

Geelong 22-26 November,
1992

Deakin University: AARE/ NZARE Joint Conference

Symposium on Language and Literacy

Theme: Language : Political and Politicised

Paper by Elaine Furniss, School of Education, LaTrobe University

Title:

Cinderella or the Ugly Siblings? A critique of current literacy
professional development program models.

Abstract of Paper:

Cinderella's glass slipper fitted and she was whisked off to the palace to marry the handsome prince. Current literacy professional development programs aim to fit the needs of students in schools. But do they? What are the benefits of pre-packaged programs for literacy development in Victorian schools? If benefits are meagre, what can be done to persuade the Commonwealth to provide more viable alternatives given the current economic climate? Are our efforts merely going to leave us with egg on our faces: the providers of yet another round of ill-fitting but politically expedient programs? This paper will present several case studies of school-based adoption of pre-packaged programs, review current literature related to professional development, and open up the issue for discussion by the participants.

We all know the story of Cinderella and the ugly sisters and how the fairy godmother rescued her from the drudgery of the kitchen to enjoy the excitement of the ball, and eventually marry the prince and live happily ever after. When we look at the Australian education scene as far as literacy professional development is concerned, one could be tempted to cast the federal government and its Language and Learning Policy (ALLP, 1991) in the role of ugly sister, instead of the role of Cinderella, which government documents portray.

Professional development is defined by Costello (1992) as 'the process of growth in competence and maturity through which teachers add range, depth and quality to the performance of their professional tasks.' (p131) He goes on to say that 'the quality of a school system is ...powerfully influenced by the extent of professional development occurring within it.' Ten years ago, the emphasis in school professional development was on one-shot, one-off professional development days, where the body of knowledge about literacy or any other field, was viewed as a finite set of ideas which teachers could be taught, and which they could then implement in their classrooms. Dissatisfaction with the limits of this simple transmission model of professional development led to the adoption of a model where teachers met together on five or six spaced occasions to discuss new ideas around pre-set themes and to use the intervening periods to implement the new ideas in their classrooms. Programs such as ELIC, the Early Literacy Inservice Course which was based on ERIC, the Early Reading Inservice Course from New Zealand, was a prototype in Australia which produced many alternatives, such as FLIP, CLP, SLIC. In fact, Australian developments are now widely marketed in North America, eg ELIC by Rigby Education, Frameworks by Cambourne and Turbill, and Readers Writers Parents by Dundas

and Strong.

Concurrently, theories of professional development have emerged, both in Australia and overseas. The current know-how which influences the practice of professional development includes the following:

- training and sharing workshops where teachers can interact with one another, as well as seek contingent expert advice (Johnson, 1991)
- opportunities for observation of each other's teaching, and for research and problem solving
- time for practice and incorporation of new skills (Collins, 1992), with the probable expectation of adaptation to the local context (Caldwell, Johnson & Ruth, 1992)

However, it's naive to consider models of professional development outside of a wider educational and political context. The prevailing climate in Australian education follows a model described for American conditions by Fullan (1991). He states that education in the nineties is characterised by two seemingly opposing phenomena: intensification and restructuring.

Intensification, Fullan tells us, involves the centralised mandating of texts and curricula, standardized evaluation measures, and the specification of teaching and administrative methods. In Australia, as far as literacy is concerned, Australia's Language and Literacy Policy (DEET, 1991) is an apt example of the growing move towards educational intensification. The policy is described below.

Australia's Language and Literacy Policy has four main goals:

- general literacy
- languages other than English
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and literacy
- language services

As far as general literacy is concerned, there are four main areas of concern:

- Children's Literacy
- Adult Literacy
- Aboriginal Literacy and ESL
- ESL generally

With regard to children's literacy, specific projects relate to

- The Literacy and Learning Program which operates in two areas
 - Junior Secondary
 - Early Intervention
- The Australian Education Council which administers development of:
 - The National Statement on English
 - the National English Profile
 - Literacy Assistance
- The Australian Literacy Federation (the peak reporting body for literacy professional organisations in Australia) organises the following with limited federal government funding:
 - Teacher development activities such as Colloquia: eg Child Literacy/ESL
 - Publications: eg on Language on L1/L2 Devt

- The National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning
Teacher training preparation
- ALLP Innovative Projects

Professional development is funded under the auspices of this central policy. However, most funding is tied to government bodies and little is available for independent developments in the field, say by tertiary institutions.

In Victoria, in the area of school literacy, the predominant way in which Literacy and Learning funding is spent is by developing structured stand-alone programs which, in the initial stages, are presented to groups of teachers from interested schools, by the developers of the programs, but which will later be presented by those teachers within a school who have been appointed to positions of responsibility for professional development. Currently being developed are

- Making a Difference
- Writing in Subject Areas
- Helping Students to Learn
- A Meta PD Manual

These stand-alone programs herald the demise of consultancy in Victorian schools and place the onus for professional development squarely on the shoulders of teachers in schools. This introduces the other aspect of Fullan's description of change in educational organisation for the nineties which is restructuring. This involves "school-based management; enhanced roles for teachers in instruction and decision making; integration of multiple innovations etc" (p7). Paralleling the centrally organised and bureaucratically led intensification in the administration of the Literacy and Learning program in Victoria, is the expectation that literacy professional development will be funded and presented in-house. While it is acknowledged that professional development concerns should rightly emanate from the actual issues being confronted in local contexts, the source of expertise for dealing with such problems is not always local.

It's not hard to figure out that these two phenomena are actually at odds with one another. In Australia, the prevailing climate of corporate management which pervades the higher echelons in public education, seems to have little to offer the actual world of classroom teaching where student

outcomes and teachers learning are more of an issue. What will happen if the task of professional development in a school degenerates to the transmission of centrally-controlled ideas circulated by a central bureaucracy? One parallel which could be taken from literacy theory is the top-down bottom-up model of reading. Ten years ago we wondered whether reading was learned from the top down or from the bottom up. In other words, were the letters the important bits to learn first, or the sense of the text? Such debates about dichotomies seem anachronistic ten years later. However, one might ask whether professional development should take place from the top down or the bottom up. The guise of restructuring may in fact disguise the impact of intensification: of centrally-imposed professional development models.

Where professional development programs have been adopted at the local level, their continuation may be discouraged at the level of the central

bureaucracy, in terms of cost, with little reference to benefits. For example: Professional development programs such as ELIC and early intervention programs for students such as Reading Recovery have been widely implemented in Australia to extend their skills in teaching early literacy programs...The continued resourcing of such programs is problematic due to budget constraints. Project Brief: Good Teaching in the Early Years 1.7.92 Victorian Department of School Education, School Improvement Branch

As Collins (1991) states:

"If politicians cannot move beyond dichotomous threats of total school accountability on the one hand and no support on the other, if what drives them is the chance to project images of 'top-down' accomplishments in the electorate, then there will be no effective professional development. The teacher will simply decouple the classroom from the engine of political rhetoric. Further, if bureaucrats are encouraged by the same ethos to reinterpret professional development as leadership development, they will spend large parts of very small budgets on themselves." (p17)

Parallels between understandings about literacy and knowledge of PD
It's been instructive to reflect on the ways in which changes in understandings about teacher professional development and changes in understandings about literacy inform one another. Ten years ago, literacy was viewed as a uni-dimensional product of learning to read and write, regardless of context. Researchers over the years have demonstrated that one's reading and writing change according to the type of text (Martin, 1989) and according to content (Hornsby and Parry, 1992). Indeed, literacy itself is a multi-dimensional concept, with some literacies being commonly valued by dominant groups and others ignored. For example, the place and value of Aboriginal art in Australian society has changed considerably over the last decade, whereas the literacy involved in understanding graffiti is not valued highly in the community generally. We ought probably more realistically to think of literacies in our society and not just literacy. (Street, 1990, Gee, 1991). The eighties also gave us a description of any literacy event as a complex discourse event (Golden, 1988), and in the nineties, we see difficulties with reading and writing as a matter of competing complex literacies (Street, 1990). The concept of literacy as unqualified good is firmly entrenched, even for those communities whose traditions are oral not written. (Wafer, nd) For example, Koori students will talk about white teachers who have already decided that their Koori students are going to fail, and who then provide the context in which such students live up to their teachers' expectations.

Ten years ago literacy took on a language focus. We said that literacy had to do with learning how to use written language. Today, we've moved to a position where learning how to use written language is governed by which language in particular is being taught, whether its the students' first language and for what purpose it is being learned. The context in which literacy learning takes place, and the agendas which people have for learning to read and write particular content have been shown to have a real impact on the learning which is done, and, in fact, may be the learning itself. Thus literacy as social practice is an important step forward. (Edelsky, 1990, Luke & Kale, 1991). In addition, what the reader or

writer brings to the literacy event will have a big impact on what meaning constructed in reading or writing. (Freebody & Luke, 1990)

The pendulum has swung in the past ten years from a way of learning which placed the emphasis on learning bits of the language, to a way of learning which placed an emphasis on keeping language whole. Now we've moved to a position of seeing that we cannot separate the learning of language from the learning of content (Pigdon & Woolley, 1992), although there will be times when the explicit teaching of some aspects of language in context will be necessary to support student learning (Clay, 1992). Literacy teachers are seen to be people who not only know a lot about the language, but also know how to observe what students know and can do, and to respond contingently. (Furniss & Smith, 1992).

The past decades has also seen a shift from emphasis on product to focus on process, on the learning as opposed to the learned. At this stage, the pendulum is a corrective of extremes, with the focus on both product and process. (Dufficy & Gummer, 1991)

The following represents some parallels between professional development and literacy development.

Professional Development Literacy

- one-off inservice days
- literacy as learning the surface features of language
- spaced clusters of inservice sessions with between unit activities
- literacy as a way of knowing about content eg science
- continuous input/action/reflection with opportunities to critique one another's teaching
- Eg Reading Recovery
- literacy as a multi-dimensional and changing concept involving culture and social context.
- competing ideologies: ALLP and AST
- literacy as a way of critiquing the dominant ideology
- DEET funding tied to government instrumentalities
- literacy as competing discourses, some more dominant than others
 - who gets published
 - who gets funding
 - who gets to speak at conferences
- Stand-alone PD programs developed centrally, presented independently
- literacy as catechism
- locally initiated problems and responses
- literacy as socially and locally constructed

Of course drawing attention to the power and control afforded the government in the inservice education of its teachers, also demonstrates the absence of tertiary institutions from the development and the evaluation of professional development activities for teachers. The next step will be the request by state departments of education for the adoption

of centrally developed courses into the university curriculum. This has already been foreshadowed. (DEET, 1992) Such adoption may allow for an external university perspective on such programs. It could also be seen as a way of controlling tertiary institutions by colonising the curriculum space.

Case Studies in a Professional Development Program in Victoria

Research in teacher professional development would suggest that it's not the pre-packaged program which makes the difference, but the ability of teachers who are working within a supportive infrastructure to take a program and transform it, making it their own by taking those aspects which are most relevant, and localising it.

With regard to professional development programs in Victoria, the Making a Difference program has been in use in some schools for at least three years. (Furniss et al, 1991). At Kangaroo Flat Secondary College, near Bendigo, three teachers were involved in the development of the program and in trialling the program since this time. A formative evaluation of the Making a Difference program (Caldwell, Johnson, & Ruth, 1992), explained that the success of the implementation of the program at this school was due to a number of factors including the following:

- It is recognised by principal and staff as an integral part of the Whole School Plan

- It is taught by a cohort of trained Making a Difference tutors skilled, confident and committed to the program.

- It is supported by subject area teachers who are willing to share responsibility with colleagues for the literacy learning of students, and

- Staff have available to them a planned, systematic and practical professional program. (Caldwell, Johnson & Ruth, 1992, pp7-8)

At a small country secondary college, Making a Difference was implemented by Linda, who heard about the program, read the manual and implemented the program seemingly independently. However, a closer analysis of her position revealed the on-going support of a colleague who was implementing Reading Recovery in a neighbouring primary school, as well as the full support of teachers and others in the power base at her school who helped obtain release time for two teachers at her school to work with students experiencing difficulties in Year Seven.

So, the crux of professional development seems to be the presence of trained and knowledgeable practitioners, a factor which stand-alone programs seem bent on ignoring.

A significant point made by the evaluators of the Making a Difference program is the importance of on-going support and networking among teacher participants in the program. Unfortunately, secondary schools evidence many competing demands. Wigginton (1985) describes the classroom press which secondary teachers face in their everyday dealings in schools.

If professional development is to have successful outcomes in our schools, it will need to pay close attention to the following:

- time

- finance
- staffing
- morale
- support from external consultants

If these are not available, then there may be a role for university staff to develop ways of supporting teachers while augmenting their own courses. Incentives for the completion of higher degree courses are quite low at present. Any response would need to be mindful of the following emphasised by Collins (1991):

'Schools may need to be totally restructured and reconceptualised if we want to make effective professional development possible. We know that effective professional development requires teachers to work together but we organise schools so that teachers are isolated from one another. We know that developing new skills takes time, but that we expect teachers to be upfront all of the time. We know that teacher development must be part of a school's plan for renewal, but we continue to import outside experts. We also fail to take account of the levels of stress which are placed upon teachers by current arrangements in schools.' (p17-18)

How can we in tertiary institutions best support the on site professional development of teachers while continuing to provide courses which count for credit for degrees? The answer may be in some kind of collaborative work. The work required will be expensive and time-consuming if we are to have any lasting effect. To short-change teachers with anything less may mean the production of pumpkins, or at least ugly siblings rather than fairy princesses.

References

- Badger, L. et al (1984) Early Literacy Inservice Course Adelaide: Education Department of South Australia
- Butler, A., Cambourne, B. and Turbill, J. (1990) Frameworks Wollongong: University of Wollongong
- Caldwell, B., Johnson, N. & Ruth, J. (1992) Making a Difference: A Formative Evaluation Commissioned by the Literacy and Learning Program, Department of School Education, Victoria.
- Clay, M.M. (1991) Becoming Literate Auckland: Heinemann
- Collins, C. (1991) Teacher development: achievements and challenges In P. Hughes (ed) Teachers' Professional Development Hawthorn: ACER
- Costello, R. (1991) Government policy for the professional development of teachers In P. Hughes (ed) Teachers' Professional Development Hawthorn: ACER

DEET (1991) Australia's Language The Australian Language and Literacy Policy Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service

DEET (1992) Teacher Education A discussion paper prepared by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, August.

Dufficy, P. and Gummer, P. (1991) Literacy and second language learners : using language to learn In E. Furniss and P. Green (Eds) The Literacy Agenda: Issues for the nineties South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Press

Dundas, V. and Strong, G. Readers, Writers and Parents Brisbane: Strodon

Publications

- Edelsky, C. (1991) Literacy: some purposeful distinctions In C. Edelsky With Literacy and Justice for All: Rethinking the social in language and education London: Falmer
- Freebody, P. and Luke, A. (1990) 'Literacies' Programs : Debate and demands in cultural context Prospect: A journal of Australian TESOL Vol 5, No 3, May; pp7-9
- Fullan, M. (1991) The New Meaning of Educational Change New York: Teacher's College Press
- Furniss, E. et al (1991) Making a Difference; supporting unsuccessful readers and writers at year seven In P. Cormack (Ed) Selected Papers of the Australian Reading Association National Conference, Adelaide Carlton South: ARA
- Furniss, E. and Smith, J. (1992) Reading Recovery in Action: Learning to lead from behind In A. Watson and A. Badenhop (eds) Prevention of Reading Failure Sydney: Ashton Scholastic
- Gee, J. (1991) Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in discourses London: Falmer
- Golden, J. (1988) The construction of a literary text in a story-reading lesson In J.L.Green and J.O.Harker, (Eds) Multiple Perspective Analyses of Classroom Discourse Vol XXVII Advances in Discourse Processes Norwood, N.J.: Ablex
- Hornsby, D. and Parry, J. (1992) Language and integrated learning In K. Pigdon and M. Woolley (Eds) The Big Picture: Integrating children's learning Armadale: Eleanor Curtain Press
- Johnson, N. (1991) Making Connections Unpublished paper Melbourne University Institute of Education
- Kale, J. and Luke, A. (1991) Doing things with words In E. Furniss and P. Green (Eds) The Literacy Agenda: Issues for the nineties South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Press
- Martin, J. (1989) Technicality and abstraction: Language for the creation of specialised knowledge In F. Christie (ed) Writing in Schools Reader Geelong, Vic: Deakin University Press
- Pigdon, K. and Woolley, M. (1992) (Eds) The Big Picture: Integrating children's learning Malvern: Eleanor Curtain Press
- Street, B. (1990) Cultural meanings of literacy Literacy Lessons series Geneva: International Bureau of Education, UNESCO
- Wafer, J.W. (nd) The bugbear of literacy in the education of tribal aborigines In E. Brumby and E. Vaszolyi (Eds) Language Problems and Aboriginal Education Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education
- Wigginton, E. (1985) Sometimes a Shining Moment New York: Anchor Books
- AARE/NZARE Literacy Symposium Deakin University 1992 E. Furniss, LaTrobe