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Exploring the Effect of the Reading Developmental Continuum, on Teacher Practices. Research in progress funded by Language Australia : Child/ESL Literacy Research Network- Queensland Node.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of research within and across institutions, and to report on how technology was used for communication purposes, data entry and analysis, and report writing in the conducting of a collaborative research project titled, Teacher Practices: Investigating Teachers' use and Perceptions of the First Steps reading Developmental Continuum.

The research was conducted at two sites with three universities, the Australian Catholic University - McAuley Campus, Central Queensland University and Griffith University, and was funded by Language Australia: National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia. The study investigated the interactive nature of teaching, planning, assessing and reporting of reading development in the beginning years of schooling while

using the Reading Developmental Continuum.

Preliminary findings are reported and methodological issues and processes associated with collaborative, cross-institutional research are discussed.

Background

Changing nature of research

Historically research, teaching and learning have been inextricably intertwined within the university's role of promoting scholarship through the transmission of knowledge. Traditionally, the academic as disseminator of knowledge, has engaged with research to develop his/her knowledge in the field. Until recently, research could be considered to be the main avenue for academics' professional development in teaching and learning. However the role of research in tertiary institutions has undergone considerable change with the establishment of the Unified National System of Higher Education in 1987. "The universities are no longer the remote source and wellspring of invention and creativity but are part of the problem-solving, problem identification and strategic brokering that characterize knowledge industries"(Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotony, Schwartzman, Scott, & Trow, 1994, p.86).

Four forces, which are impacting on the nature of research in Australian universities, were identified in the Australian Research Council's commissioned Report No. 47, Patterns of Research Activity in

Australian Universities (1996). They are the massification of higher education with the reorganisation of tertiary institutions, a Dawkin's initiative in 1987; the growth of competition for funding and resources; accountability and managerialism in the allocation, reporting and monitoring of expenditure and the commercial context with the university business making links to other commercial businesses (p.13). Over the past decade, policies related to economic rationalism have linked the role of universities to work place productivity and have influenced the work of the academic as teacher and researcher (McCollow & Lingard, 1996; Meek, 1995).

In this economic climate, the role of research as the medium for learning has been reshaped as a commodity, with the research quantum being used as a measure of productivity, accountability and an index of performance (Poole, 1993). Such government initiatives as those conducted by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education clearly consider research output as an indicator of quality determining financial rewards. The dissemination of funds is also linked to particular socio-economic objectives as described in such documents as The Strategic Role of Academic Research, (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1994) and Using Basic Research, Review of Current Theory and International Practices, Commissioned Report, Part 1 and 2 (National Board of Employment, Education and Training 1995; 1996).

Changing role of academic as researcher

Furthermore, such documents as Research for Australia: Higher Education Contribution (1989); Committee to Review Higher Education Research Policy: Report (1989) together with those previously cited, shape and legitimize research practices through the establishment of criteria and recommendations for funding which define and determine preferred ways of researching. Consequently, there is increased pressure on academics to accommodate these demands and demonstrate their ability as researchers to research in certain ways (Burgess & Strachan, 1996).

However the academic's role as teacher / researcher remains a contentious issue. Russell (1993) considers conducting research an academic social duty, while a survey conducted by Bazely (1994) demonstrated conflicting views among university academics, government policy makers and university policy makers. The former believed there should be a balance between teachers and researchers in academic institutions, while the policy makers identified the need for approximately 70% of staff to be conducting and publishing research. The significance of research is evident when the research profile of an academic has a major influence on promotion and career paths. This results in increasing competition amongst academics within and across universities to capture the research dollar. Because competition is intense and with criteria focusing on the reputation and ability of the researcher, his or her publication record, together with past records of completed projects, novice researchers find it difficult gaining

enough experience to fulfill criteria necessary for a successful proposal. An additional pressure for novice researchers is balancing an increasing teaching load with the demands of conducting research and publishing results.

This paper examines ways novice researchers can alleviate some of the demands in conducting research through engaging in collaborative projects and how the use of technology may facilitate the research process.

Our experience as novice researchers working collaboratively is reported here with the aim of identifying aspects related to the planning, implementing, analysis and reporting of a collaborative project, conducted across institutions and regions. Furthermore, the role of technology used throughout the project is described with issues and implications discussed.

The nature of collaborative research

Profile of Researchers

Two of the researchers are tenured academics, one is about to submit her doctoral thesis while the other has commenced her candidature. Both have been recipients of research grants. The third researcher has worked as a contract academic over the past decade and was awarded a full-time doctoral scholarship this year. The fourth member of the research team has completed her Masters degree and works for Catholic

Education in Central Queensland. The team represents three universities and one education system in two regional areas in Queensland. None of the team members had previously worked together however this study resulted from common interests in early literacy and membership of a professional research organization, which provides funding for small research projects.

Collaborative research as communication

There is an increasing emphasis on collaborative research among universities across regions, with the Australian Research Council (1997) identifying collaborative research as a distinct category for grant applicants (See DEETYA Research Grants and Training and Application Forms, 1997). While this reaps obvious benefits in terms of range of expertise, it also results in additional problems. Conducting research on the same topic from different sites requires more than research expertise. An ability to communicate one's research intentions and responsibilities becomes a critical factor in the project.

Communication technologies, namely electronic mail, facsimiles and the traditional telephone (including a teleconference) were used in this project and played a central role in the conducting of the research.

While four researchers sat in different sites, our computers "change[d] from that of an isolated productivity tool to that of an active collaborator in the acquisition, use and creation of information as well as a facilitator of human interaction" (Tesler,1991, p.86). The

computer as a communicative tool facilitated and simulated the experience of collaborating in the same room, tearing down the barriers of geography (p.11).

However, when it came down to integrating and refining aspects of the research, eyeballing each other around a table, examining hard copies of our data over a coffee or glass of wine proved the most effective and significantly, more satisfying. This was effective because we were able to discuss and examine how each project's data was the same or different - thus allowing each team to become clearer in their understandings of the separate team's approach to data analysis.

Therefore, issues of synchronicity and context relating to the communicative process become critical, when judgements and decisions about the ways of conducting of research are made. Writing is a social practice where participants need to be explicit in their goals and expectations of the writing outcomes when communicating with others (Fletcher & Bartlett, 1997). The communicative process, mediated using technology, needed to be refined and developed in the same space and time several times throughout the study.

Through this process the group became more defined, had a greater understanding of each other's purposes and on the one occasion when we met the teams became more comfortable with the data and evolving findings. Satisfaction came from the discussion that took place alongside the data - anecdotes about the day's activities, work experiences and other transactional talk. This contributed to our

sense of self as researcher and selves as researchers. However these meetings were infrequent and expensive involving air fares for two of the team members.

Resourcing collaborative research

The Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education (1986), an initiative by the former Labour Minister Susan Ryan, identified the role of universities as research institutions and provided a detailed discussion of how institutions should manage their resources, recommending the development of research management plans. There is a dilemma for universities seeking to maximize the benefits from their research activities. On the one hand, resources of time, support staff, capital facilities, equipment and library services need to be available to all academics to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities as researchers as well as teachers. On the other hand, available resources are inevitably limited and some choices or restrictions are unavoidable (p.143).

In the case of this project, the teams were operating independently within different technological contexts and using different analytical procedures. For Team B, the software intended for use was put aside and the team members reverted to bits of paper and handwriting in the analyses of data because computer systems were incompatible. The broad choice of roles and responsibilities for the Team B project evolved through a process of decision making - initially all members received email messages until the CEO office lost their account

provider and telephone calls and faxes took over.

Conducting collaborative research

All researchers had experience with some aspects of this topic through previous work, research or study. Initially, reference lists were exchanged through faxes, and following email communication, it was decided two literature reviews would be written developing the two research foci of each site. The first draft was an amalgamation of previous papers, revised to accommodate the stated research questions. Two events further refined the literature review. Interim reports were required by the funding body, and one of the researchers presented a paper at a national conference. While traditional library resources were the basis of the review, searches were conducted on the World Wide Web for research on the topic. The AARE site offered valuable source material and also provided models of the type and range of papers published. In an effort to maintain control over the cited references, ProCite 3.2 for Windows (1995) was partially used in the production of the reference list. However, throughout the project, lack of access to common software programs limited their usefulness and often determined the roles and responsibilities of the researchers.

Background to the study

Within this context of change at the tertiary level, the research reported here reflects a context of change at the primary education

level (Dinham, 1997). Over the last decade, there has been increasing calls for greater accountability in relation to children's literacy learning in primary schools. Documents such as Australia's Literacy: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (DEET 1991); A Statement on English for Australian Schools (Curriculum Corporation, 1994); National Survey on Language Learning in Australian Schools, (DEET, 1990) and A National Language Policy (Senate Standing Committee, 1984) have contributed towards a changing view of literacy learning and accountability at a National level.

Traditionally, all Australian states have assumed responsibility for curricula in schools. In recent times, state autonomy has come into question with a call for greater commonality of curricula across the nation. Despite concerted efforts at a national level, it would appear as if Australia will not see a national curriculum for English in the near future. Whenever the question of standards is raised, particularly in relation to literacy performance, the dilemma of having each state developing its own English curriculum guidelines and standards poses a difficulty, in that literacy performance across the nation is difficult to validly measure for comparative purposes. In the past, national levels of literacy performance were measured by using standardised tests. The validity of this method has been seriously questioned (Clay, 1993; Paris, Calfee, Filby, Hiebert, Pearson, Valencia & Wolf, 1992; Oakhill & Garnham, 1988) and educators have been seeking alternative ways of monitoring and measuring literacy performance.

Clay (1993), proposed a range of observation procedures where teachers use systematic observations to monitor children as they develop literacy skills. Paris et al (1992), describe seven critical dimensions and attributes of literacy and provide practical guidelines for teachers where assessment strategies are closely linked to classroom practices. Currently a National Benchmarking Taskforce is writing and trialling literacy benchmarks for Reading, Writing, Spelling, Listening and Viewing for Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. Thus in relation to teaching, learning and monitoring literacy learning in schools, some initiatives occur at a National level and others at the State level.

In Queensland, the Department of Education focused on the latest developments at the system level, producing a range of documents, including reviews and policy statements related to infrastructure, curriculum innovation and professional development. In the Status Report and Recommendations: Rationale and Elements of the P-10 Curriculum (Studies Directorate Qld, 1991), officers of the Department of Education reviewed the changing goals and priorities proposed for the next five years in providing high quality education for Queensland students. One of the outcomes of this prioritization was the English in Years 1 to 10 Queensland Syllabus materials published in 1994.

The goal of the English Syllabus for Years 1 to 10 is to:
develop and refine students' ability to compose and to comprehend spoken and written English - fluently, appropriately, effectively and

critically - for a wide range of personal and social purposes (p.26).

In an effort to achieve this goal, a comprehensive teacher inservice program, identifying effective teaching practices was developed and implemented throughout Queensland. In conjunction with this initiative, the Queensland Government commissioned a review of the Queensland school curriculum. The resulting Report of the Review of the Queensland School Curriculum: Shaping the Future (Wiltshire, McMenimen & Tolhurst, 1994) identified a number of recommendations related to curriculum reforms, including recommendation 7.1 which stated "That early-age prevention, identification and intervention relating to students experiencing difficulties with literacy and numeracy be given priority by teacher education programs, system- or sector-level structures, schools and teachers" (p. xiii).

Both the Syllabus and Shaping the Future have had a major impact on literacy teaching and learning in Queensland. The Queensland Government, in response to the recommendations of the curriculum review, developed the Year 2 Diagnostic Net "to support children's literacy and numeracy development during the early years of schooling in Queensland" (Queensland School Curriculum Office, 1996b, p.1). The Year 2 Diagnostic Net is a four step process in which teachers will:

- * observe and map children's progress using developmental continua for literacy and numeracy;
- * validate observations with specifically designed assessment tasks for all children likely to be identified as requiring intervention;

- * provide support to those children requiring additional assistance;
- * report to parents.

(Queensland School Curriculum Office 1996b, p. 1).

The developmental continua recommended for use in Year 2 in Queensland originated from the Ministry of Education Western Australia as The First Steps Project, which was conceived, and trialled in 1989. There are three components of the First Steps project:

- * Curriculum development;
- * School development;
- * Professional development and support.

The Reading Developmental Continuum provides teachers with a framework for monitoring and recording children's reading development. The major emphasis is on ongoing focused observation. The Continuum identifies indicators organized under levels (First Steps) or phases (Qld RDC) which describe reading practices related to:

- * making meaning at text level;
- * making meaning using context;
- * making meaning at word level;
- * attitudes.

See Queensland School Curriculum Office, (1997a.) The Year 2 diagnostic net: Understanding the key indicators of reading and writing for a detailed description of the indicators.

To be operating in a phase, a child must display all key indicators for the phase, though children may display behaviours across several phases. The process of mapping observed children's behaviours onto the continuum enable teachers to make judgements about children's reading

development and determine areas of need. This information also allows teachers to link students' current performance with planning for appropriate teaching strategies and learning experiences. Such an approach to reading and assessment reflects an emergent literacy perspective, which views learning as a staged and sequenced acquisition of identifiable literate practices (Crawford, 1995; Hill, 1997).

In 1992 the Western Australian Ministry of Education commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to carry out an evaluation of the First Steps Project. Here it was reported the First Steps Project was "based on the belief that teaching practice has a significant effect on student outcomes and that all children can learn successfully" (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1994, p. 2).

Findings of the evaluation, based on a sample of 12 schools, were very supportive of the First Steps project with a high degree of support indicated by teachers in relation to using the Spelling, Writing, Oral Language and Reading continua. Furthermore, the validity of the continua in depicting the literacy development of children was generally supported, however the validity of the key indicators in the Reading Continuum was not reported. A high level of support, 84% of teachers, reported that the professional development provided in relation to the First Steps Project was either 'very helpful or helpful' (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1994, p. 7).

More than 80% of teachers reported that their collaborative teacher was either 'helpful or very helpful' (p.7). In relation to Reading 'there was some evidence that 'First Steps may be making a difference in the reading ability of students' (p.8) and 'that First Steps is having a

positive effect on the writing ability of children irrespective of their socio-economic background' (p.9).

The Queensland Department of Education (1995) published a box of materials to support the professional development of teachers in the early years in relation to the introduction of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and the developmental continua which were to be used to map children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Staff of the Department of Education and the Queensland School Curriculum Office produced the following publications: Literacy Validation (1995/6); Handbook (1995/6) and Intervention Strategies: Reading and Writing (1995); 1997 Literacy and Numeracy Validation and Understanding the Key Indicators of Reading and Writing (1997). These documents highlight the interactive nature of teaching, planning and assessing and were developed as school-based resources and reference materials. The validation process as described in these documents was developed as summative assessment of children's literacy performance using the Key Indicators to establish at which phase they were operating. Through this validation process, 'at-risk' students were identified for the purposes of attending intervention programs run in the school.

This study examines the ways teachers manage assessment in their classrooms and their use of the Reading Developmental Continuum.

The study

In reporting the study, the two projects have been identified by the research teams, labeled Team A (Brisbane: Margaret Fletcher & Janelle Young) and Team B (Rockhampton: Robyn Cox & Dawn Haynes).

This study titled, Teacher Practices: Investigating Teachers' use and perceptions of First steps Reading developmental Continuum identified the following aims to guide the research.

Team A: Aims

The purpose of the study is to investigate the interactive nature of teaching, assessing and reporting of reading in Year 2 and to ascertain how teachers perceive this process.

Therefore the aims are to specifically examine how teachers :

- * gather and record information about students' reading development;
- * use this information for teaching, assessing, mapping, validating and reporting reading development using the Reading Developmental Continuum;
- * perceive the above process.

Team B: Aims

This research focuses on the broad area of planning for and teaching of reading in Years 1 and 2 of schooling in Queensland. In particular it looks at the impact of the mapping of students' abilities using the Reading Developmental Continuum on the classroom teaching and learning context. Therefore the aims are to:

- * explore Year Two teachers' use of Individual Student Reading Profiles from Year One;
- * explore the influence of this information on teachers' planning for teaching reading.

Method- Team A

Sample

All Year 2 teachers in Catholic schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese and Rockhampton regions, in Brisbane independent schools and in state schools in the Metropolitan West Region were invited to participate in the study. A total of 85 teachers responded to the survey with 8 teachers volunteering to participate in follow-up interviews. Four of these teachers also volunteered to participate in observations of their classroom practices.

Instruments

The survey was designed using a combination of open and closed questions. Likert scaled responses were also included.

The survey was designed to gather information in the following areas:

demographic information;

assessment techniques;

assessment instruments;

recording of assessment data;

use of assessment data;

mapping reading development on the Reading Developmental

Continuum;

planning for literacy learning;

informing teaching practices;

reporting;

* perceptions of the above practices and processes.

Teacher Interviews

Following the completion to the survey, 8 of the teachers who volunteered were interviewed to obtain further details about using the

Reading Developmental Continuum as an assessment framework and to explore the perceived effect this framework has had on the monitoring of children's reading development. Information sought from the teacher interview included perceptions of the:

- * most useful features of the Reading Developmental Continuum;
- * least useful features of the Reading Developmental Continuum;
- * moderation meetings;
- * ways of gathering information about children's reading development;
- * reliability of the mapping process;
- * teacher opinion of the Reading Developmental Continuum as a framework and the expression of its elements;
- * effect of the Reading Developmental Continuum on Year 2 teachers' work.

Classroom Observations

Data were also gathered through the recording of close observation of classroom practices when teachers were engaged in assessing students for the purposes of mapping reading performance onto the Reading Developmental Continuum. Classroom sessions were audiotaped and observers recorded field notes during the session.

Analysis

Survey data was analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods.

The use of quantitative data provided a generalised account of how teachers gather and use information about students' reading progress.

Dragon Dictate for Windows, Version 2.52 was used in the transcription of some of the qualitative data. SPSS Release 6.0 for IBM, QSR NUD.IST

and QSR Merge software were used in the analyses. The use of QSR Merge enabled two researchers to code the same data using two different platforms, translate and merge the coded data and check for congruence in categories identified.

Results

Quantitative data from eighty five teachers were collected and analysed. The survey consisted of seven questions requiring only a comment response, eight Likert-scaled questions with an associated comment section. Question 7, where teachers estimated the time spent assessing reading approximately fifty percent responded that 3-5 hours was need per fortnight as reported in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: Question 7: Teachers' estimation of the time spent assessing students' reading development every fortnight (%)

Question

1-2 hours

3-5 hours

> 5 hours

other

missing

7. Time spent assessing students' reading development/fortnight

29.4

49.4

7.1

8.2

5.9

Data from the Likert-scaled items in Questions 8 to 13 (See Table 2 below) provides an indication that teachers during the second year of using the Reading Developmental Continuum generally support the framework for recording reading progress. Eighty four percent of teachers provided positive responses in relation to the continuum as a valid framework for identifying student reading progress.

Approximately seventy six percent of teachers gave positive responses in relation to ease of use of the continuum.

When asked about the continuum as a comprehensive framework for recording progress, eighty three percent of the respondents provided positive responses with sixty five percent of teachers agreeing the continuum was easy to use. Sixty five percent of teachers indicated that the framework was efficient which indicates that further refinement of the continuum may be needed.

TABLE 2: Teacher responses (questions 8-13) related their perception of the Reading Developmental Continuum (%)

Question

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Missing

8. Is a valid indicator of students' reading progress.

24.7

28.2

31.8

9.4

0

5.9

9. Is easy to use.

21.2

22.4

32.9

16.5

3.5

3.5

10. Is efficient to use.

16.5

27.1

21.4

24.7

5.9

4.7

11. Is complex to use.

17.6

38.8

9.4

23.5

3.5

7.1

12. Is comprehensive as a framework.

21.2

23.5

38.8

8.2

2.4

5.9

13. Is time-consuming to use.

1.2

9.4

21.2

35.3

25.9

7.1

Questions 14 and 15 as described in Table 3 below, indicate that teachers are finding that the framework provides the information they need. Approximately seventy three percent of teachers responded that a true indication of children's reading ability was recorded and seventy seven percent indicated that children requiring further assistance were clearly identified when using the framework..

TABLE 3: Teacher responses identifying the effectiveness of the Reading Developmental Continuum as a recording framework for mapping individual reading progress (%)

Question

Yes

No

Missing

14. Does it help provide a true indication of individual reading ability.

72.9

18.8

8.2

15. Does it help identify the students who are most in need of assistance with reading.

77.6

14.1

8.2

Qualitative data from eighty-five teachers was collected in the form of survey responses from sixteen open-ended questions. Of these questions, seven required a written response only and nine were Likert scaled items with associated comments.

Analyses of the data at this point have two foci. The first involved several readings of the entire corpus to gain a generalised sense of repeated or characteristic themes. Secondly, further reading focused on the Likert scaled responses, correlating qualitative comments with the level of agreement as identified in the rank/scale items. These are reported below.

The first six questions explored the way teachers gather information for assessment purposes, and how they use the Reading Developmental Continuum. For the purposes of categorisation the gathering of

information was collapsed under the English Syllabus for Years 1 to 10 (1994) headings of observation, consultation, focused analysis and self and peer-assessment. These categories were also used by teachers in their responses.

Observation was the most frequently cited practice, and was both incidental and focused. This category included listening to children reading, observing them reading in different settings and observing their choice of books. Consultation involved gathering assessment information through some dialogue with students. Under this category, teachers included conferencing, asking questions following a reading aloud activity, identifying student attitudes about reading, and discussion opportunities in a variety of settings as ways of assessing student reading development. The category of focused analysis revealed the greatest range of responses. Running records/miscue analysis were the most frequently cited methods for focusing on the reading process.

The use of checklists; read and retell; work samples from exercises books and worksheets; tape recordings; tests of spelling, sight word and vocabulary; and comprehension activities including three level guides and comprehension exercises were characteristic methods of focusing on reading development.

While self and peer assessment were cited by several teachers, there was no further explanation of this method of gathering information.

Data were also gathered from teacher aides and parents. Characteristic responses revealed varied approaches as shown in the example below.

Question 3: List ways you gather information about students' reading development.

Observation in variety of situations- group / individual. When listening to individual reading, I use an individual checklist with indicators from continua as subheadings. Reading support mums, aide and myself use this daily as chn (sic) read. Parental comments on homework sheets are often insightful - close scrutiny of worksheets (Eureka scheme offers excellent variety in all genres)

- conversations and questioning. Formal assessment; running records; work samples; tape recording; observation; self (student) assessment .

The second focus of the analysis was to examine the Likert scaled responses in Questions 8 to 15 and the accompanying explanations related to the teachers identified level of agreement. These questions were designed to gather teacher perceptions about the validity and use of the Reading Developmental Continuum. Several patterns emerged. First, there was a correlation between the Likert scaled response and accompanying explanation. If a teacher strongly agreed with a statement, the accompanying explanation was generally very positive and supported the view represented in the statement. The following example demonstrates this.

It is the most comprehensive set of descriptors I have seen that encompass the spectrum of skills/understandings associated with reading. After mapping chn [sic] for several years I have seen the chn [sic] move through the phases- progression that is consistent with the ripple like structure of the indicators from phase to phase.

Second, where fifteen teachers qualified their response to the Likert

scaled statement in Question 9, The Reading Developmental Continuum is easy to use, the following areas of concern were identified:

- * The subjective nature of interpreting the indicators with ambiguity, lack of information and opinion being cited. Indicators C.2, C.3 and C.6 were identified as being problematic.
- * The validity of the indicators was questioned in identifying successful reading behaviour with specific mention of the key indicator C.3, e.g. "Some points are not relevant to reading ability, e.g. Phase C-author's opinion".
- * The gap between Phase C and D, e.g. "Phase D is ridiculous" ; "There's a big jump between C and D".
- * The time factor and duplication involved in recording information.
- * The reliance on one method of assessment to determine a student's ability.

Third, there was a strong polarising effect in the rank scaled responses of the positive statements in Questions 8, 9 and 10, and the negatively worded statements in Questions 11 and 13. If teachers strongly agreed with the first three positive statements, they strongly disagreed with the negative statements

Fourth, teachers revealed in their comments, an understanding of the interactive nature of the learning, teaching assessment cycle as they cited planning foci as outcomes resulting from information gathered using the Reading Developmental Continuum.

It assists in individual and class program planning, e.g. If children are experiencing difficulty with certain sounds/endings/comprehension it shows an area to focus when planning. Those who have no difficulty

will still benefit from a re-visit or can work on individually.

Fifth, teachers stated that practice and familiarity with the Reading Developmental Continuum alleviated the complexity and time associated with its use.

Sixth, teachers found the Reading Developmental Continuum confirmed their own professional knowledge about their students' reading abilities.

Teacher Interview

The teacher interviews confirmed these findings and provided contextualising data about the ways they assessed reading in their classroom, and how they acted on this information. The final analysis for the interviews is in progress. Trends emerging from the data are reported below.

Teachers were generally supportive of the Reading Developmental Continuum and found it most useful in the areas of pinpointing problem areas for particular children and in helping teachers to focus and look at areas of development across the different phases.

The least helpful areas reported by the teachers were that some indicators are expressed in vague terms, with some minor indicators not relating to the major indicators. Also the indicators were not always expressed in terms that are easily understood by parents. One specific comment from a teacher was that "Phase B needs fewer general indicators and more related to meaning making while using the context".

When asked if teachers found any inconsistencies of mapping when

children moved from Year 1 to Year 2 or when they came into Year 2 from another school, opinions of the teachers varied across the 8 interviews. Allowances needed to be made for responding to children's possible increased development over the lengthy holiday period between Year 1 and Year 2.

In relation to teachers' workload with the introduction of the RDC there was some difference of opinion. One teacher said there was "a great deal of stress and pressure" while another said it had 'not added to the workload". The teachers did agree that the year when the materials were first introduced was the most stressful and that the second year was much easier.

The support materials provided by State school authorities were very well received by all teachers. Most of the teachers said the materials were user-friendly and very practical, particularly the intervention strategies.

Moderation meetings with schools in the same districts were not found by the teachers to be of great value although some conceded that they did gain some practical ideas from other teachers. All teachers reported their own school moderation meetings were more valuable and questions were able to be clarified with colleagues.

Some concerns were expressed at the time and money spent completing the mapping, validating and attending moderation meetings when the money may well have been spent on intervention for 'at risk' students.

Classroom Observations

Data from classroom observations have been collected. The research in

progress is reported below.

Four classroom observations were conducted. Three female teachers and one male teacher participated. Each teacher was asked to provide the researchers with a session where data would be gathered about a child's or children's reading development. Each session was observed and audio taped and then followed by a reflective response from the teacher explaining the goals of the session and how it may lead to the mapping of reading progress on the continuum.

Teachers demonstrated a range of teaching and assessment practices, working with individual children, small groups or the whole class.

These observations are described below.

Case A:

The teacher commenced the session with the whole class participating in a shared book experience using the picture story book *Rosie's Walk* (1970) by Pat Hutchins. The teacher read the story and discussed some of the vocabulary throughout. Following the reading the class was instructed to draw special pictures to tell someone all about the story. The children were encouraged to divide the page into 8 boxes and draw appropriate pictures in sequence. The children were able to refer to the book while completing the activity. Once the class commenced the activity the teacher worked with an individual female child on the carpet in the classroom.

The teacher placed felt pictures on the floor in a jumbled sequence.

The child was asked to pick up the felt pictures, place them in order

and retell the story of Rosie's Walk. Following the oral retelling the child was asked to check if her felt pictures told the story by reading the text. The teacher assisted the child by providing encouragement and strategies for word attack to help the child with unknown words. The felt pictures were adjusted slightly to bring them in line with the story. The teacher asked the child if a new story could be made using the felt pictures. The child agreed and the teacher said they would do it tomorrow.

Upon reflection the teacher explained why she used the session and how it would help to map the child onto the continuum. The teacher explained that the child was experiencing difficulties with reading and writing and she used the session to assist the child to build confidence, to understand how texts work, to gain meaning from a text and to revise phonics.

In relation to the Reading Developmental continuum the child had demonstrated competence in all the indicators of Phase B Experimental Reading and was currently operating in Phase C Early Reading. The teacher was focusing on the first two key indicators for Phase C in this session. These indicators are as follows:

1. is beginning to read familiar texts and can retell major contents from visual and printed texts.
2. can identify and talk about a range of different text forms.

Case B:

The teacher started the session with the whole class participating in a shared book activity. Some words in the text were covered (masked cloze) so that the children would be encouraged to use context clues

and other strategies to predict the words. The class then worked independently on a set task while the teacher worked individually with female student and then a male student. The purpose of the session was to conduct a running record while the child read an information text about dogs. The teacher reminded the first child of reading strategies to use when words were unknown. Strategies such as sounding out, reading on and rereading the text were suggested. The teacher encouraged the child throughout the reading process. After reading the text the teacher asked the child to recall any information she could about dogs.

Upon reflection, the teacher said that the purpose of working with the child individually enabled her to gain some insight into how the child read and solved word attack problems. The teacher noted that the child was not reading on and she would encourage more of this in the future. She spoke about the continuum and discussed where she placed the focus for today's session. She discussed the first and fifth criteria in Phase C as these were the ones she was concentrating on. These criteria are as follows:

1. is beginning to read familiar texts confidently and can retell major contents.
5. uses picture clues and knowledge of context to check understanding

of meaning.

Case C:

This teacher chose to work with a small group of readers who were

regarded as those most in need of assistance. The children sat on the carpet in a small group and all read the same text Alison gets lost.

The remainder of the class was supervised by a class volunteer. The session began with the teacher instructing the children to look at the cover and title of the book. When the title was established the children were guided to look at the word 'lost'. The teacher revised the short vowels and used a small chart for revision where the children read words from a previous lesson.

The teacher then told the children she would read the story to them and they were to follow with their finger and watch to see if she made any errors.

The teacher read some of the text and made a couple of mistakes for the children to find. Other children then read parts of the text. The teacher assisted with unknown words where necessary encouraging the children to read on and read back and self correct.

Upon reflection the teacher said that she focussed very closely on the poorer readers and was continually observing and mapping their development. She did not do the same for the more competent readers.

The teacher often uses post-it notes and jots down observations about particular children. She does not use the continuum all the time but only periodically.

Case D:

Analysis in progress

Discussion

From the quantitative data collected from the survey, indications are that teachers are generally supportive of the Reading Developmental

Continuum. They find it comprehensive as a framework, easy to use and generally a valid indicator of children's reading progress. There was a high level of support for the framework from teachers who responded that it provided a true indication of the reading progress of individual children and that those children needing further assistance were clearly highlighted. There was less support for the framework in relation to efficiency of use and one third of the respondents indicated that the use of the framework was time-consuming.

The initial analyses of the qualitative data, confirms this view and provides additional insights into the teachers' perceptions and use of the Reading Developmental Continuum. Teachers in general were consistent in their responses to all Likert scaled questions, with their explanations accommodating the positive or negative wording of the question. There was a high degree of correlation between the Likert scaled responses and the associated comments on the teacher survey. Some explanations included qualifying comments, which revealed common concerns held by many teachers in this study as previously reported. These concerns were repeated in the interview data.

Method: Team B

Sample

A total of 10 Year 2 teachers were approached to take part in the study. No specific sampling criteria were employed in the selection of the sample. The researchers negotiated across education systems to include Year 2 teachers who had some experience with mapping, assessing, validating and reporting using the Reading Development

Continuum for more than one year.

The sample included four teachers from Education Queensland, five teachers from Catholic Education Rockhampton Diocese and one teacher

from the Independent system.

Instrument

The primary means of collecting data to answer the explicit aims of this part of the study was by interview. The researchers made a decision to utilise semi-structured interviews to capture the full range of teacher responses.

An interview schedule was developed which had four key questions and a larger number of contributing questions. The key questions are reproduced below to give a flavour of the interview process.

* When you receive the individual Reading Developmental Continuum for your class from Year 1 - do you use this information?

* How does this information influence:

the learning experiences;

your choice of teaching strategies;

your assessment techniques?

* How does the information from the individual reading development continuum help in your planning for individuals?

At times during the interviews, in the style of open -ended interview, the interviewees made comments that were beyond the questions asked but the data were collected and analysed.

Analysis

In seeking to interpret this data the interviews were read and re-read to search for categories. Originally the analysis was planned to be done using HyperQual - a computer based qualitative analysis program. Due to the small amount of interview data and the range of terminology used by teachers in describing both their own classroom literacy teaching and processes and their use of the Reading Developmental Continuum, the analysis was done using highlighter pen to identify categories and indicate congruencies in the teacher responses.

Results

The synthesis of the teachers' responses to the questions from the ten interviews were collated and provided indicators for some preliminary results. Final results and discussion are still in progress.

The preliminary analysis indicates that there are two broad foci which emerge from the data. The first focus is that teachers made broad comments about the Year 1 individual profiles and their role in working with the Year 2 students in their class. All teachers commented that they used the profiles and that they were comfortable with this.

Following are some examples of the teachers' comments;

"I just check through and see what indicators some children had and particularly those that some children don't have."

"The first thing I do is look at the continuum and decide on where the children are at, if they are still very low and still in phase A then I make a list."

"It helps me in some ways to sort out my reading groups, helps me to

find out where the kids have gaps that I need to work on."

The second broad focus of teacher comment during the interviews allows insight into how the Reading Development Continuum has initiated and supported change in teaching practices in reading.

Teachers report that they are more able to carefully group students after working with the data that comes from Year 1. The comment below exemplifies these comments;

"... it also helps me to identify, - putting the children into ability group with their reading, for when we have reading."

Further to this comments about the use of the data for grouping teachers also make some comments about the manner in which they teach new reading strategies. These reading strategies are at times common curriculum practices yet teachers comment that they have a fresh or more explicit focus - the following comments from the interview data exemplify this;

" So if you are wanting children to show that they are reading on you have to practise reading on and using the terminology."

"Many coming into Year 2 already have the strategy of picture clues, but they haven't much of an idea of word attack skills and reading around and getting information from the text."

"I use more cloze activities and read and retell."

The data indicates that these teachers have incorporated into their daily teaching the data from the Reading Developmental Continuum and its accompanying data gathering, mapping, validation and reporting into their everyday teaching repertoire. One of the teachers makes a comment, which outlines this when she says:

"I guess it gives me a good place to start, which, - I believe we've never had, so the Reading Developmental Continuum is really good for that, even if it's the only thing you use - it is a definite help for teachers."

Summary

Although these analyses are still in progress, common findings are evident across the sample, and these were repeated in the survey, interview and observation data. Teachers find the Reading Developmental Continuum a useful addition to the resources they use in the classroom. They find it helpful in recording student reading progress and in identifying student reading needs. While this is seen as confirming existing teacher knowledge about the students, this is generally reported as a positive outcome. Based on this information, teachers make decisions about planning and developing learning activities. They report increased demands on their time, but find familiarity with the Continuum over time mitigates this to some extent. Repeated concerns were related to the interpretive nature of the mapping process, ambiguity of some indicators and relevance of indicators in assessing reading performance. These findings inform the recommendations which are identified below.

Recommendations

In the light of the reported research in progress as described in this study, it is recommended that:

- * the use of the Reading Developmental should be continued;
- * inexperienced teachers should not be placed in a Year Two classroom.

without careful consideration and additional support;

* inservice in the use of the Reading Developmental Continuum and the validation materials should be ongoing;

* the reported ambiguity and description of some indicators requires further investigation for the purposes of clarification and refinement;

* the nature of assessment as a subjective activity needs to be recognised;

* further research into the effectiveness and validity of the Reading Developmental Continuum should be completed.

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Appendix A

Summary of technology used in this study

Research Process

Technology

Across site communication

Email

Teleconference / telephone

Facsimile

Literature Review

Managing citations

Internet search: Lycos; Yahoo

ProCite Personal Bibliographic Software

Collecting the data

Tape recorder

Email

Transcribing the data

Dragon Dictate

MS Word: Word Processing

Analyzing the data

QSR NUD*IST

NUD*IST Merge

SPSS

Reporting the data

PowerPoint

Inspiration software Connexus