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Suggested paper length: 3000-5000 words

**In the Zone : moving from discomfort to confidence
and improving literacy**

Abstract

This paper highlights the challenges and successes met by one urban primary school as it implemented: 'The National Accelerated Literacy Program – NALP'. This is a program that carries a new set of perspectives and fresh expectations in addressing the literacy needs of marginalised learners. Targeted primarily at marginalised Indigenous learners, NALP's extensive and effective educational scope reaches the mainstream class and beyond.

The first part of this paper briefly identifies key features of the program and describes progress made by a sub-set of four classes over a twelve month period. Data include pre and post reading assessment on unseen texts, surveys and interviews; with general reference to video observation and analysis of lessons. Based on the current assessment package, the data show a significant improvement of two years in reading level.

The second part examines issues that arose in the course of the first year as teachers engaged with an often dramatic change process. This continues to unfold as teachers open their classrooms to scrutiny and develop in confidence and competence, moving from discomfort and fear through to assurance and 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1994). This process is documented and described from teacher and student perspectives. A short video illustrates several of the children's perceptions.

One Urban School

Introduction

The focus of this paper is to describe our experience of the pedagogic change process during the first year of implementation of the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) into one urban primary school.

This paper outlines the key elements of the program; highlights the nature of Transformational (rather than Incremental) change; and provides an illustration of student outcomes and teacher development over a twelve month period. This being halfway through the two year implementation, it offers an informative 'snapshot' along the change continuum. Through analysis of student data, surveys, interviews and anecdotal comment we are starting to identify and explore some of the patterns of response at the forefront of pedagogic change. We hope to shed light on factors that will facilitate success at the systemic level with reference to change management theory and to demonstrate the effectiveness and resiliency of the Accelerated Literacy Program to transform the lives of the marginalised.

The Program

Accelerated Literacy (AL) is a research-based literacy program that includes the elements of:

- highly explicit teaching using the six stages of the AL Teaching Sequence
- the supportive notion of 'scaffolding' (Bruner 1983,1986)
- the notion of 'inclusivity' for marginalised students
- 'social constructivism', building common knowledge and working within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1978,1987)
- delivering access to 'academic literate discourse' (Gray 1998)
- 'intentionality' (Gray 1998), author intent, reader as text participant and 'critically autonomous' thinking
- a rigorous continuous assessment schedule to inform practice.

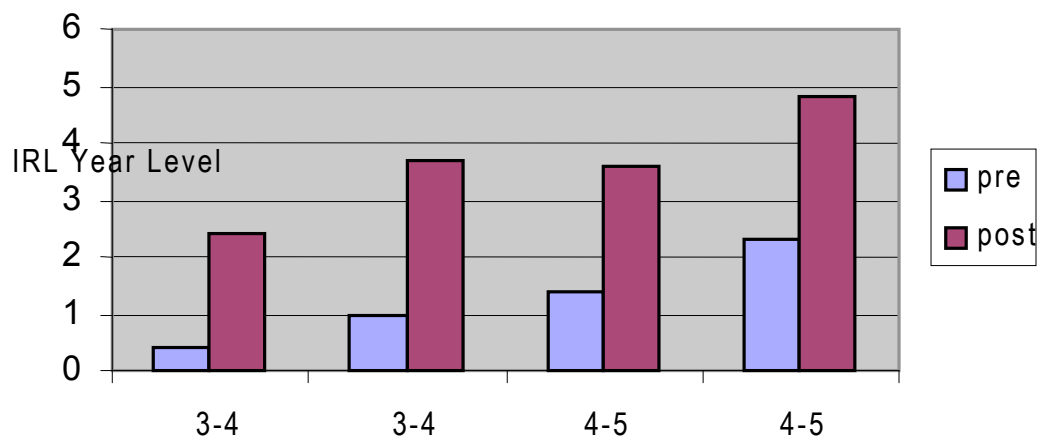
AL includes listening and speaking, reading (decoding and comprehension), and writing (including spelling); but for the purposes of this paper we will confine ourselves to the element of reading. 'Accelerated' refers to the increased rate of literacy acquisition. Recent nation-wide data shows average gains of 1.78, offering marginalised students their first authentic opportunity to 'catch-up' with their mainstream peers and compete on a level playing field.

Our results

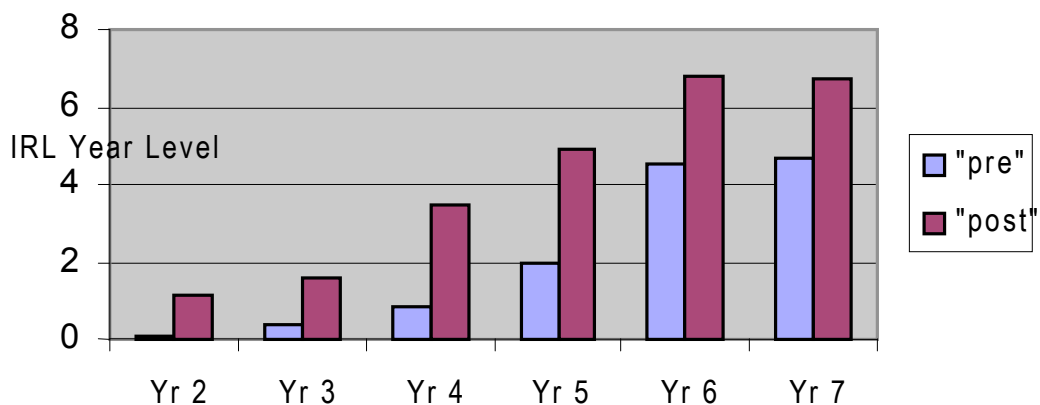
Table 1 below shows the **Individual Reading Levels (IRL's)** achieved by Target students in four middle primary classes at one urban primary school after 12 months of Accelerated Literacy (AL). Students become Target when identified and assessed as reading >18 months behind age. IRL's assess decoding; comprehension is assessed independently via the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) Test of Reading Comprehension (TORCH). All identified Targets are IRL assessed using the Accelerated Literacy Assessment Pack with detailed Observational Reading Records (ORR's). The gains represented in the table below show these students' abilities to read a selection of unseen benchmarked texts from the AL Assessment Pack at >90% accuracy after one full year in the program. 42% of these Target students reached benchmark for age within this first year. This is significant considering that these Target students had been failing to achieve literacy for the previous 2.5 – 4.5 years.

Year Level	Number of Target Students	Average gain in reading years	% Target Students reaching benchmark in first year
3 / 4 (a)	10	2.0	40%
3 / 4 (b)	10	2.7	30%
4 / 5 (a)	7	2.2	42%
4 / 5 (b)	7	2.5	57%

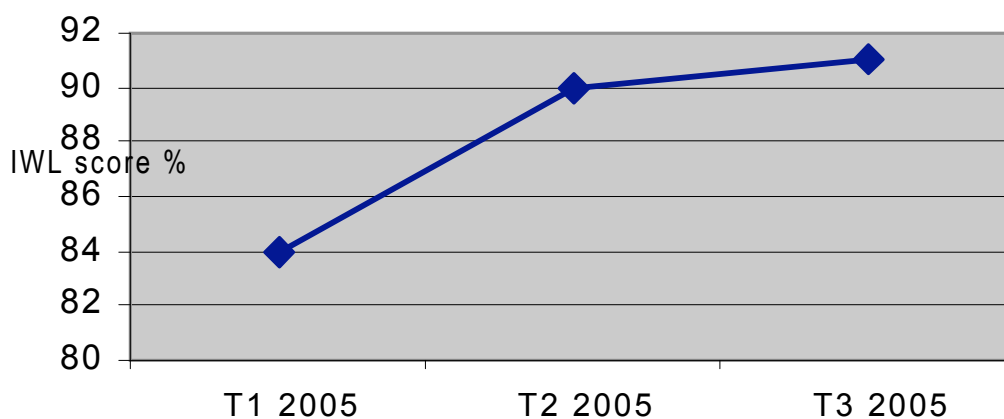
Graph 1 The four classes from Table 1 are shown separately with significant gains apparent in the right hand bar of each pair. The numbers on the x axis indicate the IRL benchmark level achieved:



Graph 2 below shows the IRL's of the Target students from these four classes distributed by year level within the wider cohort of Target students across the school. Out of 394 students, these Target students total 165. While the smallest gains can be seen at the lower end of the school, it is still significant that 5 out of the 6 year level groups achieved a minimum of 1.58 reading years over the first 12 months, with the largest gain being 2.82. The average achieved by the overall cohort was 1.98 years within 12 months. This cohort were on average >2 years below benchmark at the outset of program implementation. These results are even more significant when viewed in the context of a number of specific and unexpected challenges that were encountered during the first year of implementation.



Graph 3 below maps the second level of Accelerated Literacy assessment; the **Independent Working Level (IWL)**. It shows the steady improvement of IWL's for the 165 Target students over the first semester of the program. The IWL relates to the reading of taught (rather than unseen) texts and indicates that by the end of the second term, most Targets were reading the prescribed and extended passages from their taught texts at >90 accuracy. In our experience, it is common for new AL practitioners to underestimate the importance of this data; perceiving such mastery as natural in the face of competent teaching. What is actually happening is that many students are operating on and engaging successfully with an age-appropriate text for the first time in their lives. We maintain this is due, not merely to good teaching but, because of the highly supportive and sequential structure of the AL Teaching Sequence, the explicit teaching style and the notions of the AL questioning technique and handover. Our evidence for this lies in the consistently low literacy of these students prior to the implementation of AL.



To understand the importance of this thread of the data one must address the central premise underpinning the AL methodology: Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development'. This is the idea that students can achieve greater success when the learning is 'socially constructed' by the group. AL theorists (and experienced AL practitioners) believe that a skilful teacher who understands how to include, engage and target a range of abilities through the notion of scaffolding in AL will consistently lead students to rise to their full potential. A Target student's IWL therefore indicates that child's potential for success at that level. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is essentially the joint construction potential of each member within the group.

This differs widely from the approach of teaching to a conventional intervention point some small distance onward from the students' current position.

This collectively or socially constructed knowledge is managed with a strategy known as 'handover'. This is the idea that the knowledge held around the taught text moves from a position of monologic and predominant teacher control, to a place of student control. One of the key strategies used to encourage handover during the early stages of studying a new text is the **Preformulation, Question, Reconceptualisation** (PQR) method of questioning during key stages of the Teaching Sequence. This is opposed to the more typical 'Interlocution, Response, Feedback' (IRF) cycle. With an IRF question cycle, a question is asked 'cold', the student attempts a response and is given feedback. With a PQR question sequence, a question is prefaced with enough contextual and inferential cues to ensure that the majority of the class will be able to answer. In many cases, an AL teacher allows many students to offer similar answers to the same question to encourage less confident students to participate. In addition, more confident students are encouraged to share the 'thinking behind their thinking' so as to broadcast their process as well as their answer. The teacher follows each response with an extension or a reframing to consolidate the understanding. With an IRF question sequence, a student can be 'set up to fail'; whereas with a PQR question sequence, a student is 'set-up to succeed'. This underpins the fundamental belief that an AL student should never be excluded from the 'academic literate discourse'.

The Teaching Sequence

Overlaying the theory is the Teaching Sequence; a systematic structure of teaching that relies on each step providing the scaffold for the next. A well planned AL lesson will contain a lesson thread that is introduced by the teacher, explored by teacher and students and finally owned by the students. The six stages are briefly sketched below:

- Low Order Book Orientation (teacher models a **literate interpretation** of the text)
- Reading (teacher **models fluent** reading)
- High Order Book Orientation (using text marking to systematically attend to the **actual wording** of a passage from the **reader's perspective** to explore structure, content, links and cues, interpretations and inferences)
- Transformations (identifying, isolating and manipulating / removing pieces of cut text from a **writer's perspective** to explore beyond the meaning to the **author's purpose** / stance, and the impact of various language choices such as word choice and word order)
- Spelling (with a shift away from phonetic processing and an emphasis on **visual patterns** and **useful morphologic 'chunks'**)
- Writing (through stages of **jointly reconstructed** and **scaffolded to independent**)

Where the first four stages are primarily concerned with deconstruction; the final two can be seen in terms of reconstruction.

In our experience as AL Coordinators, it often takes two years before teachers are completely confident with the Teaching Sequence. Most new practitioners find the early and highly intensive stages of planning and teaching quite overwhelming. After one term in the program, one teacher volunteered the following: 'I'm exhausted by it. It's like being in the woods with twists and turns and millions of challenging obstacles. First there's the million eyes of Low Order, then we go through the misty swamp of High Order, into the cave of Transformations, we swim through the pool-of-icy-black-

water-spelling, climb into the claustrophobic tunnel of Joint Reconstructed Writing before finally confronting the dragon.'

Once teachers have reached a level of comfort with the basic mechanics of a lesson, we have found that some are ready to embrace the theory of functional grammar as developed by Halliday (Halliday 1994). These teachers are taught to use the textual, interpersonal and experiential lenses to analyse their own texts and therefore feel more ownership of the planning process. These lenses, while strongly overlapping, can be seen at a very simple level to loosely correspond with the stages of the Teaching Sequence. The interpersonal elements of a narrative (e.g. how a character feels at the first point of complication, and many of the hidden inferences available to a 'literate' person) are often unpacked during the Low Order Book Orientation; the more specific textual elements of a narrative (e.g. time markers, descriptors etc) can be easily explored during the High Order Book Orientation, and the experiential elements of a narrative (e.g. the effect on the reader of various language choices with regard to author's stance / realisation of theme etc) is actively experienced by students during the Transformation part of the Teaching Sequence.

Data collection

With beginnings in Alice Springs at Traeger Park in 1980, and an intensive research phase at The University of Canberra, data collection is integral to AL. The following illustrates the continuous formative and summative assessment schedule for reading implemented at this urban school during 2005:

Timeframe	Students	Summative Assessment	Methodology
Term1 05	All	Identified as Target / Non-Target	IRL assessment applied where student identified as 1.5 or + years behind mainstream and on request
Term 1 05	Target	Initial : Independent Reading Level (IRL)	Video taped reading of unseen texts (from Levelled Assessment Pack)
Term2 05	All	Comprehension	Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) 'Torch Test'
Term 4 05	Target	For transfer : Independent Reading Level (IRL)	Video taped reading of unseen texts (from Levelled Assessment Pack)
Term2 06	All	Comprehension	Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) 'Torch Test'
Term 4 06	Target	Initial : Independent Reading Level (IRL)	Video taped reading of unseen texts (from Levelled Assessment Pack)
Timeframe	Students	Formative Assessment	Methodology
Fortnightly each term	All	Individual Working Level (IWL)	Observational reading records : selected passages from taught texts

Teacher Development and Pedagogic Change

Running parallel to the successful reading outcomes achieved by the students (and one of the most interesting elements of our research), have been the areas of teacher development and pedagogic change. The following illustrates the intensive nature of support provided by the AL program:

Nature of Support	Provided by	Frequency
Professional Development Packs 1, 2, 3	NALP team	5 days over 18 months
Planning sessions with individual and pairs of teachers	AL Co-ordinator	1 hour per week per teacher / pair
Team teaching / demonstration lessons	AL Co-ordinator / school Co-ordinator	As required
Fast track training for two school Co-ordinators	AL Co-ordinator	2 days per week in early stages, reduced as ready
Planning sessions for teaching	school Co-ordinators as they gain confidence	1 hour per week per teacher / pair
Collaborative planning with and observation of all teachers demonstrate developing mastery in delivering a 90 minute AL lesson using the Teaching Sequence. (Excluding the first observation, these are video taped to enable authentic and constructive feedback and self assessment.)	AL Co-ordinator	Once each term

The resilience of AL

In 2005 AL moved into 'expansion' phase (following the initial two-year pilot). As 6 pilot schools continued, 20 commenced and 74 were planned, Coordinators found themselves at the forefront of major systemic pedagogic change. The shift towards expansion was intense as Coordinators delivered layers of professional development to urban and remote bush community schools alike. At the urban primary this process was exacerbated by three changes in management, three changes in school-based coordinators and a significant proportion of teaching staff who (for a variety of practical and personal reasons) were reluctant to embrace major (transformational) change in relation to their practice.

The Principal was deeply committed to the program; while the staff demonstrated varying levels of interest. According to teacher surveys collected in December 2005, those initial expectations by teachers included views such as: 'We needed a consistent approach – whether AL was the answer or not, I didn't know. I guess I was doubtful...', 'we needed an explicit approach to the teaching of spelling and comprehension...', 'we needed a whole school approach to literacy...', 'I was worried about the repetition, staying on one text for so long...', 'I could see the benefits of breaking-up a text...', 'I wanted a structure to follow...', and 'I had no reason to believe that AL would be good for our school'.

Despite their wavering interest levels in the program we believe that this was a staff with commitment to the needs of their school who trusted the direction of their Principal.

The first professional development session was delivered at the end of a school year to tired and overloaded teachers; using, for this urban context, a pack designed for a remote setting. It included footage of shy Indigenous students in an isolated community school. ESL students with low oral literacy offering limited teacher / student dialogue. Few could read at all. They tackled the spelling of: 'first' and 'day'. Teachers assumed this was a specialist ESL / remedial program and were concerned that literate students would not be catered for. E.g.: 'I was skeptical because the in-service looked at Indigenous children. I wondered if it was centred on ESL and I was worried about the high kids.'

One week later the initiating Principal took on a promotional position; leaving behind a management team who had limited ownership of the program.

Arriving for scheduled planning at the beginning of 2005, most teachers had not yet read the AL Teaching Notes. There was also an administrative delay with resource development; many of the Teaching Notes were either unfinished or in early draft form. Some teachers promised to start reading, others maintained there was not enough time. The school appointed Co-ordinator transferred to another program and some of the teaching staff said they would consider transferring to another school if the program remained. Some did.

As AL Co-ordinators, we offered extra workshops but these were declined. Some teachers regularly avoided planning sessions. We attributed the general (though not total) disinterest to a lack of understanding around the fundamental theory of the program, (i.e. Vygotsky's theory of the 'Zone of Proximal Development'). Twelve months into the program, surveyed responses indicate that although understandings have developed, this was probably correct at the time: 'I did this at Canberra Uni and I still don't get it...', 'I don't know...', 'Where the students are at, where they can get to, it's the layers to get there...', 'Not much. Maybe that even though kids are at point A, stretch them to point D and they should get there?...', 'Developing children's abilities within the boundaries of what's acceptable. Lifting them to that acceptable level when many are a lot lower...'

At the end of first term a third (and this time permanent) Principal was appointed; in second term a new Assistant Principal. The school then lost a further two school based AL Co-ordinators.

These challenges slowed our initial progress and caused us to assess:

- the extent to which many teachers were disempowered by the notion of 'institutionalised failure' for the marginalised
- the extent of the 'Transformational' change demanded
- the potential power of (and our lack of understanding around) our role as Change Agents.

Overcoming Institutionalised Failure through the notion of Discourse

Our experiences during the pilot phase had prepared us for high levels of teacher discomfort with video-taped lesson observations but we were not prepared for tacitly held notions of 'institutionalised failure' for marginalised learners. That is, some teachers deeply believed that no matter which program was implemented; some children would never reach benchmark. Malin (Malin 1989) looks extensively at the mechanisms of interpretation in Aboriginal classrooms. Her research likewise

suggests that teacher expectations differ widely and further describes that 'differences in expectations' 'marginalise Aboriginal children'. Gray (Gray 1998) further identifies 'lack of confidence, instances of misunderstanding, and under-estimating the Indigenous learner's capacity in a classroom to be deeply embedded in a discourse around Aboriginal Education'. In our urban primary, this impacted daily in classrooms as many teachers insisted on 'streaming' their classes (against the premise of the ZPD and social constructivism) as they were unable to contain the extremes of their students' abilities within the discourse of the lesson. Clearly, not all teachers held this notion and we can report that by mid 2006 that this had begun to change in many classrooms.

Although AL accelerates learning for the mainstream, gifted and marginalised student; our concentrated and documented focus on Targets meant that teachers were accountable for these students' failure or success, bringing these underlying assumptions into full view. We believe it is this notion that causes one of the elements of discomfort around our program. No longer can excuses like: 'They don't come to school', 'They never listen', 'They don't want to learn' or the often heard 'The problem is too big'; because our data shows that as long as a student attends for 60% with a teacher who has engaged with the program; gains will be made within 12-18 months. So without the wall of expected failure; one must shift one's thinking to accommodate the new belief that 'All students are capable of learning to read'.

Peter Gale (Gale 1996) writes with reference to Indigenous perspectives that: 'power operates through discourse and the relationship between power and knowledge is central to social change'. This is consistent with the AL view of discourse and inconsistent with a belief that excludes any learner (be they marginalised by socio-economic or socio-cultural factors) from accessing that power.

Foucault (Gale 1996) says that 'all knowledge, or "truth", is socially and historically located'. Foucault's work emphasises the central concepts of 'power-knowledge' and 'discourse'. While Foucault saw discourse as a body of knowledge, the AL methodology has developed this further to include the notion of 'discourse' as 'Transformational'. Assuming that ESL learning for the non-Indigenous student is 'additive' in that they already have a written system of language on which to attach the new language, AL asserts that Indigenous learning (as being drawn from an oral culture) must be 'Transformational'. The teacher, in placing themselves into the mind of such a learner, must confront the question: 'What am I on about and why do I want this information anyway?' It takes into account what Vygotsky emphasised as the enabling potential of 'mediated action' between an 'agent' and the 'cultural tool' of language; the power of language to shape human thinking through 'Transformational discourse'.

Recently, one tutor at the school commented that he used to be skeptical about AL. He then stated: 'I just found that between first and second term, the reading levels just jumped big time – they just clicked. I've seen a 4 year old who could identify the words by touch or one-to-one, which is amazing for a child who can barely sit still.'

At the end of 2005, one teacher reported a Year 6 child who was 'wagging, failing, bothering kids, getting into trouble so as to get out of work and not reading at all'. He now reports this child is reading his taught text at 100% accuracy and has voluntarily read his latest taught text, 'Island of the Blue Dolphins', to his brothers at home. Certainly for this child, AL has made a powerful difference.

Overcoming the discomfort of Transformational Change

Visiting educational consultants have routinely offered credibility as practitioners with educational currency and a way forward for teachers to develop and hone their practice. Teachers have adopted elements and adapted ideas as they've chosen. But at best, these offer an 'Incremental Change'. In our experience, AL is difficult to grasp

because it is a Transformational rather than an Incremental change. Early efforts to learn the sequence are often thwarted by a return to established and often ritualised behaviour patterns. This is supported by research on Conceptual Mediation CM (Lyndon 1997) revealing that old entrenched attitudes, beliefs, misunderstandings, work practices and routines are very difficult to break. The theoretical background of CM states that 'accelerated forgetting' of new material occurs if it conflicts with pre-existing knowledge. Errors and misconceptions are therefore retained even in light of rational argument.

AL requires Transformational change. In return, AL offers time intensive support. In accepting this support, schools are responsible for ensuring that teachers agree to open their classrooms and continually strive to develop their practice. Rather than expecting teachers to expand and hone their existing repertoire of skills, we ask teachers to confront their current practice as a whole, to adopt a new and very different practice as a whole and to accept that their mastery of this new practice will be closely monitored. Teachers surveyed in December 2005 were unanimous in their response that they had never experienced a program that demanded they demonstrate their mastery to this degree. Asked to describe their initial feelings about this level of evaluation, they responded with: 'Not particularly comfortable', 'Quite frightened, nervous, insecure, the whole "Am I going to be good enough thing" ', 'Apprehensive', 'A bit worried when it first happened', 'Fine' (with strong negative head shake), 'Worried throughout the process', 'Nervous, I hate being in a position to fail'.

What we discovered was that the experience of confronting current practice via the video tape was the first major motivational catalyst for many teachers to consciously apply themselves to strive for mastery. This is consistent with Lyndon's (Old Way New Way) Conceptual Mediation as using error as a start point for change.

We maintain that the experience of building a relationship of trust through watching one's own performance with a mentor trained in constructive analysis is an extremely powerful method of affecting a revolutionary or 'Transformational' change.

Factoring in our uneasy beginnings and context specific challenges, teachers at the school were understandably wary about being observed. After many planning sessions and on completion of the first round of (non video-taped) observations, there was a perceived and articulated increase in relaxation and trust. Teachers began to see our purpose as teacher development; not teacher critique. They responded positively to our method (an intricate analysis of both their strengths and a small number of identified growth points) and many openly identified as being an 'apprentice' to the AL methodology. The subsequent report-back to the Principal focused on the progress of the majority of the teachers and this was followed by a critical but timely meeting between our management team and the school management. Pressure was eased with all of these negotiations. In hindsight, this was a way of articulating and aligning our belief systems (the 'underlying basic assumptions' on both sides, Schein 1992) and crucial to future progress.

The following term brought with it the second round of observations and the terror of the camera. Many teachers expressed strong opposition to the idea of being filmed but the new Principal offered her committed support. In response to the question, how did you feel prior to the first video taped lesson observation, we were told: 'I had resigned myself to the idea that it would be a disaster and a waste of time...', 'I thought far too much about it. I over planned. We (with team-teacher) both did, we rehearsed each other...', 'High anxiety. I rehearsed...', 'A reasonable level of anxiety...', 'Scared, I hate being in a position to fail and having people watch me in my room...'.

For efficiency, we utilized four members of our team for an intensive week of planning, observation and feedback for all staff; and trust continued to be built, as is evidenced by the following responses gathered afterwards: 'Really positive about starting to succeed. It made me want to go my own way. I had a lot more clarity around what we were looking for...', 'Good. I felt I'd done well in myself and the Coordinators thought so too. Also I am very open to constructive criticism...', 'Good. Great. Because it was over. I watched myself and saw that I spoke too quickly...', 'I sat in a corner and cried. Now I can take a step back and not feel so bad. Initially I felt as though I was a failure as a teacher...', 'Really good – able to watch myself and see my good / bad points and learn from them...'

The pitfalls and power of Change Agents

At the outset, we had failed to grasp the essential difference between being a 'literacy educator' and being a 'pedagogic change agent'. As a team, we responded with authentic discussion to develop a strategic plan. One of the outcomes was team participation in the Change Management element of Ross Rynehart's (Change Australia Pty Ltd) 'Emerging Leaders Program' (ELP).

This was highly significant. Helping us to clarify and redefine our roles, to broaden our suite of tools and to begin to achieve success. We were exposed to a range of theories that some of us immediately saw as having application to our work:

- Schein's theories on organisational culture
- Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow'
- Wheatley's concept of 'interdependent webs of relationships' and 'preach to the choir'
- Kotter's work on leadership and change
- Several related ideas about 'complexity' theory

As literacy educators, we had at times floundered in obstacles and suffered losses in momentum; however as Change Agents, our process became energised and focused. We began to see the issues we were facing more clearly and committed ourselves to building Wheatley's (1999) 'webs of interdependent relationships'. Faced with the disempowerment of 'institutionalised failure' we adopted the mindset of Chris Sarra (and other transformational leaders) in refusing to accept that children were not capable of succeeding with literacy. We began to articulate this in lesson observations and noticed that teachers responded positively. In one video, the Coordinator pointed out a child who always sat outside the teacher's peripheral view. Next lesson, that teacher placed that child centre front and engaged him at several points within the lesson. A month later that same child received a minor eye injury and was offered the chance to go home. He said he'd rather stay at school until the end of AL.

In the initial stages, our progress often felt stilted and so we were impressed by Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow'. This is 'the quality of experience as a function of the relationship between challenges and skills'. High challenge and high skill results in 'flow'; a word encapsulating a feeling of engagement, motivation and success. When the levels of challenge and / or skill are mismatched or too low; feelings of apathy, worry, relaxation, boredom or anxiety can follow. Feelings of arousal and control indicate that the levels are close to perfect. We wanted our teachers to be operating in 'flow'.

Participants of Ross Rynehart's ELP program further learn about 'flow' within the context of 'Management Complexity' theory at the whole organisation level through the following 'Organisational Order and Complexity' diagram:

CHAOS

anarchy, 'anything goes', confusion, high levels of anxiety

—

—

COMPLEXITY

diversity, bounded instability, unpredictability, generative learning, 'flow'
experiences, creative responses

—

—

ORDER

uniformity, predictability, stability, boredom, habitual functioning

This is an emerging behavioural science that has its roots in the core disciplines of rational Newtonian science. According to Jonathan Rosenhead, it completely refutes orthodox strategic management by emphasising the importance of 'openness to accident, co-incidence and serendipity'. Strategy, it says, is the emerging result.

Many believe that the idea of seeking a stable equilibrium in an ultimately unknowable future is bound to lead to failure. Ralph Stacey, a key proponent of management complexity theory maintains that any manager that thinks they can strategically plan and control change for their organisation is suffering from 'dangerous delusions'. These theories concur with our experience in that we are working with people not programs. Change is not like fixing the broken parts of a machine, it is about the energy and possibility created by conducive relationships.

Schein's work on 'organisational culture' also showed us a 'fatal flaw' in our initial implementation process. One that we have since addressed but not before many Coordinator hours were lost in wasted productivity. There are various methods of documenting outcomes to ensure accountability in the implementation of a new program, but according to Schein's model of an organisational culture (Schein 1992), a pre-requisite for sustained and authentic change is to first change one's 'basic underlying assumptions'. In using this model to retrospectively examine the complex issue of teacher avoidance of / reluctance to attend planning sessions; we can see that we had addressed change at only the top and most superficial two levels, namely:

ARTEFACTS (visible organisational structures and processes) and

ESPOUSAL OF VALUES (mission statements, values statements, strategic plans)

All teachers were: using AL texts, transformation boards and transformation strips; conducting observational reading records; and attempting to work through the Teaching Sequence. There was extensive documentation for the program in terms of long and short term teacher programming, Literacy Plans, School Strategic Plans etc in place.

It was in failing to acknowledge the critical role of Schein's third level, the:

BASIC UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS (beliefs, thoughts, stories, myths, legends – the ultimate source of values and action),

that we had seriously misunderstood the scope of our business as 'Transformational Change' agents. This knowledge enabled us to consider existing values in relationship building, making more authentic pedagogic connections and better engaging in pedagogic debate. Without acknowledging the underlying values of a teacher's existing practice, one will only ever get 'accelerated forgetting' (Lyndon).

Kotter (from 'Leading Change') believes there are eight stages to effective Workplace Change Management Planning:

- establish a sense of urgency (when 75% of the management is honestly convinced that business as usual is no longer an acceptable plan)
- form a powerful guiding coalition (change begins with a few and spreads)
- create a vision (that appeals to customers and can relatively easily be communicated as a big picture in a five minute presentation)
- communicate that vision ('walking the talk' with deeds and actions not just words)
- empower others to act on the vision (carve out time, allocate funds, free up key people and remove obstacles)
- plan for and create short-term wins (to keep the sense of urgency high)
- consolidate improvements and keep the momentum for change moving (don't declare victory too soon)
- institutionalise the new approaches (change sticks when it becomes 'the way we do things around here').

Analysing our progress against these markers further shows why it took several terms before we felt a palpable change in the culture of the school as an AL organisation.

Theorists such as Meg Wheatley (1999) and Peter Senge (1999) also shed light on our process. In Wheatley's: 'Leadership and the New Science', she makes the potent analogy that change is often perceived as a 'feared enemy'. She tells the story of a geologist asked what he expected to find after a severe hurricane had battered a coastal community. He said he expected to find 'a new beach'. Wheatley has since wondered about this man's '[curiosity] about newness' and proposes that we learn to work 'with the forces of change', rather than trying to 'manage and control them'. Having drawn from the essential understandings of 'Complexity' theory, Wheatley maintains that it is common to see an organisation as being a 'broken machine'; leading us to try to 'replace the faulty part'. She cites that this technique has resulted in a striking 75% of change projects failing to yield their promised results. She suggests that we stop dealing with 'mass' and start working with 'energy'. Wheatley believes that people will change only if they believe that 'a new insight, a new idea, or a new form helps them become more of who they are'. She speaks of 'welcoming' different reactions and trying not to categorise people as either 'resistors or allies'. She believes that most people go into teaching for 'noble purposes' – wanting 'to make a difference in the lives of students and to advance human wisdom'. By having this conversation first, she says, we can 'discover one another as colleagues'. Only then would we be ready to 'talk about the technology'. After looking at how networks communicate around the world, she sees that 'preaching to the choir' is exactly the right thing to do. Helping those that already 'share certain beliefs and dreams to sing their song a little clearer, a little more confidently', she believes they will 'take that

song back to their networks'. We have discovered 'preach to the choir' to be the single most effective means of affecting Transformational change. Once we diverted our energy towards where it was wanted instead of where it was needed; the growth was noticeable. It generated its own energy, attracting more people to participate. Now in this second year, AL is being studied by some staff at the post-graduate level.

Senge makes a similar point (to 'preach to the choir') when he talks about the following three simultaneously occurring 'growth processes at work in generating profound change':

- R1 : 'because it matters' (personal results)
- R2 : 'because my colleagues take it seriously' (networks of committed people)
- R3 : 'because it works' (business results).

By the end of the first semester some improvement in results had begun. We can see that personal mastery (flow), the beginning of the 'choir' and the beginning of improved student outcomes (personal results) were all coming into play.

At this time (call it serendipity if you will), a popular teacher returned to the school. Blending talent and experience in teaching literacy with the Teaching Sequence of AL, this teacher discovered unexpected success in the explicit and analytical approach. At around the same time, another popular teacher (and founding member of the 'choir') began to see impressive results with previously low Target students.

These influences were profound. The general change in attitude across the school (although we still do not have 100% 'buy-in', we do have a tentative majority), yielded Wheatley's promised ripple effect as a 'dense network of interdependent relationships' began to flow on to the students; leading to the outstanding outcomes achieved in many of the classrooms.

The 'choir' were by now in a state of 'arousal', actively engaging with their own professional growth, articulating their own challenges and becoming excited about developing solutions to continuing obstacles. It was a time of intense 'flow' for us.

Asked how they felt teaching AL at the end of that first year, teachers responded: 'Excited...', 'Confident...', 'Sometimes exhausted knowing the long journey of the lesson. Most days I really look forward to it – pumping up a sentence, making it exciting, pulling it apart, highlighting things. I get exhausted because I know how much I have to put into it. If I stuff up in low order, the whole lesson drags because it won't flow...', 'I have a lot more enthusiasm and I'm much more confident. I know more and expect more of myself and want to deliver that lesson pretty damn well. At the beginning I thought I was doing OK but it was just a whitewash...', 'As you get more confident you can focus on the things that really excite you. Right now I'm developing a set of good examples of Joint Reconstructed Writing, Scaffolded Writing and Independent Writing to use with the staff...', 'So different. At first I didn't like AL and was very unsure of the whole thing. I felt fear, apprehension, nervousness, anxiety, panic, I just didn't get it. Now I'm excited and confident...'

The mid-way point

Gathering data at the end of 2005, we asked teachers to comment on changes in general teacher attitudes over the year. Responses were encouraging: 'Yes, they are learning, they are becoming more positive...', 'I think slightly better, they are not as negative. It's taken about two or three terms for them to come to terms with the process and to see the results from the testing...', 'Generally everyone's more positive...', 'Everyone's relaxed a bit more...', and 'There's a more positive attitude and a good quality of sharing – more teachers are going to planning sessions and are happier to receive input – they are less defensive and there's less of that "I already do that in my program"...'.

With reference to student attitudes, we were told: 'In AL there's more participation now, by that I mean a wider group of kids are participating. I think I am reaching more of their needs. There is definitely more risk-taking...', 'They enjoy their reading lessons. They like that structure at that (year) level. The less confident students are taking more risks...', 'More confidence in themselves, having a go, enjoying reading now...', 'Yes, they've grown accustomed to it. They've adapted to the routine and they are also more willing to have a go in general...', 'My ILSS children have responded really well, even though they scored zero on their IWL's because they had learned by rote. I think they'll pick it up soon. The capable children can read anything and they could do that before but even they seem more confident...'

In unpacking the belief that AL was an ESL or remedial program, we were obviously curious about how these teachers would describe AL to a person in the street. With confidence they said: 'It's a whole literacy program that covers everything you'd want your own child to be learning. It's a consistent approach, it looks at how words and sentences work, it covers all aspects of reading and writing. Personally I had never heard of teaching this way before...', 'It's a teaching sequence – it takes on board oral language, reading comprehension. Part of it teaches children how to see how / why an author wrote something. It covers the inferences about why stories are written. The spelling is good – if they already know phonics the visual strategies teach you how you might spell other words...', 'It's a program we're having a go at because we didn't have all the answers. It mainly focuses on enjoying reading and immersing kids in learning about reading and writing together...', 'A literacy program that can be taught to the whole class – including high and low students...'

To the question, how has your teaching changed: 'Significantly. I'm much more explicit and clear. And the whole business of children reading to me – before I jumped the gun, now I wait. I understand I have to give them time and let them work it out. It's also helped me to understand books more, even in my own reading. And when we do teacher reading in the afternoon (as in a class novel – not AL) well previously I would just read to them, now I stop and am transferring AL to my general teacher reading. So it has spread into other areas of literacy...', 'Significantly. I'm now a lot more structured. I tried to do it all before but I was all over the place. I'd do oral language through news, reading through Big Books, but none of it was connected. Now I zone in on a passage and really pull it apart. The same with Transformations, I'd talk about authors but not in this much depth. My spelling prior to AL was phonics, now I'm more prescriptive, looking at every chunk...', 'Significantly. Especially with Transformations and more of a focus on deconstructing...', 'Yes, significantly. More confident and happy with the AL process. I think this worked because I'm not set in my ways – I was glad to get support. I was receptive, even if it was a bit like an emotional rollercoaster...'

When asked to comment on whether some people taken more readily to the program than others: 'Yes, if people already feel they have a successful literacy program, why would they need another? People are also fearful of the close watch and they say "I did that at Uni. I'm qualified. I don't need to do that again"...', 'Yes, some people are just more open. I think it's actually easy to implement – it's all given to you, you just follow the sequence. You can see it working and it's easy to program. Having a strong background in literacy can be an advantage or a disadvantage...', 'Yes, not everyone is open to change...', 'Yes, some people can adapt to change better. Some people are set in their ways. Some people are resistant, they know this works, but they don't **know, know** it works...'

And what of the students? We also interviewed them. We told them that some children find reading and writing quite easy while others found it more difficult. We asked them which people they thought AL helped the most. We were told: 'You know, it doesn't really seem like that any more. It used to be, but now everyone can

do it. Everyone gets their stories done and if they do have trouble we just help them...’, ‘Our teacher breaks everything up now. She really shows us, like, the structure, and everything so that we can follow the same structure in our own writing...’, ‘AL is my favourite lesson...’, ‘It makes you stronger...’, ‘Yeah...’, ‘It makes you rise up...’.

So as for zone of proximal development; I think you could say they were there.

Summary

We have come to see that deep understanding of our role as Change Agents, consultative ‘value-driven’ implementation, taking time to build trust in relationships, the power of the video, the importance of Transformational leadership, ‘preach to the choir’ and the power of the teachers’ and the children’s’ own successes as quintessential elements of successful pedagogic change and as such are now using these approaches with one of our new key schools. By training a group of interested teachers in the six months before implementation, we found that they generated interdependent webs of flow that allowed for diversity and, we hope, will culminate in access to literacy for all. End of term reflections gathered at this new key school include:

‘AL makes you think about before and after in other learning areas’, ‘Children see themselves as readers’, ‘Have heard an increase in pedagogical conversation from teachers’, ‘ There is a common language between teachers and non-teachers’, ‘The progress of the students in a short period’, ‘Getting more interest from parents’, ‘Children who wouldn’t read are now reading’, ‘Children are even answering questions in other subject areas’ and ‘AL is like glue, it binds all parts of literacy development’.

With 2.5 years for the remaining roll-out, and as new schools commence and existing schools move forward, we still have time in which to make a useful difference for the remaining Target students; time to build trust and encourage reluctant teachers to ‘buy-in’, time to enable our schools to function autonomously (as Stage 3 – Managing the Program; or Stage 4 – Exemplary Site schools) and time to embed the best of what we have learned into all of our future work.

What we hope to have achieved is the engenderment of a passionate interest in the power of AL as a resilient, inclusive and socially constructed methodology, in the ‘complex’ process of Transformational change, and in the quest to eradicate illiteracy forever. It can be done.

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