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Two Literacy Projects-

A Most Insightful Association

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Abstract

Research theme: Research impacts – proving or improving?

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Marginalized, indigenous children are 'at risk' of not reaching the literacy levels of their more advantaged counterparts. The National Accelerated Literacy Program has attained very pleasing results in achieving high level literacy outcomes for these groups of children.

The presenter of this paper is one of the researchers carrying out the evaluation of the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP). As a result of this research the presenter's understanding has been enriched by the discovery of the relationships in pedagogy between the National Accelerated Literacy approach and the research project *In Teachers' Hands: Effective Literacy Teaching Practices in the Early Years of Schooling* that investigated the link between children's growth in English literacy in the early years of schooling and their teachers' classroom teaching practices.

The NALP has strong theoretical principles underpinning its pedagogy. The *In Teachers' Hands* Project developed, from the literature, the Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS), which identifies the practices of effective teachers and groups 33 indicators into six dimensions.

This paper will illustrate and explore the correlations between these two projects. As a result, the significance of the NALP will be exemplified, observation instruments for

the evaluation have been developed and, an understanding of literacy teaching and learning enriched.

Introduction

This paper discusses the discoveries made by researchers at Charles Darwin University when designing observation instruments to evaluate the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP).

Firstly, the paper summarizes stage 2 of the NALP evaluation and then discusses Accelerated Literacy underpinning theory and the In Teachers' Hands Project (Louden et al 2005). It then explores the relationship between these two projects and uses this to explain in the next section, the reasons for the development of the two observation instruments. The conclusion underscores the insights that emerged for researchers during this process of reflection and instrument design.

1. The evaluation of the National Accelerated Literacy (NALP) Program

The National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) was established in 2004, when the developers of "Scaffolding Literacy" brought their program to the Northern Territory at Charles Darwin University with funding from DEST to support a system-wide implementation of the methodology by DEET in the Northern Territory.

In addition, NALP is delivered in schools in northern Western Australia, South Australia and one school in Queensland. NALP is jointly funded by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Northern Territory Government, through the Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET). Originally known as scaffolding literacy, NALP was developed by Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey at the University of Canberra.

Before the system-wide roll-out in the NT, the program had been trialled in approximately 30 schools in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland and later in 6 schools in the NT. The program was based on the work of a small team of experts who had worked closely with the schools to support the development of classroom practice.

In 2004 DEET committed to rolling out the program in 100 schools, training 700 teachers and reaching 10,000 students in predominantly remote locations within the

NT. This was a mammoth task for a program that in essence had not been conceptualised within a systemic framework. The NT committed to making Accelerated Literacy the 'mainstream' program within policy, program and operational management tiers of the bureaucracy, taking up the challenge of achieving widespread uptake, whilst simultaneously enrolling an annually expanding number of schools and training a coterie of teachers and teacher trainers (coordinators) in the key aspects of the approach. The aim is to create a critical mass of expertise sufficient to overcome the impacts of turnover in the workforce that is a feature of Northern Territory schools.

DEET has contracted Charles Darwin University to carry out an evaluation of the implementation of the (NALP) in Northern Territory schools. Stage 2 of the Evaluation of Accelerated Literacy Program will focus more closely on the degree to which the program implementation has achieved changes in teaching practice in participating schools, the identification of factors responsible for effective teaching based on the AL methodology, and the outcomes of the program in terms of student progress.

2. *The National Accelerated Literacy Program and its Underpinning Theory*

Indigenous children experience many hardships that are likely to prevent them from fully engaging as active and fulfilled participants in their community and in wider society. One of the most important skills that children need to acquire is that of literacy. The ability to read and write English enables children to enter the literate world and as such have access to the mainstream community.

Literacy skills are taken for granted by many, but it is important to remember that a large number of children experience continual failure in learning to read and write, particularly in remote indigenous communities. It is critical for children to establish an identity as successful readers, writers and speakers but unfortunately many children are not provided with the opportunity to master these skills.

"Northern Territory data for 2004 showed that only two out of ten children in remote Territory communities passed the year 3 or 5 literacy benchmark" (Storry and Kirsten 2007 p.5). This is indeed a concern and the following quote further highlights the situation:

> Being literate means being able to navigate and shape your world and your future.
> The sight of a 16-year-old boy struggling to read a year one book about a fox in a box – his head down, hands over his face, mumbling

apologies – is humiliating for the student and chastening for any educator.

Yet many marginalised students – particularly those from remote Indigenous schools in Australia – fail to learn even the most basic reading skills (NALP 2006).

This cycle of failure is reinforced over time until literacy education becomes meaningless to these less successful children. Yet they are smart children and cannot be blamed for the failure of the education they receive. These children often have rich cultural and family backgrounds. For example, the researcher was privileged to observe at a recent remote school visit in Arnhem Land indigenous children joining with the community to engage in traditional dance where bodies were painted. The skill and beauty of this dance was unmistakable to researchers who were enriched by the experience.

The National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) has shown in small scale roll outs and the pilot in the NT and also in the Cresswell evaluation in 2002 conducted by ACER that it is possible to design and implement a program that is able to engage remote area indigenous children with literacy so they can achieve at a level proportionate to mainstream children. Accelerated Literacy (AL) is a specific English literacy teaching approach aimed at improving literacy outcomes for Indigenous and educationally marginalised students. The program uses AL methodology to address low literacy levels in remote communities around Australia, particularly indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

Developers and proponents of the AL Program are excited about the benefits of the program for indigenous children who are marginalized and as such do not have the opportunity to develop literacy skills at the same rate as main stream children. The NALP, according to its proponents, is very effective with children in pre-school and primary school and all the way to students in the upper levels of secondary school.

Gray and Cowey, the two developers of the program, express that for too long pedagogy to support the literacy of indigenous children has proved dysfunctional and has failed to achieve or sustain positive results (2001, p.14). They comment on the remarkable success of children involved in the Scaffolding Literacy (now Accelerated Literacy) program.

> Specifically for the 4 children discussed at length in this article, the program has opened up the possibility of entry into a secondary education that otherwise would not have existed. And, while their success in secondary schooling is by no means assured for they will still need considerable support, at least they have reached a level where they do have a real chance of success. p.13

Accelerated Literacy possesses strong theoretical underpinnings and it is these that must be understood if one is to develop a deep understanding of a program.

Marginalised students often struggle to understand what happens at school. The language that is used to explain what occurs is frequently unclear to them. This is because these students are not 'in tune' with school discourse and as such don't understand the point of what they are asked to do in school. They cannot make sense of the goals of the lesson and find it difficult to comprehend the way the teacher expects them to learn. In contrast, children who have come to school with a pre-exposure to the written word and who have been prepared for schooling from a western cultural perspective have learnt a way of thinking and behaving that enables them to fit in with the academic expectations of teachers. These children are able to participate in the school environment and are likely to be successful with school-based learning. Gee suggests that you cannot practice skills you have not been exposed to or engage in a social practice if you are not socialised into it. He puts forward the idea that non-mainstream children are expected to do just this (1996, p. 65). Gee, also provides an explicit description of this concept of discourse:

> A Discourse is a socio-culturally distinctive and integrated way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking, and valuing connected with a particular social identity or role, with its own unique history, and often with its own distinctive "props" (buildings, objects, spaces, schedules, books, etc)......A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognise. (Gee 1991 p. 33)

The AL program gives teachers the tools to make the learning strategies and task orientations explicit and visible to learners. In this way literate orientations that are likely to be second nature to teachers are made overt to students who gain experience with engaging in academic literate discourse which leads to academic success (Gray and Cowey 2005 p. 1-2). The AL program gives teachers the tools to make the learning strategies and task orientations visible to all learners. The approach analyses texts and makes the activity of studying them very clear for students so that they can 'tune in' to the school learning and literacy learning. AL focuses on a piece of text studied intensively over time. Children are taught not only how to read 'what words say' but what they mean and the intentions the authors have when they write the way they do.

Teachers use books that are appropriate for the age group of the students and as such texts are taught to students that are at the level that teachers want students to reach. These texts may be four or even five years above the students' individual achievement level. In this way a remedy can be provided as quickly as possible to the limited progress of students. Therefore, these students can develop more complex skills and catch up with their more advanced peers.

This idea is based upon the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and the work of the theorist Vygotsky whereby a student is capable of a higher level of learning when assisted by someone who is sufficiently experienced in the task (Gray 2007, p.20). AL pedagogy takes advantage of this ZPD concept and further extends the distance between the learner's actual level of development and potential level of development. Students who would otherwise not be able to read the text independently can, with teacher support, build a deep literate understanding of the text.

The concept of scaffolding, (Bruner 1986) follows on as a process whereby, the teacher lends their consciousness to the student so that the teacher and students can together construct common understanding or intersubjectivity about a literate interpretation of the meaning of a text. Students would not be able to read the text independently, but with teacher support can build up a deep literate understanding of the text. Students do not have to guess what the teacher is thinking, but can answer questions correctly building success and confidence. The student becomes the literate reader (Cowey 2005 pp. 8-10).

In their paper about the project at Amata School, Gray and Cowey provide a clear synopsis of the theory of scaffolding within AL.

> Scaffolding' in the context of this SRP program involves teachers in ways of interacting with children which are significantly different from those which are currently employed in either progressivist child centred (eg. Whole Language) or didactic (eg. traditional teacher directed or basic skills oriented) approaches. In scaffolding interactions teachers manage learning engagement initially through modelling and providing information to learners rather than asking learners to discover' or explore using their own learning resources. However, the developing interaction process in the classroom is a highly dynamic one and the roles of teacher and learners shift as interaction progresses over time until the learners can function by themselves without teacher help (2001 p. 2).

Thus, as the interaction between teacher and learner progresses the learner increasingly becomes an active-controller of the learning process (NALP 2006 p. 3).

The principles underpinning the theory of AL are integral to the design and structure of the teaching sequence. The teaching sequence proposed by the AL designers is different to those commonly utilized in mainstream teaching practices (Walsh and Barnett 2005 p. 14). The text is used as a resource for a thorough literate orientation of the passage under consideration and then spelling and writing as the teacher moves through the carefully designed AL sequence.

Developers highlight that a fundamental feature of the AL literacy teaching sequence is the routines or teaching cycle. This teaching cycle is recursive and encompasses a

group of literacy teaching practices that are taught each day for a period of 60-90 minutes (Cowey 2007). The NALP website explains that the teaching sequence is not a 'magic bullet' but provides an excellent structure to accelerate the literacy of students who are marginalized and who are struggling with literacy (NALP 2006 p.1).

3. In teachers' Hands Project:
Effective literacy teaching practices in the early years of Schooling

The In Teachers' Hands project, (Louden et al 2005), is an extensive and important study that investigated the link between children's growth in English literacy in the early years of schooling and their teachers' classroom teaching practices

The Project developed, from the literature, the Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS), that identifies the practices of effective teachers and groups 33 indicators into six dimensions (Louden et al., 2005 pp. 7-32).

The research conducted by Louden et al (2005) focused on identifying the teaching practices that lead to improved literacy outcomes for children in the early years of schooling (effective early years teaching). The review of the literature for this study focused on effective teaching, literacy teaching and learning and effective teaching of literacy, especially early literacy. Using the synthesized findings from the review of the literature a classroom literacy observation schedule was developed to observe effective teachers of early literacy. The schedule had two axes: the teaching activity

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axis and the teaching practice axis. 17 common teaching activities (e.g. shared reading and modelled writing) were listed.

> Our reasoning was that, in view of the large range of literature directed at teachers on how to carry out particular activities, which assumes that these activities are important elements of teachers' tool boxes', we should investigate whether the use of these activities varied according to teacher effectiveness (2005, p. 177).

The practice axis listed 33 teaching practices which were organized into six dimensions. These practices were observable teacher behaviours or behavours of children which were a proxy. The classroom observation schedule was found to be empirically appropriate. Raters observed recorded episodes of literacy teaching (observational frame) and allocated one score point for each of the teaching practices observed. It was hypothesized that the most effective teachers would be those who demonstrated most practices but there could be some trade offs so this allowed for those trade offs (Louden et al. 2005, p. 36). See Table 1 for the dimensions and teaching practices.

The Louden et al study (2005) found, 'the type of literacy teaching activity used by the teachers varied only slightly according to teacher effectiveness. Generally, the same few activities were widely used by all teachers regardless of their effectiveness' (Louden, et al. pp .4-5). However, the observation schedule indicated varied teacher effectiveness:

Generally speaking, the more effective and effective teachers consistently demonstrated literacy teaching practices from all six dimensions of the schedule. The less effective teachers demonstrated a limited number of literacy teaching practices that were also spread across the six dimensions of the Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule. (Louden et al 2005, pp. 4-5)

Table 1   Teaching practices of Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS) by Dimension

Participation Teacher's organisation and motivation of children's
classroom literacy learning, characterised by attention,
engagement, stimulation, pleasure and consistency

Knowledge Teacher's application of her knowledge of literacy to teach
significant literacy concepts and skills, characterised by use
of the classroom literacy environment, purpose,
explanations, modelling and metalanguage

Orchestration Teacher's management or orchestration of the literacy
classroom, characterised by awareness, structure, flexibility,
pace and transition

Support Teacher's support for children's literacy learning,
characterised by assessment, scaffolding, feedback,
responsiveness, explicitness at the word and text levels and
persistence

Differentiation Teacher's differentiation of literacy tasks and instruction,
characterised by challenge, individualisation, inclusion,
variation and connection

Respect Teacher's respect for children and evidence of the children's
respect for her and their classmates, characterised by
warmth, rapport, credibility, citizenship and independence

4. *Accelerated Literacy and the Classroom Observation Literacy Schedule-*
   How do they fit together?

An examination of the six broad dimensions and 33 literacy teaching practices of the CLOS (Table 1), reveals to those less familiar with AL pedagogy that AL dovetails readily within the CLOS. It appears as if all the elements of AL could be found somewhere in the CLOS. But, on further reflection the differences are profound. The dimensions of *knowledge*, *support* and *differentiation* are fundamentally different and then directly influence the dimensions of *participation*, *orchestration* and *respect*.

As will be highlighted in the explanations that follow, these differences explain why AL is often described as a radical pedagogy. Indeed, the pedagogy must be radically different to accelerate the literacy learning of marginalized children who are so far behind in literacy learning. Each dimension from the CLOS is discussed.

Support Dimension with an Emphasis on Scaffolding

The *support* dimension emphasises practices that promote the teacher's support for children's literacy learning. Scaffolding is certainly mentioned in the CLOS *support* dimension but AL demands that scaffolding underpins the teaching and learning sequence.

Gray and Cowey emphasize, 2005, p.3, that the majority of marginalized indigenous children present with profound literacy difficulties that place them many years behind their peers and also because of entrenched failure have developed dysfunctional learning strategies which further impedes their progress. These AL program developers further explain that these children have been considered 'unreachable' by other conventional literacy programs, but AL can change unproductive strategies to productive strategies in a short period of time and can also increase greatly the complexity of the reading texts with which students can engage.

AL aims to bridge the gap between these marginalized children and their more advanced peers as quickly as possible. Therefore, the program works towards these students developing more complex skills very rapidly. To achieve this the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), is also used as a strategy for accessing academic literate discourse within the teaching sequence, as this enables students to be supported to read age appropriate texts which may otherwise be beyond their reach[1].

Anecdotally, AL experts suggest that there are several interpretations of the ZPD. One is where the ZPD is just beyond a student's current development (or what students can already do or already know), which means that the more experienced other gently leads the student in small, gradual steps. This would fit in well with child centred views of learning as each student's learning could be 'scaffolded', based on their individual needs and moved on in their learning from the known to the unknown. This would be the aligned more readily with the position taken in the CLOS.

Another view is that a student's ZPD can be huge, and that all students in a class (of similar age but with a vast range of abilities) can be 'scaffolded' to achieve the same learning goals. As the aim of AL is to accelerate the literacy of marginalized students, (Gray n.d p. 3), AL theories are philosophically aligned with this interpretation of ZPD. Hence, in AL the focus is on whole class teaching and the use of age appropriate texts that may be four or five levels above that which the students could independently read. AL then, with such a large ZPD and therefore a wide chasm into the unknown, cannot be described as a child centred approach. Nor can it be coined a teacher centred approach. Indeed, AL can be described as a social constructivist approach whereby students and adults together build common knowledge as the progress through the recursive teaching sequence. Gray and Cowey assert, 'Through this repetition and integration of text content across reading, spelling and writing the

program builds progressively deeper understandings and distributes these understandings across the whole class as commonly held knowledge '(p.2).

The task of the AL teacher then is to scaffold students across this large ZPD. Scaffolding is one of the teaching practices contained in the *support* dimension in CLOS but it does not carry as much significance in the CLOS as it does in AL. The research team for the In Teachers' Hands Project validate that they embraced as many teaching practices as they could that indicated effective practice 'In choosing the dimensions and associated teaching practices we took an agnostic approach in that we tried to include as many research findings as possible' (Louden et al 2005 p.187). In fact, scaffolding was only one of a number of practices identified as significant and was not represented as more important than any other practice. In AL, scaffolding is *vital* to the methodology.

Figure 1 displays this diagrammatically. The goal of AL is for the student to engage in academic / literate discourse. The theory of ZPD and the AL teaching and learning sequence are strategies that are used to 'access the academic / literate discourse' (Gray n.d., p. 5). The arrows in the diagram demonstrate how the scaffolding framework underpins the AL teaching and learning sequence and the strategy of using the theory of ZPD as a way to access academic / literate discourse (Gray n.d p. 5)

Figure 1   **Claire Bartlett, 2007**
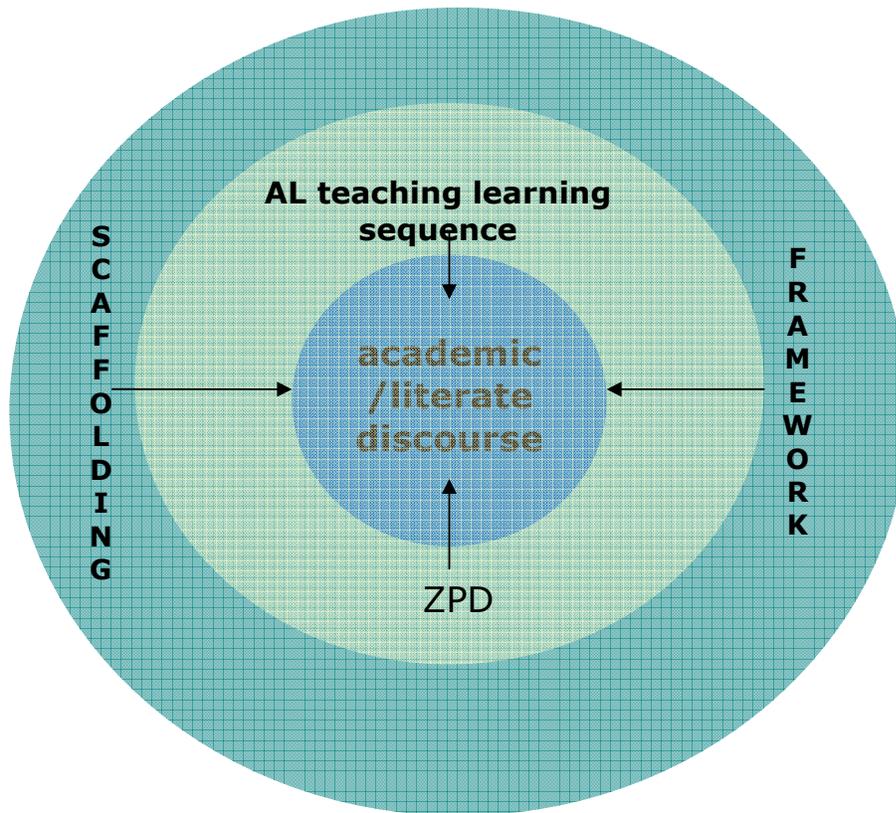
Knowledge Dimension

The knowledge dimension in the CLOS refers to the teacher using knowledge of literacy concepts to teach significant concepts and skills. AL places much greater emphasis on the teacher loaning to students their experience with reading as well as their understanding of the educational ground rules in working with a text. The teacher in AL expects that knowledge then will be jointly negotiated until a common understanding is developed (Cowey 2005, p. 7). Further, AL highlights the importance of highly explicit teaching. Indeed, Gray reports that the 'secret weapon' to being effective in the classroom with indigenous students is the extent to which teachers can make explicit both the intentionalities of the text and the implicit intentionalities in the negotiation of teaching and learning (2007 p.12).

Indeed, neither the CLOS nor AL expound the merits of either a phonics or a whole language approach over the other .The CLOS includes practices that advocate explaining literacy concepts at a letter and word level as well as a whole text level (Louden et al 2005, 187), AL places much greater emphasis upon the essential nature of explicitness in teaching at both these levels.

Differentiation Dimension

Further, AL differs from the CLOS differentiation dimension. The differentiation dimension in CLOS refers to teacher's differentiation of literacy tasks and instruction.

Students are not divided into small groups for learning, but are always taught as a whole group and the practice of cognitively challenging children is certainly implicit in the pedagogy of AL, but children are challenged within the larger group to move beyond literal interpretation and construction of text to more cognitively demanding interpretations, explanations and justifications. It is carried out through the process of scaffolding in an inclusive way whereby all students, feel successful and competent at learning at all times as they gain more and more control over their learning through the process of handover. A carefully designed questioning strategy is utilized so that children are 'cued in' and can answer questions with confidence. Students do not have to guess what the teacher is thinking, but can answer questions successfully, which in turn builds their confidence and literacy success. Shared knowledge is created as the teacher broadcasts student's answers clearly to the whole group (Gray 2007, pp 30-31). All students take part in the same systematic teaching and learning sequence that is built around predictable patterns of recurring routines unique to AL. This also relates back to the very large ZPD that can be inclusive of the abilities of the whole class.

The AL pedagogy then, differs substantially from the CLOS in the dimensions of support, knowledge and differentiation. These are crucial areas for AL pedagogy as the dimensions encompass the key principals of the pedagogy.

If the AL teaching practices are being effectively put into place then the CLOS dimensions of participation, orchestration and respect will also fall into place.

Orchestration Dimension

The CLOS dimension of *orchestration* indicates the teacher's management or orchestration of the classroom. The systematic teaching and learning sequence that is built around predictable patterns of recurring routines make it easier for the AL teacher to organize literacy learning. The AL teachers can structure transitions and lesson pace in ways that give a clear and different meaning to the orchestration dimension. Familiarity of routines can also reduce cognitive overload for children leaving more head space for immersion and thus participation in the literacy task. This is much more specific than the CLOS indicates.

Participation and Respect Dimension

Within the CLOS the dimensions of *participation* and *respect* and the respective practices are of high import. *Participation* refers to the organisation and motivation of children's classroom literacy learning. *Respect* means the teacher's respect for children and the evidence of the children's respect for the teacher and their classmates. Proponents of AL would argue that these practices and behaviours follow readily if the teacher is implementing the specific AL teaching and learning sequence and utilizes the strategy of scaffolding to the strategy with the theory of ZPD as a way to access academic / literate discourse. Children's focus and rapport with the teacher remains high because cognitive overload is avoided and predictability of the story and

lesson structure is emphasized. If teachers are successfully engaging the AL methodological strategies within the *support, knowledge* and *differentiation* dimensions then it is highly likely they will also be effective in the *participation* and *respect* dimensions.

Students involved in AL are more likely to have a high level of participation.
As this cognitive overload is avoided and children's engagement and pleasure in the lesson increases, confidence continues to develop through the recursive sequence. A culture of pleasure and satisfaction in learning develops.

Similarly, *respect* for others is integral within the AL principals that emphasize inclusivity in teaching and learning, as well as competence and confidence building.

The teaching and learning strategies as described in the CLOS are generic and could be used with any literacy teaching methodology. They are based on a thorough literature review of early literacy development and effective teaching and researchers included as many research findings into the CLOS as possible. AL, on the other hand, is a very specific literacy methodology whereby the activities incorporated within the teaching and learning sequence must be carefully implemented. The differences described above highlight that AL cannot simply be made to fit within the CLOS.

5. *Observation Instrument Design*

The challenge for researchers, as the evaluators of the NALP, was to design an instrument that could measure how well AL was being taught in classrooms. At the beginning of the project researchers were presented with the Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS) developed in the In Teachers' Hands project, (Louden et al 2005),. Researchers believed that the CLOS, would provide us with a tool that would capture AL practices if suitably adapted. Surely, researchers speculated, they could fit AL into this Schedule! As this schedule was empirically appropriate and the findings of the In Teacher's Hand Study (Louden et al 2005) reflected effective literacy teaching practices the researchers determined that these could be modified to reflect AL teaching sequence strategies.

Extensive consultation with AL key stakeholders, the AL program developer and experts from all jurisdictions and AL DEET team occurred and these consultations resulted in more than ten different versions of the adapted Classroom Literacy Schedule until one was decided upon to test using videos of AL teaching.

During this period of time researches were also developing an increasingly deeper understanding of the AL methodology and were discovering, as described in the

previous section of this paper that AL was based upon a very different pedagogy and therefore could not be made to fit within the CLOS. They were also discovering that by adapting the CLOS instrument it lost its integrity. This became clearer and clearer to researchers and when this observation instrument was tested prior to the pre-pilot moderation, using videos of AL teaching, the researchers determined that that teaching practices outlined in the CLOS model and the AL teaching sequence strategies needed to be separated.

In addition, researchers discovered that incorporating the AL teaching sequence strategies with the indicators of effective teaching practice in the CLOS did not allow them to clearly distinguish if the teaching practice was a generic effective practice as described in the CLOS or if it was effective AL teaching practice, as described in the AL teaching sequence strategies.

Further, researchers hypothesised that effective AL teachers are also effective teachers and would therefore expect to observe Accelerated Literacy teachers demonstrating effective implementation of the AL Teaching Sequence as well as effective teaching practices as outlined in the CLOS. On the other hand, it was hypothesised that teachers who demonstrated effective teaching practices according to the CLOS may not be using the AL teaching sequence strategies effectively, or at all. Therefore, the researchers needed an observation instruments that would enable them to distinguish between the generic effective teaching practices outlined in the CLOS and the specific AL teaching sequence strategies.

Finally, the researchers decided that two separate observation instruments were needed: one that would enable them to determine how effectively teachers implemented the Accelerated Literacy teaching sequence as well as one that enabled them to measure frequency of effective literacy teaching practices that could be present in any classroom, regardless of methodology. The first observation instrument is the Accelerated Literacy Sequence Strategies Observation Record (ALSSOR). This indicates Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies that would be expected to be observed at each stage of the teaching sequence and throughout the teaching sequence. The second observation instrument is the Classroom Observation Record used for the In Teacher's Hands study (Louden et al. 2005). For the purposes of this study the rating scale has been amended and the instrument has been renamed the Teaching Practices Observation Record (TPOR).

A sample section of these observation instruments, the ALSSOR and the TPOR follow in Tables 2 and 3

Table 2
A Sample Section of the ALSSOR

Example of observation instrument

nalp
National Accelerated Literacy Program
www.nalp.edu.au

Low Order Literate Orientation (focus on language and content)			
• Did the teacher clearly explain the lesson purpose or lesson goal?	0	1	2
• Did the teacher clearly explain the learning goal for low order?	0	1	2

High Order Literate Orientation (focus on wording of the text)			
• Did the teacher ensure all students could see the book / text?	0	1	2
• Did the teacher examine the wording of the text to demonstrate the author's writing techniques?	0	1	2

The National Accelerated Literacy Program is jointly funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training, and the Northern Territory Government through the Department of Employment, Education and Training, and supported by Charles Darwin University.

Table 3
A Sample Section of the TPOR

Example of observation instrument

nalp
National Accelerated Literacy Program
www.nalp.edu.au

Key: 0 = Never 1= Sometimes 2 = Always			1	2	3
Orchest-ration	Awareness	The teacher has a high level of awareness of literacy activities and participation by children			
	Structure	The environment is predictable and orderly			
	Flexibility	The teacher responds to learning opportunities that arise in the flow of literacy lessons			
	Pace	The teacher provides strong forward momentum in literacy lessons			

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Conclusions

As time progressed, researchers made significant strides forward in their understanding of the two literacy projects and the inter-relationship of these. Researchers had to articulate that which had not been articulated so far and that was the *ALness* of the classroom. Questions such as, what would an AL classroom look like, and what specific teacher behaviours would be expected at each stage of the teaching sequence had to be asked and answered. Although there was a fair amount of literature about the theory behind AL and papers and website referring to the stages of the teaching sequence, no-one had previously documented the specific strategies at each stage of the sequence and what each strategy might look like in practice. A set of empirically valid variables were developed in the ALSSOR that would enable researchers to systematically observe AL teaching. Researchers also developed very specific benchmarks to exemplify each strategy. Gray, after describing the teaching sequence, emphasises that AL is not conventional practice:

> The operation of NALP teaching sequence discussed above is, in fact, not an end in itself but rather an expression – a point of focus for the application of what is a comprehensive theory of teaching and learning. As a consequence of the dependence of the NALP teaching sequence upon theoretical understandings that differ significantly from those underlying current conventional practice, the pedagogy will be effective to the extent that teachers are able to achieve the application of these alternative fundamental principles in their day-to-day work with their students (2007 P. 33).

The In Teachers' Hands Project was the starting point from which researchers launched the process of designing an instrument to observe teacher AL practice. Whilst the process enabled researchers to tease out that which differentiated AL teaching practice from general teaching practice and was for this reason useful researchers discovered that a square peg could not be fitted into a round hole. In fact, while it is most useful to seek out and examine other research and instruments, it is really important to start with the end in mind and develop a new instrument that is based upon the theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy. The model needed to reflect the core AL practices and enable researchers to determine the extent to which teachers are practicing the AL methodology.

The In Teachers' Hands study found that effective teaching sits outside of specific pedagogy as effective teachers achieved good outcomes regardless of the pedagogy they used. The Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule observed teachers' pedagogical practices, not the pedagogy. The findings from the study suggest that although the effective teachers may have been operating with different pedagogies, they were all achieving high outcomes as they practiced 'good teaching'. Researchers are also observing effective teaching practices which are, in this case, enacted through AL activities. The In Teachers' Hands study and the CLOS provides us with a tool to determine the relationship between AL teaching and good teaching as is exemplified in the In Teachers' Hands study. For example, are effective AL teachers also effective teachers?

Thus, researchers developed two layers; to measure 'effective teaching' and also to measure AL sequence strategy implementation. The ALSSOR data will tell researchers if AL teachers implement AL strategies effectively and the TPOR will inform researchers if these same teachers practice effective teaching in general. If researchers only evaluate AL teaching strategies this may not provide us with enough information to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of AL as it is only one part of the picture

This has indeed been challenging process for researchers. However, the challenges experienced in determining the differences between AL and the In Teachers' Hands study is really a metaphor for truly comprehending the similarities and differences between AL and other teaching practices. An understanding of this will most importantly mean that key and complex questions relating to the implementation of AL can be fully answered.

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