculum, and the lower the socio-economic status of its recipients, the less likely it is to achieve its goal of social equity' (2).

A deeper understanding of the way in which school systems foster inequality is offered by Rose's (2004) explanation of how the sequencing and pacing of the literacy curriculum are crucial

mechanisms for the stratification of learner achievement in the education system. He argues that each stage in the sequence of literacy development in education assumes 'orientations to meaning' developed in previous stages. For example, stratification of learners' outcomes occurs in the early primary years of schooling because teaching practices implicitly assume and evaluate orientations to meaning that highly literate parents scaffold their children into before school. Children of literate, middle-class families receive about 1000 hours of parent-child interaction around texts before they get to school (Bergin, 2001), while children from oral and working class backgrounds are likely to get little or none. These children are thus immediately placed at a disadvantage because they do not have the necessary orientation to text that the schooling system assumes. Furthermore, most school systems only provide explicit teaching of reading in the first three years of junior primary school, by the end of which learners are expected to be *independent* readers. Learners from highly literate backgrounds are likely to reach this stage in the time provided, while learners from oral, working class backgrounds are not. In the senior primary stage, the literacy curriculum operates on the assumption that learners are independent readers and aims to enable learners to *learn to learn from reading* by the end of the stage. Learners without independent reading levels in the senior primary stage are likely to be increasingly disadvantaged as dependency on the ability to learn from reading escalates through secondary schooling. Here, learners are expected to develop the ability to *learn independently from reading*, a prerequisite for tertiary study. Rose argues that the ability to read with comprehension, and to learn from reading, is the basis for most other activities in schooling. It is 'crucial to read early in order to acquire the written code, for beyond the book is the textbook, which is the crucial pedagogic medium ...' (Bernstein 1990:53). The sequencing and pacing of the literacy curriculum, and how it relates to South African schoolchildren, is illustrated in the following diagram.

Sequencing and Pacing	**South African scenario**
Reading development sequence **secondary** *independent learning from reading* **upper primary** *learning to learn from reading* preparing ... evaluating **junior primary** *independent reading* **before school** *learning to engage with reading* (Rose, 2006: Teacher Training Manual: 4)	Unable to independently learn from reading; many reading at grade 8 levels No explicit teaching of reading in English; shortage of textbooks and reading materials (14-year olds reading at age 7-8 levels) Inadequate teaching of reading in mother tongue; focus on decoding not comprehension – 'barking at print'; shortage of appropriate texts (30% comprehension levels) Little or no pre-school reading experience

2. Rose's Scaffolded Reading Strategies: *LRRL Programme*

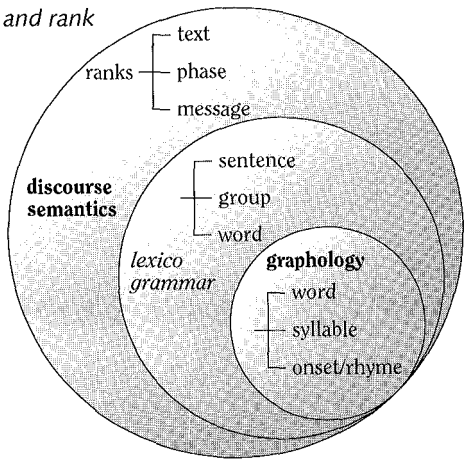
David Rose's methodology was developed in 1997 in indigenous aboriginal educational programmes in South Australia, in contexts similar to our own. We were attracted to his LRRL programme for this reason, for its theoretical soundness developed though grounded practice, and the independently evaluated success of the programme: '... a most important resource for the teaching of English to indigenous students and should be adopted more widely'. The evaluation found that over one year of the project:

> Significant increases in student achievement have been measured...the average improvement in reading and writing was 2.5 levels... [this equates to four years reading age]. At the same time, teachers have noted a range of student learning outcomes that are more difficult to measure, like an increased level of student engagement in their learning. Video and anecdotal evidence reflects much higher levels of student participation – especially in terms of the quality of dialogue between students and teachers, as well as students themselves (McRae et al, 2000).

Rose's strategies have developed out of the Genre Approach (GA) to the teaching of literacy. The GA, arising as it does from a coherent theory of language in use – Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) – offers an explicit understanding of different genres as staged, goal-oriented processes. This allows teachers to make explicit the way in which the purpose of text is linked to the staging and language used to achieve that purpose effectively. Of particular importance is the comprehensive and explicitly scaffolded methodology of the GA. The cycle of modelling, criteria development, joint construction and guided practice, leading to independent construction, offers teachers a clear, flexible process to work with. The emphasis on scaffolding is crucial in moving learners from their everyday spoken discourses into reading and writing academically in different subject areas.

Rose's (2005) LRRL methodology draws on the models of Vygotsky's (1978, 1981) learning as social process, Halliday's (1993, 1994) language as text in social context, and Bernstein's education as pedagogic discourse. The complexity of the path to independent reading and elaborated codes is clearly described in Halliday's (1996) stratified model of language, illustrated in the diagram below (Martin & Rose, 2005: 257).

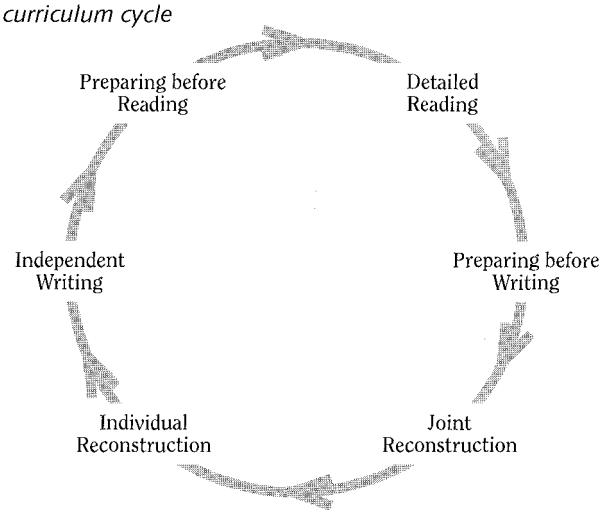
Complexity of the reading task by strata and rank



This model indicates that we make sense of written text by a complex movement between the different strata of phonology and graphology, lexicogrammar, and text or discourse semantics. Martin and Rose (2005) argue that we do not only recognise written words by processing letter patterns, it is our experience of the system of meanings that words realise that enables us to read.

Given this complexity of the reading process, Martin and Rose argue that the teaching of reading needs to simplify the task and involve learners in working across all three levels in the process of reading a text. Using the Hallidayan language model, genre and register theory, and the Vygostskyan model of scaffolding, Rose has developed a methodology which aims to support all learners to read text at high levels. His process scaffolds learners to independent competence through repeated practice with high-level tasks, gradually lessening support as learners are able to take more and more control. These scaffolded strategies focus learners on the patterns of language and the meanings they express. In academic texts the patterns are highly complex and specialised, involving dense nominalisations, implicit linking, abstract concepts, and technical terms of different academic fields. These patterns are very different from everyday spoken language and therefore often opaque to students whose past literacy experience has not enabled them to learn independently from texts. Rose's six-stage curriculum cycle for the explicit teaching of reading and writing is represented below (Martin & Rose, 2005: 263).

Learning to read: Reading to learn curriculum cycle

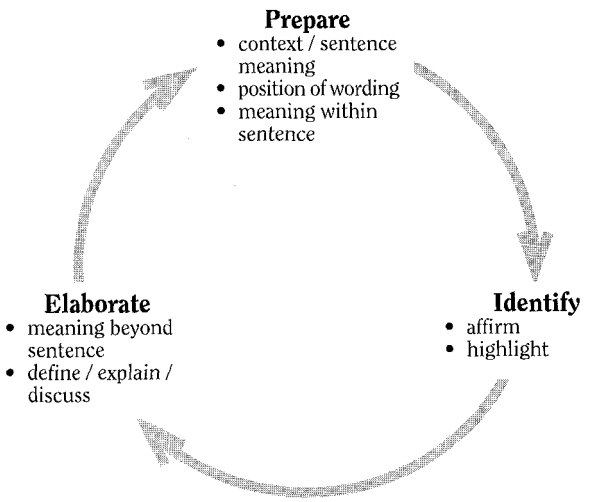


Rose argues that this process addresses a problem with the genre approach, where reading is made 'marginal to the central goal of learning to write for assessment' (Rose, 2004:4). Reading is primary, while writing serves the secondary function of reinforcing and assessing the knowledge acquired through reading. Students who have not experienced reading as a significant part of their early socialization, are unlikely to be able to read, understand and use model texts, and will thus not get enough support from genre pedagogy to benefit from the process. The LRRL approach thus addresses three major problems in the teaching and learning of literacy: students who are unable to read texts used to model genres; teachers whose classroom interaction patterns are dominated by ritualised and discriminatory IRF exchange sequences; and teachers and students who do not have the specialised knowledge about language needed to analyse and construct texts (Martin, 2004).

In the first stage of the cycle, *preparing before reading*, the teacher prepares learners for reading a text by paraphrasing the overall meaning and sequence of a text in commonsense terms, and then reads the text with the learners following. This allows learners to gain some understanding of a text and how it unfolds, and does not overburden weak readers while they attend to the words as they are read. This is followed by the three-stage *detailed reading interaction cycle* which is central to Rose's cycle.

- **Preparing**: This stage focuses on the detailed meanings in each sentence by providing adequate support for learners to recognise wordings. First, the whole sentence is paraphrased in terms the learners can understand, and its relation to the context or preceding text explained; second, the teacher provides a position cue to enable learners to identify key wordings in the sentence; and, third, the meaning of the word is provided in commonsense terms. Learners have to link the meaning cue to the actual wording in the text.
- **Identifying**: Key wordings are identified in the text and highlighted by the learners.
- **Elaborating**: Having identified wordings, the teacher elaborates on their meaning by defining technical words; explaining new concepts or metaphors, or relating them to learners' experience.

This process is illustrated below (Martin & Rose, 2005: 258):



In the *preparing for writing* stage, the learners write the keywords they have identified from the text on the board. The teacher is thus able to focus learners on issues of graphology. The teacher then supports the class to *construct jointly* a new text from the key wordings by pointing out discourse patterns and other key elements in the text. In the *joint reconstruction* phase, the teacher uses the detailed reading interaction cycle again to prepare learners to develop new texts, by drawing attention to notes, suggesting alternative wordings, and further discussing the field. Instead of identifying actual text wordings from commonsense cues, learners now select more commonsense paraphrases for these noted wordings. The teacher may elaborate by rephrasing the selection, supporting them to check issues such as grammar, punctuation or spelling, and encouraging discussion of the way the original author constructed the field. This will enable learners to reconstruct the text because of the supported practice in deconstructing

and reconstructing meanings they have received at all levels of the text. Such negotiated joint construction is a step towards learners writing their own texts using the same notes (*individual reconstruction*), a further supportive step towards *independent construction* in the same genre on another topic. This whole process supports learners through all three levels of the reading task as described by Halliday.

This brief overview of Rose's Scaffolded Curriculum Cycle will facilitate an understanding of Jean Moore's work with an individual learner in her school.

3. The Intervention

3.1 Background to the Programme

The intervention took place over six months in an urban "ex-model C" school in Pietermaritzburg, where learners who speak English as an additional language are in the majority. Many experience academic difficulties but there are no specific interventions programmed for them. Jean had been experimenting with Rose's approach in the classroom, where learners' response to the process was overwhelmingly positive, when a particular learner with severe reading difficulties failed Grade Eleven and appealed to her for help. As Phindi's Grade Eleven English teacher, Jean was aware that her learning problems seemed to stem from her inability to read and write. She was not a learner who could effectively 'bark at print' but who struggled to comprehend what she had read; she was frequently unable to decode words and could not rewrite them unless they were directly copied from another source. Memorisation of words enabled her to write down a little of what she knew, but she was never able to read a word that she had not memorised before. She was, however, an intelligent learner who was frustrated by the traditional approaches to reading support, recognizing that any success in these "easy readers" would not lead to success in the classroom. Rose's methodology, which aims to support learners to read at a high level, seemed to offer a solution to her particular problem. It must be noted that the programme was developed in response to a crisis, within various resource and time-constraints, rather than as a deliberate piece of action research, and as such has several limitations.

Phindi's experience of school provides a pointed reminder of how the sequencing and pacing of schooling affects learners' literacy and academic development. Rose (2004) argues that a significant contributing factor to the deepening inequality created in the school system is the lack of explicit teaching of reading after the first three years of schooling. Discussion with Phindi confirmed this and revealed that very little writing was done at all in her primary school. Her inability to read and write was never identified. She passed all of her subjects in Grade Seven and was awarded a 'C' (denoting 'good') for Reading Ability and Comprehension. This raises a number of questions about how these primary school grades were achieved, what type of assessment the school engaged in, and how she managed to mask the extent of her reading difficulties for so long.

It is highly probable that OBE played a part in Phindi's success in masking her literacy levels. She is a confident learner who communicates clearly and engagingly when speaking. She is comfortable working in groups, and is able to offer leadership to other learners when necessary. These are attributes highly valued in the OBE curriculum. In group work, depending on how the task is structured, it is often possible to obtain a mark without having read or written anything oneself. In large classes, she would have stood out as an "above average" learner in

speaking situations and assessment may have been skewed in her favour as a result. Her teachers in high school observed that she tends to rely on friends and peers to read and interpret for her, and to ensure that she is not involved in the write-up part of any written group project. This led to a pattern of a marked difference between exam results, which were consistently very poor, and class marks, which were generally higher, especially in subjects that had an oral or practical component.

When Phindi's difficulties were documented in high school, several requests were made to the Department of Education for assistance in diagnosing and supporting her. Essentially, we were told that Phindi was too old to be helped. She did attend traditional, phonics-based extra-reading lessons in Grade Eight, but they had little effect. Although she failed Grade Eight, the policy of only allowing a learner to fail once in every phase of schooling, enabled Phindi to reach Grade Eleven without ever having passed a year of high school.

3.2 The Process

Discussion with Phindi established that Biology and Business Studies were the subjects she found most difficult and was at most risk of failing. Jean and Phindi decided that their reading sessions would be based on texts from these subjects, so that their lessons reinforced what she was doing in class and helped to prepare her for class tests.

This intervention concentrated mainly on the first four stages of Rose's six-stage curriculum cycle, with a little individual reconstruction of text. Much time was spent on the first two stages – preparing before reading and detailed reading – with less time spent on the later stages. This was a time-driven decision, rather than one that was necessarily theoretically sound, based on what Jean believed would be most beneficial in the twice weekly, half-hour sessions that we had. Phindi is different from your average learner with reading difficulties in that she had no phonetic base for her spelling decisions. Thus, she might spell ' fish' *'frsky'* or 'running' *'rangy'*. Jean therefore incorporated phonics training in the 'preparing before writing' phase of the reading and writing cycle, with the aim of getting her to spell at least in a phonetically plausible way, if not accurately.

3.2.1 Preparing before Reading

The first few minutes of sessions were spent helping Phindi to prepare for what she was about to read. This often involved discussion of prior knowledge, diagrams or other visual information. Jean would then offer a broad paraphrase of what she was about to read.

3.2.2 Detailed reading

A sample text, and a short example of the Detailed Reading Interaction Cycle from the first sentence of the extract, is provided below. The text is taken from a study guide that Phindi was working with, *Exam Fever Series: Biology II (Revised Edition)* (Bridglail & Koekemoer, 2002: 69)

> **Viruses:**
>
> Introduction: Viruses are micro-organisms that are intermediate between the living and non-living. They live in living cells only and are therefore considered obligate intracellular parasites.

> Viruses are acellular (do not have a cell structure): they do not have ribosomes, a nucleus and other organelles. Viruses can be regarded as nucleo-protein particles. They can enter a specific animal, plant or bacterial calls where they multiply. Many viruses can be crystallized.

Prepare: [sentence meaning] The first sentence tells us exactly what viruses are; that they are very small and that they are halfway between being alive and dead. (Teacher reads the sentence while Phindi follows.) *Viruses are micro-organisms that are intermediate between the living and non-living.*
Prepare: [position] The sentence starts with the main topic of the sentence. Which word tells us this topic?
Identify: (Phindi responds) Viruses
Affirm: Good. That's right. Can you highlight 'viruses'?

Prepare: [position] The next two words tell us [meaning] that they are very small creatures. Can you see the words that tell us that viruses are very small things?
Identify: (Phindi responds) micro-organisms
Affirm: Micro-organisms. Exactly. Well done. Let's highlight 'micro-organisms'.
Elaborate: Micro means very, very small and organism usually means a living thing.

Prepare: [meaning] But the rest of the sentence tells us something different; that they are actually in-between between being alive and dead. [position] Which word means 'halfway'? Viruses are micro-organisms that are...
Identify: (Phindi responds) intermediate
Affirm: That's right. Good. Let's highlight it.
Elaborate: Intermediate. Have you heard that word being used before for anything?
[Discussion follows]

Prepare: [position] The rest of the sentence tells us that [meaning] viruses are between being alive and dead. Which words means the same as 'alive'?
Identify: (Phindi responds) living
Affirm: Good
Prepare: [position] And after that comes the word [meaning] meaning the opposite of alive. Can you see it?
Identify: (Phindi responds) non-living
Affirm: Exactly right! Can you highlight both these words, 'living' and 'non-living'.
Elaborate: So now we know that viruses are very small and they are between being living and non-living. That's quite a strange idea – have you ever learned about other things that are like this? [Discussion follows.]

It is evident that the detailed reading is time-consuming as it is characterised by much repetition, reflection and support. Jean found it helpful to have her own copy of the text, and to highlight words with Phindi. This helped to defuse the power dynamic and to create the feeling that they were working together.

3.2.3 Preparing before writing

At this point Jean and Phindi focused on constructing individual words. Jean provided phonics training when necessary. As Phindi read each paragraph, they would write some of the words down several times. The first time she would copy it straight from the book. After that, she would attempt to write it herself, with Jean sounding the word out to her. She would then read the word out loud and attempt to correct it herself if she could see that it did not make sense when she read it. Affirmation was provided after and during every word.

3.2.4 Joint reconstruction of text

During this stage they attempted to make simple notes that Phindi could use for learning. Jean would make suggestions and she would elaborate or refer to words that she had already written down. She would read each point to me, and then read through each summarised paragraph. Jean would sometimes read the original paragraph back to her and she would decide if she was happy that her summary had covered all the necessary points.

4. Evaluation of intervention:

4.1 Academic development

Jean noticed a marked improvement in Phindi's ability to decode words and to understand the phonetic system. At the end of six months she was reading hesitantly but generally accurately. Her comprehension of texts had also improved. She could begin to construct sentences without Jean's help and, although she made several errors, she could identify many of them herself when they reread her writing together. Her spelling remains a major weakness but she at least now spells in a phonetically plausible way. For example, whereas before she might have written the word 'management' as '*mkgnity*' she now writes it as '*manijmint*'. Thus her writing can at least be understood.

Although reports and summative assessment results have their limitations, they can be a useful guide to a learner's progress. Below is a comparison of Phindi's half year results in Grade Eleven, in 2004 and 2005:

	2004 (before intervention)	**2005 (after intervention)**
Exam aggregate	**644**	**860**
Year mark Aggregate	683	805
Position in grade (exam)	203/213	126/199
Position in grade (yr mark)	196/213	161/199
Subjects passed (exam)	Art, Drama	Art, Drama, English, Zulu, Business Economics
Subjects passed (yr mark)	English, Art, Drama	English, Art, Drama, Business Economics, Biology

Even allowing for inevitable improvement, given that she was repeating the year, this reflects remarkable progress. What seems particularly significant is that, for the first time, her examination

results were higher than her year mark, although both marks were much higher than the previous year. This seems to suggest that her ability to decode and comprehend written questions, and her ability to write comprehensible answers, had improved significantly. Her Business Economics teacher made the following comment:

> By the end of July 2005 there was a marked improvement in Phindi's written work for tests. Her ability to express herself more clearly obviously improved her marks. A sentence used to be so jumbled and disjointed, with half-words, that I'd have to rewrite what I thought she was trying to say before I could mark it. Then suddenly her sentences started making sense...

Phindi, when asked to reflect on the process at the end of June 2005, said that she felt that it had helped her a lot, although she had initially wondered about spending so much time on little bits of writing. She noted that she sometimes pretended that she was in Jean's classroom, reading together, when she was trying to decode words in tests and that this helped.

4.2 Attitude/confidence

As the year progressed, Phindi seemed to rediscover her confidence and motivation, and lost the sadness and withdrawal that characterized her interactions at the beginning of the year. The intervention's power to motivate seems to have been one of its most effective facets as was reported in evaluations of LRRL interventions in other contexts. Teachers described her as "confident, self-assured and helpful". With regards to her being in matric, her class teacher from Grade Eleven said, 'I thought she would battle but she is very confident and she looks very happy'.

5. Wider implications

It is clear that there are limitations to the generalisabilty of this study. Working with one learner is very different to working with a large class. However, this case study highlights a number of important issues which the experience has brought to the surface. We would like to look at what it has to say about the issue of literacy teaching and learning in the schooling system; the applicability of highly scaffolded strategies like the LRRL programme in our schools; and what it indicates about urgent needs within the system.

5.1 Problems within the system

Rose (2004), Pretorius (2002) and Macdonald (2002) all point to the devastating effects of a lack of explicit teaching of reading beyond the first three years of schooling, especially for learners whose experience confined them to decoding in their mother tongue and then are left to their own devices to learn how to read in English. Phindi's experiences in both upper primary and secondary school attest to this problem and its effects. This lack of explicit teaching seems to stem from a number of interrelated factors. Firstly, it seems that from the introduction of C2005 onwards there has been a focus on the development of oral skills at the expense of an explicit focus on teaching literacy, especially reading. Both Taylor (2001) and Macdonald (2002) commented on this, and we have seen this as a crucial factor in Phindi's literacy inadequacies being masked for so long in the school system. Secondly, many teachers feel overwhelmed by the range of demands placed on them by the changing curriculum. This severely limits their capacity for intervention in situations like Phindi's, which the research mentioned earlier are

widespread in our school population. Bernstein (1996) has commented on the 'hidden costs' of competence models of education such as C2005 and its subsequent revisions. He claims that these costs are 'charged to the individual commitments of teachers' (63) in terms of the time required for resource development, evaluation, meetings with staff and parents, and in-service development (Graven, 2002). The impasse created by this systemic barrier means that many learners will be deprived of the most crucial skill required for success at school and illustrates Taylor's conclusion that C2005 is leading to widening inequality. Bourne (2003: 498) warns that this is a consequence of the development theories underpinning progressive curricula that require teachers to evaluate learners against fixed norms of attainment. In these circumstances: '*Evaluation replaces instruction* [our italics] and certain children are not given access to the academic discourses on which, Bernstein argues, the development of scientific concepts ultimately depends'.

Finally, Phindi's case history shows up the inadequate support within the education system for learners like her. Inadequate assessment in primary school meant that her problems remained undetected. When these were exposed in secondary school the system positioned her as too old to be helped, arguing that real problems would have been identified and assessed in primary school. This creates a classic 'Catch 22' situation with learners left to 'swim up a waterfall' as Macdonald (1990, 2002) so graphically described the plight of countless South African learners.

5.2 Application of Rose's strategies

Based on the outcomes of this intervention, it seems that Rose's strategies have some applicability in the South African context. It must be recognized that the entire process is very time-consuming especially in the initial stages and we have already commented on the systemic constraints operating at present. Although the RNCS and the NCS are supportive of literacy development in theory, in practice there seems to be very little time to focus on these fundamental skills. Efforts to reduce the number of assessment tasks and related administration could go a long way to creating more space to engage in explicit and focused literacy support and development. Furthermore, this intervention has shown that problems with reading and writing are not simply problems which language teachers need to address. It is a reality that many South African learners cannot read independently. Reading development and support strategies should thus be incorporated into all learning areas of the curriculum, to improve the reading levels of all learners. Ultimately, unless explicit literacy teaching is made an urgent priority in schools, at all levels, it seems likely that South African learners will continue to leave school with inadequate literacy levels and continue to struggle at tertiary institutions and in the workplace.

6. Conclusion

This paper has documented the very real shortcomings of Phindi's literate development through the school system. It has explained how the system has contributed to her problems and the general crisis in literacy education in South Africa through inequalities in resources, inadequate and inappropriate teaching, and the sequencing and pacing of the literacy curriculum. This has enabled us to argue the primacy of reading in the literacy curriculum, and the development of the ability to learn independently from reading, as the basis for the secondary development of effective writing by which learners are evaluated. It has exposed the consequences of a lack of explicit focus on literacy across the curriculum through all stages of schooling and how this would create widening inequality in literacy outcomes in South African society. The urgency

of the situation is expressed by Wally Morrow's summary of the WCED's 2005 evaluation of their education system:

> We can agree with David Rose 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. *...One contribution that teachers at all levels of the system, and in all areas of the curriculum, can make to overcoming inequality is to focus strongly and persistently on developing learners' capacity to read and to learn from reading.* (our italics) (5).

We have presented a case for the use of Rose's LRRL programme as an example of highly scaffolded strategies for the explicit teaching of reading and writing across the curriculum. It has had significant success in contexts similar to our own and Jean Moore's adaptation of the process, in the face of very real barriers of time and space within the system, has indicated the possibilities of this sort of intervention.

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