

Lifelong Literacy

The integration of key competencies and reading

Report prepared for Cognition Education Research Trust



Juliet Twist and Sue McDowall



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

WELLINGTON

2010

New Zealand Council for Educational Research

P O Box 3237

Wellington 6140

New Zealand

© NZCER, 2010

ISBN 978-1-877293-79-5

Distributed by NZCER Distribution Services

P O Box 3237

Wellington 6140

New Zealand

Acknowledgements

The NZCER team thanks the Cognition Education Research Trust for affording us the rare opportunity to conduct a “blue skies” project. We are also grateful to the teachers from our four research schools. All of them put their teaching of reading on the line so they could contribute their knowledge and skills to a project whose directions none of us could fully anticipate at the outset.

We acknowledge the other NZCER staff involved in this project: We have greatly valued Rosemary Hipkins’ support throughout the project. We acknowledge Ally Bull and Renee Campbell for conducting fieldwork and for their part in planning and participating in the workshops and review day. We also acknowledge Sarah Beresford and Jim McNaughton for their contribution to Appendices B, C, and D. Jennifer Garvey Berger helped design the teacher workshops. Information Services support was provided by Beverley Thompson and Susan Tompkinson who conducted searches for reference material. Support staff assisted with key tasks during the project. Our thanks go to Joanne Edgecombe who co-ordinated the catering and venues for our meetings with teachers, and Christine Williams who co-ordinated flights and accommodation for conference presentations and formatted this report.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Executive summary	vii
Introduction	vii
Objectives of the project	vii
Research questions	vii
The research partnership	vii
Findings	viii
1. Introduction	1
The project in brief	1
The context for the project	1
Research aims, objectives, and questions	2
Overview of the research activities	2
<i>The school sample</i>	3
<i>The teachers</i>	3
<i>The research team</i>	4
Methodology	4
<i>How the data was gathered</i>	4
<i>Data analysis</i>	6
Overview of emergent themes	6
The structure of the report	7
2. Participating and contributing	9
Introduction	9
The focus at Mahoe School	9
<i>Links to theory</i>	9
<i>What happened: Theory to practice</i>	11
The focus at Harakeke School	12
<i>What happened: theory to practice</i>	16
Conclusion	20

3. Using language, symbols, and texts	21
Introduction	21
The focus at Mahoe School	21
<i>Links to theory</i>	21
<i>What happened: Theory to practice</i>	23
The focus at Toetoe School	24
<i>Links to theory</i>	25
<i>What happened: Theory to practice</i>	26
Conclusion	27
4. Thinking	29
Introduction	29
The focus at Harakeke School	29
<i>Links to theory</i>	30
<i>What happened: Theory to practice</i>	30
Conclusion	35
5. Relating to others	37
Introduction	37
The focus at Koromiko School	37
<i>Links to theory</i>	37
<i>What happened: Theory to practice</i>	38
Conclusion	40
6. Managing self	43
Introduction	43
Managing self at Harakeke and Mahoe Schools	43
<i>Links to theory</i>	43
<i>What happened: Theory to practice</i>	44
Conclusion	51
7. Discussion	53
Living the key competencies	55
Effective teacher-researcher partnerships	55
The role of resources in supporting change	56
Deep ideas across the key competencies	57
Concluding comment	58
References	59

Tables

Table 1	Summary of school characteristics	3
Table 2	Teaching levels	4
Table 3	The research focus in the four schools	7

Appendices

Appendix A:	Four Resources Model	61
Appendix B:	Introduction to the Cinderella resources	65
Appendix C:	Summary of presentations	67

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research project which explored how the key competencies described in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) might be integrated with the teaching of reading in the middle years of primary school (Years 3–6). The project was funded by the Cognition Institute and carried out in 2007–9 by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). In brief, the project involved researchers supporting teachers to conceptualise key competencies more deeply and design and implement reading programmes which integrate the competencies.

Objectives of the project

The aim was for researchers and teachers to work together to:

- critically explore ways to integrate the key competencies with reading
- use this emerging understanding of new possibilities to develop materials to support teaching programmes
- provide information for policy makers and teacher educators about the opportunities and challenges for improving learning through integrating reading programmes and the key competencies.

Research questions

There were three main questions:

- What does an integration of key competencies and reading look like in the middle primary school?
- How do students' opportunities to learn change as teachers work to integrate the key competencies with the teaching of reading?
- How does student engagement in learning change as teachers work to integrate the key competencies with the teaching of reading?

The research partnership

In this project NZCER researchers were positioned as critical friends who also conducted most of the fieldwork, minimising the burden of the research on the teachers involved, and maximising their time for reflection, analysis, and development. The researchers could not answer their

questions without the help of classroom teachers, and they also knew it was unlikely teachers would come to the same questions without some theoretical input and support. Thus the project was conceived as a rich collaboration, in which each group brought a perspective that the other did not hold, so that new knowledge could be built in the spaces between the different expertises of the two groups.

We designed the research to proceed in a manner that we hoped would be “psychologically spacious” for *all* participants (Garvey Berger, 2004). During our conversations in person and by phone and email we discussed: findings from research literature; what was happening in classrooms; and our emerging ideas and theories about the integration of reading and key competencies. Data gathering activities included: workshops and a review day; classroom observations; audio recordings of lessons; conversations with teachers; and the collection of documents.

We analysed the data according to themes developed using a staggered and iterative approach. The themes emerged both from the data and were informed by theory. The researchers worked closely together between school visits and insights often emerged during informal conversations. Often these insights were able to be tested in next conversations with the teachers at the relevant school. Analysis continued as the case study descriptions were written up and summaries prepared.

Findings

At the beginning of the research the teachers thought their reading programmes would change very little as a result of the integration of key competencies. Over time, a conceptualisation of key competencies as capabilities for *lifelong* learning and living with the potential to *transform* pedagogy, enabled teachers to see that change was indeed needed if their students were to live and learn in the complex, heterogeneous societies of the 21st century.

One change we saw was the use of background knowledge. Near the start of the research, episodes we observed suggested most teachers were unaware of the power of drawing students’ personal knowledge into reading conversations. Over the course of the project we saw key competencies develop as students and teachers learnt how to make use of who they were and what they knew as they made meaning of text.

As the research progressed it became clear that, regardless of which key competency was foregrounded, the same ideas surfaced. That is, we found there was a group of ideas that are engaged when any one of the five key competencies is modelled and discussed. An example of an idea engaged by all key competencies is that of interpretive space. In essence, when key competencies are integrated into reading programmes, the same effect occurs—interpretive space is opened up. This gives students more opportunity to make meaning according to the world they bring to the act of reading—as opposed to simply making meaning according to the world

announced by the text. We found that, with more interpretive space available, students at all reading levels actively participated in literary discussions.

In turn, as interpretive space opened, students' opportunities to learn increased. For example, the teachers in one school wanted to develop their students' ability to relate to each other. Specifically, they wanted their students to develop a sense of empathy. It is important to remember that by now the teachers understood key competencies as capabilities for *lifelong* learning and living with the potential to *transform* pedagogy. This conceptualisation led them towards an expansive idea like empathy, which they knew to be crucial to living in a complex world, and away from a more skills-based approach to key competencies such as students learning to comment positively on each other's work. The teachers believed reading fiction would be an ideal context for the development of empathy for three reasons: when reading fiction, readers are exposed to the unfamiliar perspective of the author; they are required to put themselves in the position of the various characters; and fiction offers readers the opportunity to experience the action of a text but at a safe distance—students are able to fully experience the action of the story but do not have to live with its consequences. The teachers undertook work designed to support their students to analyse how characters in picture books felt, and why they felt that way. With time, we saw students learn to relate the action of the story to their own lives, to begin to think about the idea of empathy, and to begin to understand and share characters' feelings.

It became increasingly clear that, if the teachers were to successfully establish reading programmes within which key competencies might be developed, they would need a much deeper understanding of how texts work. In essence, we found that key competencies do not develop within reading programmes, at least not to any real extent, when teachers have a limited understanding of how to explicitly use the language, symbols, and texts of English. In the case of one school, the teachers wanted their students to see themselves as participating in, and contributing to, the discourse community of literary critics—skilled interpreters of text who engage in stimulating and challenging discussions with their peers. However, the teachers had a limited understanding of the kinds of knowledge needed to be a literary critic. The researchers wrote a teaching resource for the teachers which included a component designed to explicitly teach English form—the structure and language features of English. The resource successfully extended the teachers' content knowledge which, in turn, led to quite dramatic changes in opportunities to develop key competencies.

We found that the integration of key competencies and reading draws students into conversations that engage them in reading as a dynamic, interesting, rewarding activity in much the same way as expert adult readers are engaged. In particular, integration of key competencies achieves this through encouraging the use of personal knowledge and making more interpretive space available. Notably, it is *all* students who become engaged in literary conversations.

We also found that the integration of key competencies and reading has led to the increased engagement of teachers. Although most of the teachers were active readers—members of “real world” reading discourse communities in their out-of-school lives who understood what it meant

to make meaning of text—the role several adopted at school as “reading teacher” bore little resemblance to this. These two roles seemed quite distinct at the beginning of the project with teachers apparently suppressing any natural inclination to teach reading as they read in their out-of-school lives. But when teachers began to model what a “real” reader looks like, for example, when they took part in informed discussions with their students, modified their interpretations in response to the interpretations of others, conveyed a love of literature and a belief that literature can illuminate understanding of what goes on in the social as well as personal sphere, we saw increased the engagement of both students and teachers.

1. Introduction

The project in brief

This report presents the findings of a research project that explored ways that the key competencies described in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) might be integrated with the teaching of reading in the middle years of primary school (Years 3–6). The project was funded by the Cognition Institute and carried out by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). In brief, the project involved researchers supporting teachers to conceptualise key competencies more deeply and design and implement reading programmes which integrated the competencies.

The context for the project

New Zealand’s newly introduced national curriculum framework (NZC) includes a set of five *key competencies* that could potentially stimulate innovation and change in teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2007). The idea of key competencies originated in the OECD DeSeCo¹ project (OECD, 2005). The key competencies described in the New Zealand curriculum framework were derived from the four developed by the OECD, adapted for the local context. They are defined in the curriculum as “capabilities for living and lifelong learning” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.12). Their descriptions could be read as signalling that they are a replacement for the “essential skills” of the previous curriculum or they could be seen as something quite new—a means of fostering citizenship and skills for learning in the complex, heterogeneous societies of the 21st century (Hipkins, 2009; Reid, 2006).

Recent research suggests this transformative potential is more likely to be achieved if key competencies are read as just one agent in a *complex* curriculum, where the *interactions* between all the parts determine the learning opportunities that emerge (Hipkins, Cowie, Boyd, & McGee, 2009). However teachers need rich examples of what such an integration of key competencies with other aspects of the curriculum could look like in practice. This project was initiated to develop an understanding of the potential to use key competencies to transform pedagogy in the area of reading instruction, and in the process to generate examples that could show teachers what such transformative change could actually look like in the day-to-day contexts of their work.

In some action research projects the external researchers are positioned as resource people who act as facilitators and critical friends, supporting practitioner-researchers to carry out fieldwork

¹ Defining and Selecting Competencies

and analysis (Community Economic Development Action Research Project, 2004). In this project NZCER researchers were positioned as critical friends who would also conduct most of the fieldwork, minimising the burden of the research on the teachers involved, and maximising their time for reflection, analysis, and development. The researchers could not answer their questions without the help of classroom teachers, and they also knew it was unlikely teachers would come to the same questions without some theoretical input and support. Thus the project was conceived as a rich collaboration, in which each group brought a perspective that the other did not hold, so that new knowledge could be built in the spaces between the different expertises of the two groups.

Research aims, objectives, and questions

With the above context in mind, the objectives of the project were:

- for researchers and teachers to work together to critically explore ways to integrate the key competencies with reading
- to use this emerging understanding of new possibilities to develop materials to support teaching programmes
- to provide information for policy makers and teacher educators about the opportunities and challenges for improving learning through integrating reading programmes and the key competencies.

The specific research questions were:

- What does an integration of key competencies and reading look like in the middle primary school?
- How do students' opportunities to learn change as teachers work to integrate the key competencies with the teaching of reading?
- How does student engagement in learning change as teachers work to integrate the key competencies with the teaching of reading?

Overview of the research activities

In an initial workshop researchers and teachers shared their respective understandings of key competencies and literacy practices, and raised questions for further probing. With the support of the NZCER team, the teachers designed and implemented a programme that they had co-constructed during and after the workshop. Each school's research question was refined after the first workshop, as might be expected once specific contexts were examined further. A pair of researchers worked with a pair of teachers in each school. They visited several times in the first year of the project to: plan together; observe in each teacher's classroom as ideas were enacted; discuss the events that unfolded with the teachers; informally evaluate progress; and plan next steps in the light of the questions raised. The whole group came back together at the end of the first year to share what had been learnt and, where possible, the process was repeated in the

second year. (As can happen in longer running projects, some teachers moved on from their schools at the end of the first year.)

The school sample

Four schools took part in the project. An overview of their characteristics is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 **Summary of school characteristics**

School*	Decile	Type	Size**	Ethnicities represented (relative proportions)
Mahoe	2	Full primary	160	25% NZ European/Pākehā 25% Somali/Ethiopian 15% Pacific 10% Māori 25% Other
Koromiko	3	Full primary***	370	75% Māori 15% Pacific 10% NZ European/Pākehā
Harakeke	7	Full primary Rural	20	Mostly NZ European/Pākehā small numbers of Samoan, Māori, and Chinese
Toetoe	8	Full primary	330	60% NZ European/Pākehā 9% Pacific 9% Māori 12% Asian 10% Other

* All names are pseudonyms.

** School roll rounded to the nearest 10.

*** Although the school has five full Māori immersion (level 1) classrooms, the teachers we worked with taught mainstream classes.

The teachers

Nine teachers took part in the project: two each from Koromiko, Harakeke, and Mahoe, and three from Toetoe. The third teacher from Toetoe was released from the classroom—she had a management position which included responsibility for professional development. She was completely immersed in the project and has therefore been grouped as one of the teachers. One of the teachers was a teaching principal, and one taught small groups of struggling readers. One of the teachers had taught for two years at the beginning of the research and another had taught for one. Three had taught for between five and ten years, and four had taught for over ten. Thus our sample, while small, represented a real mix of experience, role in school, and type of school in

which the teachers worked. Table 2 is an overview of the levels the teachers taught during the project.

Table 2 **Teaching levels**

Teacher*	2008	2009
Judith	Years 4–5	Years 4–5
Karen	Years 5–6	Years 3–4
Bronwyn	Management position, no class	Management position, no class
Clare	Years 5–6	Years 5–6
Sinead	Small groups of Years 3 and 4 struggling readers	Small groups of Year 2 struggling readers
Nicola	Team teaching Years 1–8	Y1–8
Charlotte	Team teaching Years 1–8	Position lost due to decreased roll. No longer teaching
Jessie	Years 5–6	Teaching overseas
Elizabeth	Years 3–4	No longer teaching

* These teacher names are also pseudonyms

The teachers had been nominated by their schools as practitioners who could bring new understandings back to the other staff and lead ongoing professional learning during and after the project completion.

The research team

Four researchers were involved in working with the schools. All had expertise in primary education and two were literacy specialists. One was a member of NZCER’s Te Wahanga Kaupapa Māori team. The researchers worked in pairs, in combinations carefully designed to maintain a flow of ideas and experiences across and between schools, as shown in Table 3 (see page 7). Some adjustments were made in the second year as school focuses evolved and some people’s circumstances changed. This core team also worked when relevant with two other researchers (e.g., when planning and running workshops). To the team these researchers respectively brought expertise in the area of adult learning, and in the nature and potential of key competencies for curriculum transformation.

Methodology

How the data was gathered

Data gathering activities included: workshops and a review day; classroom observations; audio recordings of lessons; conversations with teachers; and collection of relevant documents.

We designed the research to proceed in a manner that we hoped would be “psychologically spacious” for *all* participants (Garvey Berger, 2004). During our conversations in person and by email we discussed: findings from research literature; what was happening in classrooms; and our emerging ideas and theories about the integration of reading and key competencies. The following brief descriptions illustrate how this intention was realised in practice.

Workshops

Teachers, researchers, and one principal met as a whole group in March, 2008 at a one-day workshop designed to introduce the teachers to the project. That day was spent discussing what we each valued about reading, and what the process of change from current practice to the integration of key competencies might feel like as well as look like. We introduced the teachers to Luke and Freebody’s (1999) Four Resources Model, together with a resource we had written especially for them which summarised the model (see Appendix A). We suggested it could be used as a tool which could help them think about elements that were already part of their reading programmes and those that were not. Towards the end of the day we asked the teachers if they thought their reading programmes would change as a result of the integration of key competencies. Overwhelmingly, they believed programmes would change only slightly; instead, the integration would “refine”, “enhance” or “tweak” what they were already doing.

The teachers used the time between workshops one and two to become more familiar with the resource, although there was some resistance towards using a model developed outside New Zealand. Some of the teachers believed this model would be much less relevant to New Zealand teachers than the resources already in schools. Others did use the model to help them identify gaps in their practice, in particular that their students did not appear to perceive themselves as in control of texts or as creators of knowledge.

The teachers and researchers then met again in April to talk more about how key competencies might be conceptualised, and how particular conceptualisations might encourage thinking about reading in a different way. At this second workshop, an informal presentation² on the background of the key competencies (Hipkins, 2006) led to a discussion of the idea that reading programmes might look different, that “new things” might be created by the integration of key competencies and reading, and that both students and teachers had to be *disposed* towards key competencies, that is, “ready, willing, and able” (Carr, 2006) to do things differently. During the later stages of this workshop, researchers supported the teachers from each school as they spent time deciding upon the focus of their exploration of the integration of reading and key competencies. Teachers and researchers also discussed how they might work together as this exploration unfolded. Most participants decided upon initial classroom observations but the teachers from Toetoe expressed a

² This was not a planned part of the day’s programme. Perceptions that it was needed emerged from the conversation on the day and so the content was impromptu, but based on a substantive report about the nature of the key competencies (Hipkins, 2006).

preference to talk further with researchers about a possible focus of exploration prior to observations beginning.

Classroom observations

The researchers visited the teachers' classrooms according to need. Sometimes teachers requested an observation, sometimes researchers. Observations were generally teacher-led lessons but a small number included groups of students working independently on a task. We kept running notes of the lessons. All teachers were offered recorders and a small group accepted. Most used them so they could independently analyse the fine detail of their lessons; these analyses were discussed when we visited the schools. Classroom observations were always followed by conversations with the teachers; although there were many occasions when we met at schools just to talk and did not observe. Conversations were audio taped.

Review day

Teachers, researchers, and two principals met in October of the first year. The review day was designed to give the teachers the opportunity to discuss their current thinking about key competencies, to review the fieldwork process, and as a time for each school to plan their focus for the first six months of the second year.

As well as discussing emergent themes (see below) teachers and researchers reviewed the process of the research, in particular, the classroom observations. The teachers acknowledged that it had taken time to build up trust; that is, for them to understand that the researchers did not think they had all the answers and that it was not their aim to “fix” the teachers' practice. All but one participant said they saw observations as useful and wished them to continue into the second year. The one teacher who was not comfortable with observations decided to use a digital audio recorder, and email selected recordings to the researchers.

Data analysis

We analysed the data according to themes developed using a staggered and iterative approach. The themes emerged both from the data and were informed by theory. The researchers worked closely together between school visits and insights often emerged during informal conversations. Often these insights were able to be tested in next conversations with the teachers at the relevant school. Analysis continued as the case study descriptions were written up and summaries prepared.

Overview of emergent themes

When designing the fieldwork the researchers went along with the key competency focus selected by each school team. They used the early conversations to match up this focus with one or more of the key competencies and key ideas from literary theory that could potentially be used to bring

out the deeper dimensions of the selected competency. Some schools changed the focus for the second year and some stayed with one key competency throughout the project. Table 3 summarises the pattern that unfolded and acts as a guide to the structure of the next chapters of the report.

Table 3 **The research focus in the four schools**

School/ team	Key competency focus	Theoretical link	Where to find in report
Mahoe	Participating and contributing	Discourse communities	Chapter 2
Researchers 1 and 2	Using language, symbols and texts	Intercontextuality	Chapter 4
Harakeke	Thinking	Critical literacy	Chapter 3
Researchers 2 and 4	Participating and contributing	Discourse communities	Chapter 2
Koromiko	Relating to others	Personality transformation through the literary arts	Chapter 4
Researchers 3 and 4, later researcher 1			
Toetoe	Using language, symbols and texts	Intertextuality	Chapter 5
Researchers 1 and 3			
(no schools)	Managing self*	Building a sense of identity through literary engagement	Chapter 6

* Data from Mahoe and Harakeke schools has been used to illustrate the potential of this key competency, which was not chosen as a primary focus by any of the schools.

The structure of the report

A dilemma when researching complex aspects of learning such as competency development is that all the key competencies are always all in play. However, since the teachers worked with many new and complex ideas as they designed reading programmes which had the potential to be transformative, it was necessary for them to focus on one competency at a time. It is also necessary, for analysis purposes and to highlight the unique characteristics of each key competency, to adopt a process of foregrounding and backgrounding. That is what the next five chapters do as they explore the individual competencies in turn, beginning with Participating and Contributing.

2. Participating and contributing

Introduction

The New Zealand Curriculum describes this competency as:

... about being actively involved in communities. Communities include family, whānau, and school and those based, for example, on a common interest or culture. They may be drawn together for purposes such as learning, work, celebration, or recreation. They may be local, national, or global. This competency includes a capacity to contribute appropriately as a group member, to make connections with others, and to create opportunities for others in the group. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12)

The focus at Mahoe School

The teachers at Mahoe School were concerned about their students' lack of agency as readers—in general, the students were passive discoverers of the author's meaning. The teachers were also concerned that teacher voices tended to dominate reading group discussions. They believed their students' confidence as readers would grow if they began to perceive themselves as participating in, and contributing to, a community of practice—that of skilled interpreters of text who engage in stimulating and challenging discussions with their peers. In effect, the teachers hoped the students would begin to perceive themselves as literary critics.

Links to theory

The teachers' interest in creating a community of practice in their classrooms relates to discourse theory (Gee, 2008). In relation to the school context, this theory says students will come to school already able to control many discourses. First they acquire their primary discourse—the way people in their family and community groups speak, interact, behave, value, and believe. Next, they acquire secondary discourses. For example, they may start school already knowing how to be a member of a soccer team, they will know how to be a friend, perhaps a Hurricanes fan, an Xbox player, a guinea pig owner, or a ballet dancer (indeed the same child may control all of these secondary discourses) because they know how to speak, interact, behave, value, and believe as someone who is part of these groups.

When they start school, there are new discourses to acquire, ones which require students to not only speak, interact, behave, value, and believe in certain ways but also to read and write in certain ways. Teachers need to immerse their students in practice so that the target discourse can be acquired through participation in an authentic environment. In essence, teachers need to set up

a classroom environment that an experienced practitioner of the discourse of literature would recognise. At this point they are not concerned with the specifics of instruction but with creating an authentic “feel” to the classroom, a place that emulates sites in the wider world where literature is practised. Such a classroom is a place where students expect to have informed debates about the merits of works of literature and to modify their interpretations in response to the interpretations of others. It is also a place where students understand that their interpretations are the result of their experiences in the world, and a place where they relate what they read to their lives, the lives of others, and to other texts. The literary classroom is one where students believe in the beauty of literature, believe in its potential to illuminate their understanding of what goes on in the social sphere, and to change lives and even societies. It is a place where students believe in the capacity of literature to develop intellectual rigor, while also seeing it as a place to read for pleasure and to relax, and a place where there is space for group discussion and more private spaces for individuals, and where the timetable reflects a belief in the value of literature.

Elizabeth and Jessie were particularly keen to see how a change of classroom environment might change how their students perceived themselves as readers:

It’s that ‘Boss of the Text’ idea I really like ... kids being in charge, not the text. I want them to be more like that. (Elizabeth)

Once the environment is conducive to the acquisition of the target discourse, the teacher then needs to assist students to *learn* a discourse through explicit instruction (Gee, 2008). The teacher is not, however, the “all-knowing one”, someone who already knows everything there is to know about a discourse, since discourses are constantly evolving in ways that make the attainment of absolute knowledge an impossibility, even an absurdity. Instead the teacher is also learning the discourse; what is different is that they will come to the learning with a relatively higher level of consciousness about particular discourses and about discourses in general:

I know I talk too much. I just kind of do ... but I want to get better at that part of my teaching ... let the kids do more talking. (Jessie)

As previously discussed in Twist and Hipkins (2009), in the case of Mahoe School the teachers wanted their students to see themselves as members of the discourse community of literary critics—skilled interpreters of text who engage in stimulating and challenging discussions with their peers. It was becoming increasingly clear that, if they were to successfully teach the discourse, they would need a much deeper understanding of how texts are constructed. Yet towards the end of the first year of the project they still lacked any real understanding of how writers use particular language features for particular social purposes, and this lack of understanding severely limited the extent to which they could guide the students’ exploration of the bigger social questions raised within picture books. For example, one teacher showed us a version of *Hansel and Gretel* she had read to her class. The children’s bedroom in the story is illustrated in dull browns and greys and is sparsely and shabbily furnished. In contrast, a close-up illustration of the stepmother’s dressing table shows it cluttered with make-up, jewellery, perfume—the very latest pretty things. The teacher was not explicitly aware that one of the ways

writers reveal character is through appearance—what a character looks like, what kind of car they drive, the house they live in... the possessions that sit on their dressing table. She began to see that in order to discuss “big” questions about the social purposes of texts her students also needed to learn about the language features and structure of texts or text “form”. While students in both classes were growing in confidence as readers it was nonetheless premature at this stage to describe them as belonging to the discourse community of literary critics.

What happened: Theory to practice

At this point the researchers decided to write a resource for the teachers, Jessie and Elizabeth, which would assist them to explicitly *teach* the discourse of the literary critic through a focus on text form. The resource was written to be used with the text, *Cinderella: An Art Deco Love Story* (Roberts & Roberts, 2001)—a version of the traditional tale set in the late 1920s. It poses the question: How much is Cinderella’s father to blame for her situation?, and analyses the character of the father in terms of his appearance, what he says, what he does, what he thinks, and what the author tells the readers about him. The following section details the lessons the teachers developed from this resource. (See Appendix B for an introduction, and an online link, to the resource: *How much is Cinderella’s father to blame for her situation?*) The teachers used the analysis as the basis of their lessons but, as it was a resource to help them think about the text rather than a full lesson plan, they were free to create their own lessons from it.

The series of lessons the teachers developed from the resource offered the students the opportunity to function as literary critics for four main reasons:

1. The lessons were conducted in a classroom which was already well on the way to being a place that had the authentic “feel” of a literary environment. The students seemed aware that it was their job to interpret and discuss ideas within that environment.
2. The question, How much is Cinderella’s father to blame for her situation? was one which encouraged vigorous literary discussion because the concept of parental blame is a controversial one.
3. The character of Cinderella’s father is ambiguous—ambiguity elicits diverse reactions from readers and so stimulates debate.
4. The resource provided the teachers with the information they needed to explicitly teach the discourse, to support their students to interpret how the author had used the form of the text to communicate its social function.

Under these circumstances the students’ participation and motivation levels increased significantly. They also began to respond far more confidently:

He was probably lonely and wanted a new wife. It’s like [student]’s mum, she took her boyfriend back because she was lonely—he’d had an affair.

[Adults are] not necessarily forgetful. My grandparents are seventy-eight and they always remember stuff like to pack the trampoline. (The father is described as quite forgetful.)

I think he's forgetful and he lives in a bubble, but there's goodness in him. [At the end] I think he sort of popped out of his bubble and realised what had happened ... because, look, on this page he's making sure Cinderella tries on the slipper.

Teacher comments on the students' increased confidence included:

And all those times when they jumped on you [Jessie] and said, Yeah, but back here it said this! (Elizabeth)

And they were like, Hang on. And my notes hadn't anticipated that [they would notice that point]. They were actually *using* the text. (Jessie)

Perhaps the most dramatic shift was the teachers' new role as fellow members of the class literary community rather than as the controller and dominator of the discussion:

I think that the opportunities for children to discuss have increased because I'm trying not to talk so much and I'm really trying to encourage the kids to talk. I'm like, Don't put your hand up, just talk to each other! ... You're not controlling it ... *They* guide the lesson, which is quite cool. Isn't that the point of our careers? (Jessie)

... and I think the beauty of having it [the resource] rather than my traditional lesson which would say, 'Now go to page 34, just read that quietly and then answer this question', is that we all went through the text together, the kids were going through it, manipulating the book rather than me saying, 'You have to go to this page.' Did you see them doing that? I hadn't realised they had complete control over it ... I was just way more relaxed about it and the discussion just flew. (Jessie)

The focus at Harakeke School

The teachers at Harakeke School were, like their colleagues at Mahoe, concerned about their students' lack of agency as readers. They wanted to build an environment in which students engaged in deep discussion and debate about text, and took responsibility for initiating and leading such discussions rather than just responding to the teacher. Two of the goals they set following the first project workshop addressed this concern. These were to:

- develop (in students) the ability to share ideas, self and peer assess
- incorporate aspects of co-operative learning into reading.

We considered that a focus on the key competency Participating and Contributing would be a useful way to address these goals. Following our first few observations and shared analysis of the lessons we had an in-depth conversation about what changes might help us to meet these goals. We came up with three areas of change. These related to: the teacher role; the text; and the task.

Changes made to the teacher role

Charlotte and Nicola were both active readers and writers. As members of “real world” reading and writing discourse communities in their out-of-school lives they understood what it means to make meaning of text. However the role they took on at school as “reading teacher” bore little resemblance to this.

Charlotte, for example, considered her (out-of-school) view of reading to be informed by her own experiences as an “eclectic” and “passionate” reader, writer, and artist

Language is fundamental ... That’s how we communicate in our society ... it’s being able to interpret what other people are trying to communicate and being able to communicate your own ideas ... A lot goes on with reading—it’s not a passive activity, it’s an active activity. You’re interacting with the text, igniting your brain, linking what you read with what you know, imagining things... (Charlotte)

But she did not initially connect this to her role as a reading teacher:

... at teacher’s college, it was very fuzzy and I didn’t actually get given a kind of toolbox of how to teach reading ... I got a kind of fuzzy idea about... more sort of junior level, than the level that I’m teaching now. I actually came in quite cold thinking how on earth do I run these ... these reading lessons, how do I teach comprehension, how do I teach reading to kids who are actually able readers, how do I extend them? (Charlotte)

Charlotte’s general approach to teaching reading was informed by the “fuzzy” messages provided as part of her teacher education, her own experiences as a school student, and observations of other teachers. However we noticed in our first lesson observation that she also slipped in and out of another approach to reading that seemed to be informed by her own experiences as an “eclectic” and “passionate” reader, and as a writer, and artist. These two roles seemed quite different and over the course of the year we reflected together on these differences. We became increasingly interested in the former as it seemed that increased student engagement and thinking (and opportunities to build the key competencies) were occasioned when Charlotte slipped out of her “reading teacher” and into her “teacher as reader” identity.

We decided to try to foreground the “teacher as reader” rather than “teacher of reading” identity in the hope that this might help create a classroom environment more akin to a discourse community of literary critics.

Changes made to the type of texts used

We realised that if we wanted students to participate and contribute in the way that literary critics do, we needed to provide them with literary texts. The teachers observed that while they valued and used texts developed for educational purposes, such as the school journals and other school readers, these texts were not always complex enough to elicit the deep and extended discussion we were after:

You know ... they’re [the School Journals] a bit scripted. (Charlotte)

Contrived I guess. (Nicola)

Yeah. And while they're great, they're still not quite like the real thing. (Charlotte)

Sometimes it's good to go out of that [school readers] to experience something different with a different sort of set up, a different structure and ... (Nicola)

Like when you read a chapter book and suddenly you've got something that's alive and has humour and all sorts of crazy things... I mean you will never find Roald Dahl in a school journal (Charlotte).

Because it's not predictable enough possibly. (Nicola)

They're [school readers] really important but they're a different kind of text aren't they? (Charlotte).

Yeah, there's far more control isn't there of the ideas and how they're put down. (Nicola).

And they're not necessarily, they're not pieces of literature, they're not ... you know if you're a writer, you won't necessarily write in that way. You know, if you're going to write a novel or something, you wouldn't be guided by you know vocab [associated with reading levels]. (Charlotte)

The teachers decided that they needed to use texts, such as poems, that contained ambiguity. This would provide something for students to discuss:

It's like poetry isn't it when you sit down and really look at poetry. It's incredible isn't it, what different people get out of it ... I used to absolutely love doing it, just amazing isn't it, what you can see in just a few lines of a poem. And just what an author can do in a very short space of time ... They do make a lasting sort of impact on you ... (Nicola).

If we could just kind of bring that to novels, you can find sort of ... (Charlotte)

Because it's definitely in novels as well, there's definitely all that you know, suspense and mystery and you know, double meanings and ... (Nicola)

Yeah. (Charlotte)

Isn't there? I mean it's right through there, it's just that in poems, it's a lot more compressed. (Nicola)

Changes made to the nature of student tasks

We also realised we needed to change what we asked students to *do* with texts to make their experience closer to that of readers of fiction in the real world such as literary critics, book club members, and so forth. We reflected on the importance of having time to talk about what we read with others:

Reading isn't something that you just do by yourself. You read the book by yourself but then you talk about it with other people. You know you talk to your partner, and your friends and anybody. (Charlotte)

We also contrasted the *type* of talk about texts occurring in the “real” world with the way we talk about books in school. Real world readers have conversations about texts that involve *interpretation*. This involves sharing identifications with, for example, places, characters, things, events, or authors. The talk around text that occurs in traditional reading lessons is very different from this. The primary focus is on *comprehension*. It involves checking on the ability to decode and comprehend. We tried to think of how we could change what we ask of students so that their discussions would become more like those in the real world. We concluded that as well as using “real” texts we needed to provide students with something “real” to discuss. This, we agreed required more complex and open-ended tasks:

Maybe we don’t do that [have open-ended discussions] enough. (Nicola)

Well, I’m just thinking of myself, and you know you have your comprehension questions you know. (Charlotte)

Yeah, maybe we get too caught up in the mechanics ... There must be a level I guess where you can push it to there [deeper level discussions] perhaps. (Nicola)

Yeah, maybe there are strategies to actually sort of bring it more into that other realm. Where you can actually get that discussion, that sort of easy kind of discussion. (Charlotte)

We conclude that one of the strategies we could try is slowing things down:

Yeah, maybe it needs ... (Nicola)

To slow everything right down ... I think we’re so... that’s the thing with analysis ... spending all that time setting up the text, talking about...before you open the first page. And...you need to actually ... teasing out of the kids what they know about something or what they don’t know about something or their views about things, and then spending a long time over the first few pages ... And I sort of never would have thought of that before, it was a bang bang bang, let’s skip through this, skip to the ... to the next thing. So maybe it’s just, actually just, yeah ... spending more time. (Charlotte)

Doing less. (Charlotte)

Yeah, not being so sort of quantity driven ... Take more time over things that you may not have even touched on before, like the prior knowledge and the discussing and relating to others ... Once you start doing that prior knowledge thing, everybody starts sharing and we saw that with our kids. You know, like they were really into, they were ... I could hardly keep them quiet ... (Nicola)

It takes time to do that. Charlotte)

It does. (Nicola)

We also concluded that we needed to relinquish some control over the direction of discussions:

It is building enough space in a lesson, not having to get stressed so much that you can actually let go and have those conversations. Kids can get off tangent a bit and it’s all part of it, part of the experience of it. You know, and this goes against the grain, of you know, of

everything, the curriculum is so full and you've just got to cover so many different kinds of ... (Charlotte)

And I've actually got to get this book done today and... Another book I've got to do tomorrow and ... so where do I have time to have this sort of conversation, and that's kind of how, yeah ... even when you see kids getting really into something, you sort of have to move them on because you've got a worksheet for them to do at the end of this, and ... another group waiting over there and all that sort of stuff. (Nicola)

Isn't part of this... about teachers willing to ... let ... relinquish control and power over not knowing what's going to happen next, and not knowing where the conversation's going to go, and to think that it may go off and go into something completely different, they're still building towards something collectively. It's also a huge kind of thing to get over as well. (Researcher)

One thing that happened to me during that lesson was that I was about to ask a question at some point when they were all doing stuff and then Matthew said it. He said the question that I was just going to say, and I thought ... good on you. I have to leave this here ... and it is a real conscious thing isn't it? That you've really got ... it's hard, I think, for a teacher to do that, to sort of ... (Nicola)

Have silence. (Researcher)

Stop ... and because we've all got our agendas haven't we? We know where we're going and we know what we want to achieve and ... (Nicola)

What happened: theory to practice

Shifts in teaching

Both Nicola and Charlotte set about putting these ideas into practice—Charlotte as part of a novel study, and Nicola as part of a unit on poetry. We focus here on just one of these—Charlotte's novel study—for the purposes of illustrating our findings.

Charlotte selected a literary text (Steinbeck, 1975, *The Red Pony*) rather than a school reader for her group of Years 6 to 8 students. Her decision to use this text was primarily motivated, not by the reading level or lesson objectives (although these were considerations), but by her own engagement with the text. Having bought it at the Salvation Army for her personal reading she wanted to share the book with the readers in her class in the hope that they would love it in the way she had. These motivations were apparent in the way she introduced the text to the group:

Today we are going to read the first pony story ever written and it's one of the great works of literature—by John Steinbeck. I just read this story myself and I loved it so much that I wanted you guys to read it ... The main character is ten ... Even though it was written a long time ago it is written in a very modern style—that's what struck me when I read it—and I have never read any of his books before.

In response to a question from one of her students about where she got the book Charlotte replied, again as a reader:

I actually got it from the Salvation Army. I don't know about you, but when I have favourite stories I want to keep them forever.

She modelled that text analysis is a slow and careful process, introducing the first page of the book with the words:

When we first read a story we go really slowly. The author is setting the scene ...

She positioned herself physically as a teacher reader rather than a teacher of reading:

We did our reading towards a table, so we just set around some tables, so that we were kind of in a circle rather than being at our desk, and that changed things completely. It wasn't about me being at the front of the class and the kids just watching, I actually had to physically move and make a more informal setting so that we're all sitting ... we're all equal, shoulder to shoulder around a table, and then it ... the discussion really did flow. And I did feel they really did open up and they enjoyed telling stories ... so it was just ... hugely beneficial.

She responded to the text and contributed to discussion as a reader:

I first found out about the great depression when I was at university. I was at art school and we were looking at these incredible photographs. People had to leave everything behind because there was no work or food. There were people carrying everything they could. We'll have to find out more because I don't know enough about it, but I just remember the photographs of those people sitting on their front verandas looking terrible—starving. I'll try and find some of the photographs and bring them in to show you.

Charlotte modelled that literary criticism is a collective endeavour. Readers work together to make meaning of text, draw on each other's expertise, sound out their interpretations with others, and ask for clarification. During the first lesson Charlotte asked one of the students in her class, who she knew owned a horse, "What's curry comb?" in relation to a reference in the text. After listening to the student's response she checked she had got it right: "Oh, so it's an action you do with a brush?" The student corrected her and provided more detail. Charlotte checked again, "Oh—it's a thing. So you use the spiky one to get the hair out of the soft one?"

It is important to note that Charlotte's adoption of a reader identity did not preclude providing explicit instruction when it was needed. She began the first lesson by teaching her students how to infer character through an analysis of the first two paragraphs of the text:

We are looking at how characters' relationships are developing as a story. One of the characters is a horse and I am interested in whether you think the character is a rounded one ...

And as Nicola observed:

There is an expectation that it will be connected [to evidence from the text]. (Nicola)

As indicated in the quote below she maintained a fine balance between responding as a reader and providing guidance as a teacher throughout the unit:

I could sort of ... stop being the teacher, I mean sure I would say look, where does it say this about this relationship? [i.e., insisting on evidence from the text]. But I kept trying to bring it back to a more sort of informal setting.

Shifts in the learning environment

In the lesson we observed we saw students beginning to interact in the way members of a community of literary critics might be expected to do. We saw students initiating and leading discussion, and drawing on evidence from the text as well as from their own experiences to hypothesise about the characters. We saw students questioning each other.

Our subsequent conversations with Charlotte and Nicola indicated that the “literary critic” behaviour we observed continued and grew over the course of their units. They found that students became more immersed and engaged:

You were sort of able to travel back in time and go to this place and get to know these characters and I really felt that the kids did ... You know, they were there with Jodi and the horses and things like that. (Charlotte)

They found that students began to discuss more openly and freely:

[Taking] more time over things that you may not have even touched on before, like the prior knowledge and the discussing and relating to others ... Once you start doing that ... everybody starts sharing and we saw that with our kids. You know, like they were really into, they were ... I can hardly keep them quiet ... (Nicola)

I think that those discussions would work at every level. I think as teachers we just rush through things so quickly that we just don't take time and how can kids enjoy books if we're not taking time and savouring them. (Charlotte)

They found that students became more analytical and began to read more closely and use evidence in the text:

We were actually able to analyse a paragraph, to actually be able to pick up the essential sentence that described the relationship ... (Charlotte)

I saw the kids making those sort of connections about personality types ... and also what we did was we kept linking it back to the text ... And they actually became very good at that, and of course they had to infer to do that and because Steinbeck is not an explicit writer, everything is inferred. They were able to actually ... pick up a sentence or a couple of sentences that described a scene. And it sort of said one thing, but it inferred something else altogether about a relationship. So by the end of it, they were actually very good, most of them were very good at actually being able to read between the lines. (Charlotte)

They described how students began to make links to other texts and with their own lives:

...to be able to actually bring our sort of experiences into the story and make links with what was happening and we realised that the messages of the story, the things that were going on, were actually similar to the things that they experienced too. (Charlotte)

Interestingly they observed that as a result of the climate they created students were also able to cope with more difficult texts:

It made me realise that I can bring in ... pieces that perhaps are slightly less easy to get into...because the way that we can ... just do bit by bit and with the computer we can actually contextualise things ...

They found that students worked more collectively like a community of literary critics:

It gets them animated—it becomes more of a collegial type environment. (Nicola)

Reflecting on the shifts

When we asked the teachers at the end of the project to reflect on the factors that they considered had contributed to the changing environment in their reading programmes they referred back to the elements of teacher role, text, and task they had set up to emulate a literary discourse community:

Be open and don't tell them so they're wrong and listen to them in an open way. Though at times contribute yourself, not so much to model it but be a ... to just join in on it ... Pulling back a bit more and letting the conversation go ... [Why?] I guess it's out of interest to see where it leads to. Being a bit more relaxed when you're having those conversations. (Nicola)

Educational writing [is] good in that it ticks all the boxes in terms of having lots of vocab and the level of difficulty and everything but it seems a bit dry, it doesn't sort of have that voice, it seems a bit sanitised. I guess [for] me as a reader and as a writer, I can see that there's a place for it, there's a lot of it, it's easy and it's accessible for teachers to use. But it's so different and we need to recognise it's almost like a different genre in itself. And you know it's made for kids whereas literature is not. It's made to be enjoyed and it's made because somebody wants to communicate something, an idea and often that can be quite layered. I guess that's the other thing too, is that literature does tend to be more layered and there's more sort of things hidden in there which makes it more exciting as well, I think, as a reader. (Charlotte)

It's slowing down, taking time, allowing those conversations. Sometimes kids will want to take it a different way—not forcing your ideas on them—they might see things from a different position. (Nicola)

It's the sharing with the other people that actually makes the impact I think, isn't it? Having the time to discuss with other people and share what you get out of it, and what you think the author might have been trying to do ... (Nicola)

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented examples that demonstrate how foregrounding the Participating and Contributing key competency can contribute to the acquisition and learning of the discourse of the literary critic.

The examples of Mahoe and Harakeke show how Participating and Contributing might foreground the idea of discourse: the idea that communities of practice speak, interact, behave, value, believe, read, and write in unique ways.

Participating and Contributing helps develop the acquisition and learning of discourses by providing students with the opportunity to perceive themselves as belonging to a community of practice such as literary critics. This example has shown that:

- teachers need a deep understanding of how texts are constructed if their students are to become members of the discourse community of literary critics
- when teachers see themselves as part of a community of practice, a fellow literary critic rather than above their students, conversations flow and student agency increases.

Teachers might consider the following when they teach to develop the discourse of the literary critic:

- Set up a classroom environment that an experienced practitioner of the discourse would recognise.
- Pose questions that stimulate passionate debate.
- Use texts with ambiguous characters.
- Explicitly teach how authors use the form of a text to communicate its social function.

3. Using language, symbols, and texts

Introduction

The New Zealand Curriculum describes competent users of language, symbols and texts as those who:

... can interpret and use words, number, images, movement, metaphor, and technologies in a range of contexts. They recognise how choices of language, symbol, or text affect people's understanding and the ways in which they respond to communications. They effectively use ICT (including, where appropriate, assistive technologies) to access and provide information and to communicate with others. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12)

Two schools foregrounded Using Language, Symbols, and Texts. Their explorations linked to very closely related theories: Mahoe's linked to the theory of intercontextuality, and Toetoe's to intertextuality.

The focus at Mahoe School

At the beginning of the research the teachers at Mahoe School were far from clear about how this competency might be interpreted. They realised during the first few months of the project that their students needed to learn to use their background knowledge when making meaning from texts since, in general, the students did not appear to see their background knowledge as making a valid contribution. As a result, their meaning making was somewhat limited. From this beginning the teachers came to see background knowledge as a kind of text, and began, tentatively, to think of their work as relating to the key competency Using Language, Symbols, and Texts. However, neither teacher reached a point where they confidently articulated an interpretation of this competency.

Links to theory

The teachers' interest in readers' use of background knowledge relates to the theory of "intercontextuality". This is the idea that any given context³ is connected explicitly and implicitly to past, contemporary, and imagined contexts. Part of putting this idea to use in the classroom involves using an already understood context in order to understand a new one (Engle, 2006). In a

³ We interpret "text" to mean a single unit whereas "context" is interpreted as the circumstances that form a setting made up of many units.

guided reading lesson, for example, the student makes connections between contexts they already understand and unfamiliar contexts presented by texts.

Our baseline data suggested reading sessions in these two classes were not necessarily conducive to students making use of their unique history of experiences within the world in order to make meaning. Instead, in general, both students and teachers adopted passive roles as discoverers of the author's prescribed meaning. Indeed, the term "background knowledge" did not usually refer to readers' remembered, current, and imagined experiences but rather to information provided prior to reading, and primarily by the teacher, which briefly explains unfamiliar contexts and vocabulary.

There was one notable example very early on in the research, of a student using her background knowledge to make meaning (Twist & Hipkins, 2009). During the reading of a text about dogs working in airports to detect quarantine goods, a girl sat throughout the session with her hands over the lower part of her face in what appeared to be disbelief. Although she occasionally contributed to the conversation, nothing she said related to her apparent disbelief. Her teacher did not attempt to ask her to talk about her reaction. It was only after the session that the teacher explained to the researcher that the girl's culture considers dogs unclean—they are scavengers and would certainly never work with people in a role considered as important as that implied by the text. Here was an instance where the student was most definitely using her background knowledge but she and her teacher seemed not to appreciate it as a valid and rich resource for meaning making.

We found the teachers' failure to recognise the role of background knowledge puzzling. We had talked to them on several occasions about their own reading, about the books they were currently reading and those that had been important to them over time. These conversations gave us a clear picture of what the teachers believed reading was all about—there was definitely an element of pleasure involved but, significantly for this discussion, it was also about making your own idiosyncratic meaning. They were not readers who deferred to the author's meaning but made their own, one which they knew to be unique—and they took pride in this. In short, they were readers who consciously drew on their background knowledge as a basis for interpretation.

The "Peter Effect" (Applegate & Applegate, 2004) was certainly not applicable to these teachers. The "Peter Effect" in reading refers to the story of the apostle Peter, who, when asked for money by a beggar, stated that he could not give what he did not have. These teachers, however, were in a very strong position to be able to "give" to their students; that is, to model and discuss their beliefs and attitudes about the use of background knowledge. Why, then, were these beliefs and attitudes not evident in their guided reading lessons? Jessie talked about finding exemplary teaching practice as shown on DVDs supplied to primary teachers "intimidating", and of being anxious about "doing the right thing". She wondered if her anxiety was causing her to lose sight of what reading was all about. Elizabeth wondered if "the amount of stuff that has to be on paper" (teacher accountability) meant teachers were generally becoming less instinctive in the classroom.

Both described their reading programmes as “unnatural”, and wanted to develop ones which would reflect the way they thought about and practised reading outside of school.

What happened: Theory to practice

The teachers planned a series of lessons designed to give the students opportunities to think about and practise the idea of using background knowledge in order to make meaning. Two such lessons were those discussed in the previous chapter using the text *Cinderella: An Art Deco Love Story* (Roberts & Roberts, 2001) which posed the question: How much is Cinderella’s father to blame for her situation? (See Appendix B for an introduction, and an online link, to *How much is Cinderella’s father to blame for her situation?*).

Elizabeth and Jessie set aside time to discuss with their students the idea of using background knowledge when reading:

We talked a lot about how our views are different ... that our expectations of Cinderella’s father will be different because we have different background knowledge. (Jessie)

My kids are so young that I found it really, really hard to explain but they seemed to get that it was something to do with their own ideas being important, not just the ideas written in the book. I like that idea of the kids being the boss of the text. I talk to them a lot about that. (Elizabeth)

They knew instinctively, though, that the students needed to move beyond abstract ideas. Both modelled their use of background knowledge so the students had concrete examples of what intertextuality might look like. When discussing what kind of person marries someone they have known for two weeks (as Cinderella’s father does), one of the teachers found her modelling had to be quite assertive. She drew on her background knowledge when putting forward her idea that the father was someone who didn’t think about the consequences of his actions. Some of her students were far from open to this being a possibility and responded with a certain degree of indignation:

I asked them, ‘What kind of person does that?’ They got mad pretty quickly, and I had to tell them my example that no one buys shoes without trying them on ... ‘What kind of person does *that*?’ (Jessie)

The teachers also saw the importance of showing the students what intertextuality *doesn’t* look like. Elizabeth talked about her students “going too broad”, making interpretations that seemed far fetched. For example, one student speculated that the father might have arranged with the prince to have him hold the ball, dance with Cinderella, and arrive at the house with Cinderella’s slipper. In this case, another student, drawing on her understanding of the narrative genre, explained that the author would have let the readers know something if that had been the case.

Jessie and Elizabeth talked about the need to prompt the students to think more critically about the contexts they draw on. Many drew on a context that is best described as “the ideal father”—a

world where fathers are perfect and so couldn't possibly be responsible for harm coming to their children:

... my kids got hung up on up on the fact that he got married so quickly because he didn't have his glasses with him [and so couldn't see that the stepmother had a devious look on her face] ... therefore he made a bad choice ... they couldn't get past the fact that it's his bad eyes. They kind of wanted to give him any benefit of the doubt they could. (Elizabeth)

... so I pointed out that in this picture he's reading the newspaper with his glasses *on* ... (I asked them) 'Does he have an excuse for missing what's actually going on here?' [Cinderella is wearing a tatty maid's uniform and is serving tea.] It's not like all he can see is blurry blobs, you know. (Jessie)

One student's comment in particular was indicative of how strongly most students held onto the concept of the ideal father and drew on it heavily when thinking about how responsible Cinderella's father was for his daughter's situation. This comment refers to the abuse and murder of three-year-old Nia Glassie by her mother's boyfriend in 2007:

[Nia Glassie's mother] knew what was happening with her boyfriend. He [Cinderella's father] probably doesn't know all of it.

Only one student viewed the father critically:

His decision to marry the stepmother was hasty. He had only known her for *two weeks!*

The teachers made frequent references throughout their lessons to connections between the text and past, contemporary, and imagined contexts understood by the students:

We talked about his [the father's] possessions in his office suggesting he was an intelligent, well educated man. (Jessie)

In this discussion the students analysed an illustration of the father's office, which is cluttered with papers and intriguing objects, and drew on what they knew about people whose houses were full of unusual objects from places overseas. They also made connections between people whose offices are full of papers, and intelligence.

The teachers also frequently supported the students to make connections explicit, using scaffolding such as, "Tell me if I'm right, are you thinking that?", "What helped you to think that?", and "What does this remind you of?"

The focus at Toetoe School

The teachers at Toetoe School were interested in extending the resources their students drew on when making meaning from texts. They saw that the greater the number and range of texts (verbal and non verbal) a reader drew on when meaning making, the deeper and broader that meaning making was likely to be. While they believed some of their students were already drawing on multiple texts as they read, the teachers aimed for all to be consciously using this reading strategy.

Links to theory

The teachers' interest in encouraging readers to draw on multiple texts to make meaning relates to the theory of "intertextuality". This is the idea that any given *text* (verbal and non verbal) is connected explicitly and implicitly to past, contemporary, and imagined texts (Bazerman, 2004). It involves exploring how someone who has taken responsibility for an idea has drawn on multiple texts in order to construct that idea. In reading, the reader analyses a text in order to form ideas about which texts the writer has consciously and subconsciously drawn on. At this school, the students began to appreciate this complex world of texts through exploring the way an idea is represented across texts. This was seen as the first step towards the ultimate goal of the students forming ideas about which texts the writers had drawn on to construct those representations. As one of the teachers put it:

It's our job at this stage to support students to make connections between texts, to see that there is such a thing as intertextuality, that every idea comes from another, and every idea goes somewhere. (Bronwyn)

The three teachers we worked with at Toetoe—Bronwyn, Clare, and Sinead—talked about the importance of students understanding that texts don't exist separately from each other and that the connections between them are never complete:

It's like an onion. Each time you read, you build another layer of meaning on top of the last. Each layer enables another level of understanding. You make use of the first, earlier layers. (Bronwyn)

The teachers stressed the need to plan for intertextuality. They noted that, while they needed to be opportunists and make the most of unanticipated discussions about the connections between texts, they could not rely on these types of discussions to spontaneously occur. They needed to have chosen the central text carefully and have at least some idea of the texts the students might connect to it:

You've got to read the right book to the kids. A book that has been chosen for a particular purpose, a book that makes them think about the right thing. The poem or book you read them can't just be something you grab off the shelf at twenty-five past one. You've got to ask yourself, 'Why this book?' (Clare)

The teachers also stressed the need for teachers to know about the form (structure and language features) and social function of texts if they were to successfully teach students to make connections across them. While they acknowledged the range of texts their students used proficiently outside of school, they strongly believed it was critical that teachers saw their job as expanding this range—and only teachers with a high degree of knowledge about form and function would be able to do this:

The teacher has to have a strong connection with the text if they are going to work with it. What happens if they aren't passionate readers? What happens if they don't know how a piece of writing works? (Clare)

All three read widely, and had particular expertise in English literature. It was mostly this discourse that they worked within when teaching intertextuality:

We try to make the most of the Western canon to help the kids learn how the world today works—relate the big ideas of literature right into the modern day. The Western canon *is* relevant. To say it isn't is a nonsense. Our year sevens and eights perform Shakespeare. They understand what 'a jangled world' is. [Learning about Shakespeare] helps them make sense of the world today. (Bronwyn)

The teachers appreciated that, as Sinead put it, “knowing your stuff” or knowing how knowledge is produced within a discourse was essential if a teacher was to teach their students to read *critically* across texts (Gee, 2008; Moje, 2008):

My kids are just beginning to see the connections. Even though they are all struggling readers there's no reason why they won't eventually be able to look across a group of texts and make some critical judgements. I think I can help them do that because I know these texts well. (Sinead)

The teachers planned a series of lessons designed to make the intertext explicit to their students. The aim of these lessons was for students to learn how to look for connections across texts so that they would be able to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the ideas they represent.

What happened: Theory to practice

The teachers used a variety of texts when teaching intertextuality. Some had been written by the same author and had clear connections, for example, those featuring the same character at different stages of their life. Others required the teacher to do all the work of finding the intertextual links. Sinead, who taught a group of struggling readers, talked about a lesson where she used two texts that were, in fact, slightly different versions of the same story. She used these texts because she believed the connections between them would need to be very obvious before her students would be able to recognise those connections:

It took them a long time before they realised there were parallels between the texts. I had to say to them [after we'd read both], 'In the first book, there's an old man who plants a seed. It grows into an enormous turnip, and he can't pull it out. And in the second book, there's an old man who plants a seed. It grows into an enormous turnip, and he can't pull it out ... Is there anything the same?' I had to ask that! But with the third book, they were predicting that the pāua in the story might get stuck. A very basic level, I know. But it's where they needed to start. And they had some rich conversations about the pāua story. If you set them up to look for connections, they can do it. (Sinead)

Clare supported her students to write a class book about intertextuality. During class discussions, she would act as scribe so that there was a record of their emerging thoughts about intertextuality as a concept as well as examples of intertextual links they found as they read.

She also made sure she showed them how writers rely on existing texts in order to create new ones so the students had some appreciation of the intertext as a credible resource used by

published writers. For example, her class first read an article by Jenny Bornholdt (2003a, p.13) where the poet explains how the notes she jots down in her notebook help her write:

[My notebook] is likely to be filled with words and phrases that might find their way into poems. I also write down things like conversations that I overhear or odd signs in shop windows. My notebook is often the starting point for a poem.

The class then read a poem by Bornholt (2003b, p.11) and wondered about which texts she might have used to help her write it. This exercise prompted the following student comment:

Connecting texts opens things up in all sorts of new ways.

The teachers gave their students the opportunity to think about and practise intertextuality from a very early age.

In the junior school I encourage our teachers to choose four books for the week. All the books are connected, whether by author or theme, whatever. On the last day of the week the teacher re-reads the book the kids have voted their favourite. (The kids make their choice by sitting next to a particular book on the floor—you can't have them put up their hands, they'd vote four times!) It's about being a discriminating reader and actually thinking about which one you like and why, and even why you like it more than the others—that's right back in year one/two. So by the time the kids get to year five/six, when we start to talk explicitly about intertextuality, they're ready for it because they already know how to think about one book *and* about how it is part of a group of books. (Bronwyn)

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented examples that demonstrate how foregrounding the Using Language, Symbols, and Texts key competency can contribute to the development of intercontextuality and intertextuality.

The example of Mahoe shows how Using Language, Symbols, and Texts might work together with the idea of intercontextuality: the idea that any given context is connected explicitly and implicitly to past, contemporary, and imagined contexts.

Using Language, Symbols, and Texts helps develop awareness and use of intercontextuality by providing students with the opportunity to draw on their background knowledge as they read. This example has shown:

- the importance of teachers not only knowing what they value about reading but also having the confidence and space to put those values into practice.

Teachers might consider the following when they teach to develop intercontextuality:

- Set aside time to discuss the idea of intercontextuality with the students.
- Show the students what intercontextuality does and doesn't look like.
- Make frequent references throughout lessons to connections between the text and the students' background knowledge.

- Support the students to make their own contextual connections through the use of prompts.

The example of Toetoe shows how Using Language, Symbols, and Texts might work together with the idea of intertextuality: the idea that any given text, verbal and non verbal, is connected explicitly and implicitly to past, contemporary, and imagined texts.

Using Language, Symbols, and Texts helps develop awareness and use of intertextuality by providing students with the opportunity to explore the way an idea is represented across texts. This example has shown:

- what can be achieved when teachers deeply understand the literary ideas they teach
- the importance of having a deep understanding of the construction of the texts used in teaching those ideas.

Teachers might consider the following when they teach intertextuality:

- Initially, at least, make connections between texts very obvious for struggling readers.
- Record the students' emerging thoughts about intertextuality, as well as examples of intertextuality, in a class book.
- Give examples of how authors rely on existing texts in order to create new ones so students appreciate the intertext as a credible resource.
- Give students opportunities to practise intertextuality as soon as they start school.

4. Thinking

Introduction

The New Zealand Curriculum tells us that:

Thinking is about using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas. These processes can be applied to purposes such as developing understanding, making decisions, shaping actions, or constructing knowledge. Intellectual curiosity is at the heart of this competency. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12)

In this chapter we describe how the teachers at Harakeke School piqued their students' intellectual curiosity and broadened their reading programme through a focus on thinking while engaged in reading across a range of curriculum areas.

The focus at Harakeke School

The teachers at Harakeke School chose the Thinking key competency as their main focus for the first half of the project. They observed that while their students were able to decode and comprehend text beyond a literal and factual level, they were not very good at questioning text. They tended to take texts at face value, and to all hold the same opinions:

They all hold the same opinions—they think as a pack. (Charlotte)

The teachers considered this incapacity to question was, in part, the result of living in a small, rural, homogeneous community.

The teachers' goals were: to help their students to think more critically about text; learn that texts are interpreted in different ways for different purposes; and engage in rich and extended discussion about these purposes:

[We] will be teaching children to be more critical [and to have] more in-depth discussions of what they've read than current comprehension [approaches allow], to enrich [our discussion] with wider perspectives. (Nicola)

The Harakeke School teachers saw the capacity to think critically about texts as essential for living and learning in the 21st century.

Kids having an awareness of bias on the Internet, being a text critic when using Google ... We want kids to be able to go out into the world. (Nicola)

They chose to make use of texts available on the Internet and to focus on reading across the curriculum.

Links to theory

We saw a connection between what the teachers wanted to do and the concept of critical literacy. Critical literacy involves considering the construction of texts; questions of inclusion, exclusion and representation; and the ways in which texts can position a reader. Critical literacy involves questioning texts rather than taking them at face value.⁴

The teachers at Harakeke School were already familiar with some critical literacy ideas. Nicola and Charlotte had learnt how to analyse and think critically about text when studying at university—Nicola, in English literature, and Charlotte, while at art school. They engaged in acts of critical literacy as active readers and writers in their out-of-school lives but had not explicitly taught critical literacy in their job as teachers of reading. As an experienced teacher of reading Nicola drew on the literacy professional development she had most recently been involved in. This included a focus on reading comprehension. As second-year teacher, Charlotte drew on approaches to reading instruction she had been shown during teacher training. These did not include a focus on critical literacy:

[When I first started teaching] I actually came in quite cold thinking how on earth do I run these reading lessons, how do I teach comprehension, how do I teach reading to kids who are actually able readers, how do I extend them? (Charlotte)

Nicola and Charlotte became aware of the gap between the ways in which they used and talked about their use of texts in out-of-school contexts and what went on in their classrooms. They used the “text analyst” role from the *Four Resources Model* (Luke & Freebody, 1999) to help them apply ideas of critical literacy to their classroom reading programme. The role of the text analyst is to critically analyse texts by acting on the knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral—that they represent particular points of view by silencing others. This is done by drawing on knowledge of the linguistic techniques used to represent and silence particular points of view.

The teachers in this small country school chose to work with the whole school as one group of fifteen children ranging in age from eight to twelve years. This decision was based on the belief that all students, regardless of their age or reading level, need opportunities to demonstrate and practise critical literacy. The teachers’ decision to work with the whole school as one group was also based on the desire to generate multiple interpretations of text as a means of exploring different perspectives. We considered student diversity (achieved here through cross-level grouping) would help generate a wider range of perspectives.

What happened: Theory to practice

We did not use the language of action research cycles but this was in essence what occurred. Charlotte and Nicola ran informal action research cycles where the learning from one cycle

⁴ For further reading on critical literacy see: Antsey and Bull (2006); Knobel and Healy (1998); Lankshear (1994); Luke and Freebody (1999); New London Group (1996); and for recent New Zealand-based research: Sandretto et al. (2006a, 2006b).

informed the goal setting and action for the next. We visited towards the end of each cycle to participate in the reflection and goal-setting process. Between each visit Nicola and Charlotte worked towards the goals. This was a messy process and things overlapped and did not fit as neatly into categories as our after-the-fact reporting structure here suggests.

Reflection and goal setting following our first visit

In the first lesson we observed as the children watched the TVNZ produced documentary Twenty Year Anniversary of the Wahine Disaster, sourced from You Tube, via an electronic whiteboard. They also accessed information on the Wahine disaster from other websites. The viewing was guided by a series of comprehension questions that the students worked on in pairs and shared with the group. The goal was to elicit extended and critical analysis of the texts.

When analysing the lesson together we came to the conclusion that while there were lots of conversations they tended not to be “text critic” conversations and there was little opportunity to explore multiple perspectives. We worked out that there were three main reasons for this: the video footage did not in and of itself invite a critical response and nor did the student task; the students did not have the necessary critical literacy skills or text analysis skills; and the teacher inadvertently shut down opportunities for extended conversation.

The teacher closed down opportunities for extended conversation out of concern about behaviour management issues, with comments such as:

No Arthur, it’s Sylvie’s turn.

I’d like to see some writing [shuts down spontaneous discussion about the footage].

Quiet—we need to get on with our research.

This was understandable given the situation—being observed for the first time by a colleague and two researchers. Another reason for closing down the conversations was to ensure each student recorded their own notes, possibly due to an assumption about learning being an individual rather than a collective endeavour. Examples include comments such as:

I’ll get you three to work together but you all need to record your own information

You’re showing me you’re not capable of individual work

As a result of our collective analysis of the lesson Nicola and Charlotte set themselves three goals to work on over the next six to eight weeks. These were to: choose topics where there was something to think critically about, and tasks that provided opportunities to do this; provide overt instruction (as well as situated practice) on thinking critically including the relationship between the function and form of texts; and encourage extended discussion by setting up structures and systems to support this.

Reflection and goal setting following our second visit

During our second visit we observed a lesson in which students had the task of analysing three letters by responding to the questions: “Who do you think wrote this letter [age, gender, beliefs and values etc.]?” “What kind of letter is it?” and “Why did they write it?” One of the letters was from a student enquiring in a youth magazine about BMX riding, one was a mail box drop about a missing kitten, and one was a letter to the editor complaining about the recent actions of Māori activist Tama Iti, as presented in the media. Compared with the previous lesson we observed there were plenty of opportunities provided by the texts and task for students to question the texts concerned. The teacher provided explicit instruction on analysing the language techniques to work out who and why these texts may have been written and how they might position us as readers. This had been one of the teacher’s goals for the lesson:

I want children to learn that who you are determines what [and how] you write. (Charlotte)

One of the things I wanted them to pick up on is that part of the reason you can tell the age of the writer is because of the language they use. (Charlotte)

However our observations suggested that some students were still taking texts—even those that showed strong bias—at face value. We overheard a group of students, for example, basing their argument on the assumption that Tama Iti was “a childish person” because this was how the letter writer referred to him. They showed no awareness that this was an opinion which could be questioned by the reader.

Compared with our previous observation there was plenty of opportunity for discussion. The teacher introduced the lesson to the students by saying it would involve: “a bit of listening, a bit of writing, and then talking with your buddy”. The students worked first in pairs and then as a whole group. In contrast with the earlier lesson the teacher reinforced collective work and debate:

I’m looking to reward pairs of people.

I’m looking for the group that is doing the most discussion.

However, although we observed more in-depth discussion than in the earlier lesson the task didn’t generate multiple interpretations and there was little debate. We concluded that one of the reasons for this finding was that the task wasn’t open-ended enough and that teacher responses, such as those in the interchange shown below, may have signalled this:

How is Bob feeling? (Teacher)

Angry. (Student)

Ok, so now we’re getting somewhere. What is Bob angry at? (Teacher)

Tama Iti and what he did. (Student)

See you knew it without even re-reading it. (Teacher)

We also wondered about the choice of topic for the lesson. Although the letters were authentic the students did not seem to see a connection between them and their own lives. Nor did they see a real need for generating new knowledge on the topic. We came to the conclusion that providing students with more than one perspective on the Tama Iti issue (for example, two different letters to the editor) may have provided an interpretive space for analysis and so have generated further discussion. Our goals for the next cycle were to: choose texts on topics for which students saw the need for knowledge generation; provide students with alternative perspectives on the same topic; and widen the interpretive space by loosening the learning intentions and teacher direction.

Reflection and goal setting following our third visit

The third lesson we observed was part of a unit on wind farms. This was a topical and controversial issue because a wind farm was being established near the school community. It was also a topic that generated a wide range of viewpoints:

It's a complex issue. It's providing a lot of guys with work, there's the green issue, oil crisis.
(Charlotte)

The teachers were initially apprehensive about focusing on this topic (which would involve presenting positive as well as negative perspectives on the wind farm issue) because of the strong and unanimous objection to wind farms in the community:

It would be authentic but—everyone in this community is passionate and vocal [about it].
(Charlotte)

People in this community have invested thousands in fighting this. (Nicola)

We just have to be a bit careful I guess. (Nicola)

However they decided to go ahead because of the critical literacy opportunities they considered this topic provided for their students:

To be able to see it from a different perspective and hold your own opinion. (Nicola)

However they were very aware of the need to provide a climate in which allowed “other people to express their views safely”.

The lesson we observed required students to consider different information and opinions about wind farms from different sources. One source was a video in which a group of people living very close to a wind farm described their experiences and expressed their views. All but one were strongly opposed. A spontaneous conversation emerged in response:

But he's only got two [wind turbines] so the noise would be less. (J.)

He's getting paid. He's getting paid to say that. (C.)

He's old and deaf [and so can't hear the wind turbines]. (P.)

Yeah but he could hear the cars. (A.)

He might be making it up. (M.)

He might have double glazed windows. (P.)

Maybe when he goes out the wind turbines are off. (J.)

Maybe he lives in a really windy place [and the wind is so loud he can't hear the wind turbines]. (P.)

The teachers concluded that presenting different perspectives on the same topic helped students to question text:

They thought they were opinions—like that guy talking about how close he lives and so forth and how they didn't believe him. (Charlotte)

Comparing two points of view is something that works—having a theme of two opposing views on it. (Charlotte)

The space between these differing viewpoints provided students with the chance to recognise and question opinions rather than take them at face value.

We also saw evidence of students learning to question text presented as factual. In the same lesson the teacher showed students a DVD presenting factual information about wind farms. While it appeared neutral and objective it was in fact produced by an energy company and only contained positive facts about wind farms:

They were critical of things that were presented as facts ... Things that are sold to you as facts but actually there's a slant to it. (Charlotte)

Yeah—that's where I want to go with this next—how 'facts' can fit either in the negative category or the positive category dependent on how you present them. (Nicola)

They knew it was facts—but [facts can be] presented in a positive way or a negative way—they all knew that it was being presented in a positive way. So—again it's thinking about the way things are presented to you even if they are presented in a very factual way, like that article was. It was done in a very positive way. There weren't any facts in there that were actually negative. (Nicola)

Yeah—it was a real PR piece. (Charlotte)

I wanted them to see that as well—even though it wasn't done as an interview, or an opinion—it still was in that camp ... (Nicola)

This was our last planned visit for the Harakeke School focus on the thinking key competency. Our discussion about where the unit could go to next included the possibility of social action.

They [the students] could end up writing letters to the editor. (Charlotte)

They [the students] may have advice for the people thinking about building the wind farm at another local area. (Charlotte)

In the longer term we saw possibilities for applying some of the big ideas emerging from the unit on wind farms to other contexts:

I've just been thinking you could take this in different direction. It could be less about wind turbines and more about things happening to communities. It could be other things ... (Charlotte)

It's interesting—they've had the scepticism. It would be interesting if they could apply that to a new piece of text—not a wind farm but something where we provide them with some information and see if they can be equally sceptical about that. (Charlotte)

Conclusion

In this chapter we have demonstrated how using critical literacy as an avenue for building the competency of thinking within reading programmes offers transformative possibilities that go beyond ideas of critical thinking. However for this to occur, teachers need a deep understanding of how texts work and of what critical literacy can mean in practice.

This example from Harakeke School shows how a focus on critical literacy might help prepare students for life, by teaching them to question texts rather than taking them at face value. The teachers at this school found that when starting out in teaching critical literacy they needed to:

- choose texts on topics where there is something to think critically about, and tasks (such as comparing different views on the same issue) that provide opportunities to do this
- choose topics for which students see the need to generate knowledge
- provide overt instruction and situated practice on critical literacy
- encourage discussion of different possible readings of texts by setting up structures and systems to support this.

5. Relating to others

Introduction

The New Zealand Curriculum describes students who competently relate to others as those who:

... are open to new learning and able to take different roles in different situations. They are aware of how their words and actions affect others. They know when it is appropriate to compete and when it is appropriate to co-operate. By working effectively together, they can come up with new approaches, ideas, and ways of thinking. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.12)

The focus at Koromiko School

The teachers at Koromiko School believed their students generally showed insufficient empathy towards each other both in the classroom and in the playground. They believed the children's often difficult home lives were not always conducive to developing social skills such as empathy, and that the school reading programme might provide the ideal opportunity to develop these skills.

Links to theory

The teachers' interest in the benefits of reading fiction relates to the theory of personality transformation through the arts, in this case, the literary arts (Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman, & Peterson, 2009; Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006; Oatley, 2008). This research suggests readers of fiction may be better prepared for life, with particularly strong people skills. It is argued that reading fiction facilitates the development of social skills because the reader of fiction imagines themselves in the position of a character; they are exposed to an unfamiliar perspective of the narrator; they are taken beyond their immediate lives and into the wider social world of the text; and they have the opportunity to rehearse for later life at a safe distance—the reader experiences the action but, unlike the characters, can walk away from it whenever they choose.

The Koromiko teachers, Judith and Karen, decided to undertake work designed to support their students to understand how characters in picture books felt, and why they felt that way, in the belief that this would be the first step towards the students becoming less censorious and more empathetic towards each other. The teachers believed reading fiction was particularly relevant to their context because it offered their students the opportunity to experience the action of a text but at a safe distance—the students could fully experience the action of the story but did not have to

live with the consequences of the action. The teachers believed that the nature of many of their students' lives meant that reading fiction provided the ideal opportunity to develop social skills, such as empathy, in a safe environment:

Our kids' relationships are often like I smashed them. Their lives are hard core ... tough ... raw. I try not to dismiss comments like that [I smashed them] but I also don't want to feed those kinds of attitudes either. With this sort of work they can practise [developing empathy] without the risk of smashing anyone or getting smashed themselves. (Judith)

Baseline data from this school showed most students listened without comment when their teacher read fiction (picture books) to them. The small number of comments made included some that showed the aggression referred to by the teacher above. Picture books were usually read as a means of settling the students after playtime or lunchtime or as a means of quietly filling in time before the bell rang rather than as an opportunity for students to engage intellectually with the text.

The teachers planned a series of lessons designed to give the students opportunities to understand how characters in picture books feel, and why they feel as they do.

What happened: Theory to practice

In the first series of lessons, both teachers read their students *A Pocket Full of Kisses* (Penn and Gobson, 2006). In this picture book Chester, a racoon, feels his little brother is taking his place in his mother's affections. The story follows how Chester's mother gently reassures him of her love for him. The story was read more than once, over a series of days.

The construction of the Chester character was explored through his actions—represented in the illustrations as his body language and facial expressions.⁵

First, the teachers supported the students to identify numerous concrete examples of Chester's actions in the text, asking "What is Chester doing?" Student responses included:

He's crying.

He's got his mouth wide open.

The teachers then supported the students to link an emotion to Chester's action by asking, "If he's doing that, how do you think he is feeling?" Student responses included:

⁵ It was particularly important that the students' work involved reading facial expressions since research suggests empathy and social acumen can be measured by a person's ability to read facial expressions (Baron-Cohen, 2001). The various studies by Oatley and colleagues, cited above, on the potential of the literary arts to transform personality, used the test developed by Simon Baron-Cohen in which participants look at photos of people's eyes, as if seen through a letter box and, for each image, they choose the most appropriate of four words to describe what the person was feeling—for instance, "terrified, upset, arrogant, annoyed". The test itself, "Reading the Mind in the Eyes", can be found at <http://www.glennrowe.net/BaronCohen/Faces/EyesTest.aspx>

He's sad.

He can't believe what's happening 'cause his mouth is hanging down.

The students used a limited range of words to describe Chester's emotions, for example, "sad" and "mad". As a consequence, the teachers' third step in the process of supporting the students to understand Chester's feelings was to feed in the language needed to describe his actions more precisely—words such as "disappointed", "shocked", "confused", "jealous" and "envious".

The teachers' fourth step was to ask the students to relate Chester's predicament to their own lives, asking "Have you ever felt like Chester?" Student responses included:

... when my little brother gets takeaways and I don't.

When I see the twins get stuff I don't get ... I feel like Gran doesn't like me any more.

This was perhaps the most crucial part in the process. Giving the students the opportunity to move beyond the action of the text and into their own lives was viewed by the teachers as the point at which empathy may begin to develop; although at this stage the teachers saw no concrete evidence of empathy towards Chester.

Finally, after many opportunities to practise the four steps detailed above, the teachers reduced the level of scaffolding and asked, "How does Chester feel at the end of the story?" Responses included:

I think he knows that parents can love you all the time, even when they love someone else.

He gets it that his mum knows how to share the love around.

He feels calm.

In the second series of lessons, both teachers read their students *Donkeys* (Dahimene & Stollinger, 2005). This picture book is a love story about two donkeys, Jenny and Jack, who have lived together for a long time. They have a silly argument over Jack sleeping right through their anniversary, and each one rushes off to find someone better—only they find the other isn't so easy to replace. When they reunite there is "just a chink of sorrow from their time apart". This second series of lessons followed the same format as the first.

The construction of the Jenny and Jack characters was explored through their actions—represented in the illustrations as their body language and facial expressions.

First, the teachers supported the students to identify numerous concrete examples of the characters' actions in the text, asking, for example, "What is Jenny doing?" Student responses included:

Jenny's eyes are staring wide and she's snorting puffs out of her nose.

The teachers again supported the students to link an emotion to Jenny or Jack's action by asking, "If Jack's doing that, how do you think he is feeling?" Student responses included:

Jack's head is kind of on one side, like he's stuck up, and he's not looking at Jenny when he's talking to her. She's nobody to him ... but it was him that started the whole thing.

Jack's eyes are popping out of his head and his tongue is flopping out of his mouth. He can't believe it ... He's thinking the brown patch on the cow's front is so, so awful ... Why does he think that? ... Aren't cows meant to have those?

The students again used a limited range of words to describe Jenny and Jack's emotions, for example, "grumpy" and "angry". The teachers' third step in the process of supporting the students to understand characters' feelings was to feed in the language needed to describe their actions more precisely—words such as "hurt", "offended", and "stubborn".

The teachers' fourth step was to ask the students to relate Jenny and Jack's predicament to their own lives, for example, asking "Have you ever felt like Jenny?" Student responses included:

Her eyebrows have that mean going down into your nose look. Frowning, that's it! ... I get that look when my sister borrows my socks without asking.

Again the teachers believed this to be the most crucial part in the process. This second series of lessons confirmed the teachers' belief that giving the students the opportunity to move beyond the action of the text and into their own lives was the point at which empathy began to develop. Student responses indicating developing empathy included:

He [Jack] was silly to sleep right through their anniversary ... If I was Jenny I'd have been hurt, too. She tried hard to help him remember.

It wasn't as if Jack *meant* to sleep all day.

Once again, after many opportunities to practise the four steps detailed above, the teachers reduced the level of scaffolding and asked, "How do Jack and Jenny feel at the end of the story?" Responses included:

They really, really love each other.

Their eyes are sparkly. That's love.

I think they know they should never have split up. They're better together.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented examples that demonstrate how foregrounding the Relating to Others key competency can contribute to development of empathy.

The example of Koromiko shows how Relating to Others might foreground the idea that readers of fiction may be better prepared for life, with particularly strong people skills.

Relating to Others helps develop empathy by providing students with the opportunity to understand other people, in this case, characters in picture books. This example has shown:

- picture books provide a safe environment within which children can develop empathy. This is particularly important for those whose lives are “raw”.

Teachers might consider the following process when they teach to develop empathy:

- Draw attention to concrete examples of a character’s actions.
- Support the students to match emotions to those actions.
- Feed in language which describes the emotion more precisely.
- Support the students to relate the character’s predicament to their own lives.
- Reduce scaffolding by asking the students to think about how the character feels at the end of the story.

6. Managing self

Introduction

The New Zealand Curriculum tells us that students who manage themselves are:

enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, manage projects, and set high standards. They have strategies for meeting challenges. They know when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.12)

Managing self at Harakeke and Mahoe Schools

A background study on the Key Competencies carried out at NZCER (Hipkins, 2006) suggests a risk that Managing Self would be interpreted as generic social and organisational skills rather than a competency for learning in the context of *disciplinary* knowledge. In terms of a reading lesson, the former approach might, for example, involve the capacity to keep track of school readers, exercise books and pencils; to put one's hand up and wait one's turn when discussing text; to listen to others' viewpoints, and so forth. The latter approach might involve the capacity to manage the process of expressing, defending, challenging, and adapting interpretations; changing one's mind; recognising the assumptions underpinning one's interpretations; and reflecting on the relationship between texts, selves, and interpretations. As noted by Reid (2006) when not viewed through a disciplinary lens the transformative potential of the key competencies is compromised.

A more generic or superficial reading of the potential of the key competency Managing Self might explain why only one school chose to focus on this competency—especially given that all were interested in transforming reading programmes. The one school, Harakeke, did not choose Managing Self as its primary focus but included it as a focus secondary to its main interests in Thinking, and Participating and Contributing. However all schools provided the *conditions* needed for students to develop this competency even though this was not explicit. In this chapter we focus on the shifts in teaching and learning conditions at two schools—Harakeke and Mahoe—that enabled students to manage themselves within the English learning area.

Links to theory

In this chapter we explore in more detail the transformative potential of the competency Managing Self in the discipline of English by presenting the shifts in teaching and learning that occurred at Harakeke and Mahoe Schools, especially in relation to ideas about identity.

Our (changing) sense of identity is linked closely with the capacity to relate to the other. This is because our understanding of ourselves comes not from deep introspection but from encountering the other. Sumara (2002, p.9) argues that, like the mind:

Identity is not some essential quality of the individual human subject. Identity emerges through relationships, including relationships people have with books and other communicative technologies based on language.

Rather than helping us *discover* or learn more about “who we really are”, experiences, such as the act of reading help *create* our sense of who we are at any given moment. Rather than existing prior to experiences such as reading, our sense of who we are emerges in the act of reading. In turn, our capacity to build relationships and negotiate with people whose cultures, values, and beliefs differ from our own is dependent on being aware of our own sense of identity.

What happened: Theory to practice

Within the discipline of English students need to be able to manage themselves as they: form and express interpretations; defend and challenge interpretations; adapt interpretations or change their minds; build on the interpretations of others to generate new knowledge; and reflect on the relationship between texts, selves, and interpretations.

Forming and expressing interpretations

Over the course of the project we observed students learning how to form and express their own views based on in-text and out-of-text evidence. As explained in the chapter on Using Language, Symbols and Texts, forming an interpretation requires knowledge of how texts work and an understanding of the relationship between function and form. But it also involves a component of Managing Self as all acts of interpretation are expressions of identity. At the start of the project students saw their task as working out what the author “really means” or working out the interpretation of their teacher. Over time they began to take responsibility for generating their own interpretations.

Some students had difficulty tolerating the uncertainty that comes with complex meaning-making situations in which there is room for multiple interpretations rather than one “right” answer. In one of the lessons we observed, for example, a student identified as “very bright”, opted out, and her teachers considered her inability to cope with an open-ended task to be the reason:

It’s funny though because ... in the end, the kid that really sat back and got bored was [student] and she’s like my highest level reader and after a while she actually kind of just disengaged a bit ... I found that really interesting ... She is my highest level kid and when you give her a task, she will listen to you ... She was away with it [not engaging] and whether it’s because it gets slowed down, she has to listen to everyone else’s point of view, do you know what I mean? (Elizabeth)

She's actually been labelled as gifted and in those situations ... I would expect a child who has been identified as gifted to think outside the box, to come in and contribute to that situation but obviously [I was wrong]. (Jessie)

She's a highly competitive girl and ... in her mind there was always an answer to everything and ... she was right. And I think the first time that we looked at something that didn't have a closed [only one 'right' answer] ... [she could not cope] ... I remember she's the person ... who was most unhappy with an open ending. It was really interesting. (Elizabeth)

This student had the capacity to use language, symbols, and texts, but not the capacity to manage herself in a complex meaning-making situation. The response of this student is consistent with the findings of Carol Dweck who found that it was "bright girls" who were least likely to show resilience in complex learning situations, because they had the least experience of having to stick with difficulty.⁶ She concluded that all students and especially bright girls need more opportunities to become immersed in complex learning situations, a conclusion that Jessie and Elizabeth also came to:

She probably needs that kind of group more than anything. (Jessie)

With everyone having different points of view and there's no right answer. (Elizabeth)

At Harakeke School, Charlotte also observed the importance of students managing complexity:

And yet you know, in the ... big world out there, they're going to come across ambiguity all the time aren't they so ... it's actually you know, building it. It's more than just sort of reading skills, it's actually about going and asking somebody they know who knows something and not seeing that as some sort of failure. (Charlotte)

Defending and challenging interpretations

Within the discipline of English, students need to know how to manage themselves when defending and challenging interpretations. The teachers considered their students' increased capacity to do this to be one of the main shifts during the project.

We saw, and heard of, many examples of productive conversations in which students challenged and defended different interpretations of text. The example below comes from a small group discussion on the fate of the father in Sam Hunt's (1989) poem *Boy's Song*. This was not a task the teacher set but an issue the students raised themselves as they analysed the poem:

I reckon he's dead. (T.)

I reckon he slipped. (K.)

Is that a true story? (R.)

But [T.] he might have done it [disappeared] on purpose 'cos he didn't bring the kid. (J.)

It doesn't say it—it just says he walked away. (T.)

⁶ A summary of Carol Dweck's work can be found in Chiu, Hong, & Dweck (1994).

J) Maybe the father just left and started a new life.

T) The kid could have died. The kid could have moved away.

Below are excerpts from a conversation between two Year 4 students from Mahoe School in which they debate the character and motivations of the mother in the picture book *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2002). We include a significant portion of the conversation here to illustrate the ways in which each child builds their argument in response to the other. We also refer back to this conversation later in the report:

She might be a teensy bit posh. (P.)

Good one! (A.)

I'm not joking. She could be because Victoria is a very neat Labrador [the text uses the word pedigree]. She said "I *ordered* it" so she is a bit posh. (P.)

Is she like ordering it—like saying "Go away"? I think she's bossy. (A.)

I didn't say bossy. (P.)

She's boring because she says, "Sit!" [To her son]. (A.)

That doesn't necessarily mean she is boring. (P.)

He was talking to a "rough looking" kid [quoting from the text] and she told him to stop and sit—that's boring. (A.)

She's the opposite of boring because she is saying stuff and doing stuff... "Rough looking"—that doesn't necessarily mean he⁷ is rough. (P.)

Yes but she *thought* he was rough—"rough looking". (A.)

Adapting one's interpretations and changing one's mind

As well as being able to defend and challenge interpretations, students working in the discipline of English need to be able to adapt their interpretations in the light of new evidence and to change their mind. Teachers from both Harakeke and Mahoe observed that while students had learnt relatively quickly how to defend and challenge interpretations it took some time for them to learn how to adapt or change interpretations in response to those of others:

They're really opinionated; they want people to have the same opinions as them ... (Jessie)

Elizabeth described how some of her students found tolerating the uncertainty that comes with loosening the grasp on one belief in order to take hold of another, particularly difficult:

L and M, of all my kids, they find it really hard to let new information inform their previous information. So when they learn something they really hold it. So of all the children learning

⁷ For readers familiar with *Voices in the Park* the child these students refer to as "he" is in fact a girl—a point they realise later in the week when they re-read the story.

the living world [a science topic], L was the one who couldn't let go of the idea that things that move were living ... And the same with M, she learns something new and she holds it and she holds it and she holds it, and she's just not good at letting new things inform it. (Elizabeth)

She described how one of these students, student L, got very upset when another challenged his interpretation of the father during their unit of work on the story *Cinderella*:

We had that feisty fight earlier on about this father. One of them couldn't accept that a father would be a bad person, and so ... [it] was legitimate to him that he [the father] could lose his glasses. Because he just couldn't accept that the father would not come back after two weeks and not tell [his daughter]. And the other kid was like, No it says here that he said he *was* coming back and he *didn't* come back, therefore ... It was a really good conversation. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth described how the other students working in a group with these two came running to her in alarm saying "There's a fight". Her interpretation of the situation was that it was "a really good conversation" in which the students concerned had not quite mastered the self-management skills needed to complete it:

He got really, really angry and upset that [student] was saying one thing ... and he was saying, No, no ... it couldn't be that... It's just that he holds his view really strongly ... I think part of it is letting new information inform your previous information and neither of those two seems to do that very well. (Elizabeth)

She saw the disagreement and the response of others in the group as evidence of the need for more practice in hearing and responding to alternative viewpoints.

We also saw some examples of students modifying their interpretations in response to others. During one of our last few observations we heard one student directly acknowledge the validity of another's interpretation with the words "I see what you're saying." On the day following the discussion between Student P and Student A, presented above, there was a discussion with the whole group of children working on the text. We were interested to see that Student P had come to a slightly different interpretation of the mother that involved an amalgam of some of his original views, and some of his partner's original views to create a new interpretation. This is what Student P had to say about the mother from *Voices in the Park*:

Just like she said Sit to the dog she said Sit to her own son ... She was a little too posh to care about her son's needs [Originally his own view] ... I think she is the bossiest woman ever [originally a Student A view]. She is not bossy to Victoria [the dog] but she is to her own son. A mean old bully and a full-of-herself posh person [both views combined].

Building on others' interpretations to generate new knowledge

Students working within the discipline of English need to be able to hear, acknowledge, use and build on the interpretations of others to create knowledge that's new for all of them. It was not until quite near the end of the project that we saw some students beginning to demonstrate this

skill. The teachers described how students were beginning to show the capacity to listen to and build on each other's ideas to generate new knowledge:

Sometimes somebody makes a comment and there is this kind of linear building on it ... So someone would say something and the next one would say, Yeah, and I've seen this. And it builds [in a] linear [way]. So the same idea did build. And there were other times that like being the age that they are, there were three or four ... [ideas] going on simultaneously ... (Jessie)

And they were taking the ideas further as part of their conversations... (Elizabeth)

They're really listening to each other, and really responding ... I really like the way that there's this continuous ... collective sentence ... And it's a real case of a collective conversation. (Researcher)

But there's something quite natural about it as well, that's not a sense of being contrived. (Elizabeth)

Below is an excerpt from one of these student conversations:

Why does she shoo the dog away? (M.)

Maybe because it's not as expensive. (S.)

Because it looks poor. (W.)

She's rich with money but she's poor because she's really mean. (E.)

That man is rich with niceness. (W.)

But he's happier. (I.)

He's poor but he doesn't mind being poor because he has what he wants. (S.)

He doesn't need much but he probably would need a roof over his own head. (W.)

Taking responsibility for one's own meaning-making processes

By the end of the project students saw their role as readers as generating new interpretations of text rather than simply trying to work out the one right answer—"what the author really means" or what the teacher's interpretation is. They realised that reading is not a passive or responsive endeavour but an active and creative one which requires agency on behalf of the reader. In all of the classrooms we saw students increasingly taking responsibility for making meaning of text. In our first meeting teachers talked about wanting students to be the "boss of the text". Achieving this requires the capacity to use language, symbols, and texts, *and* to manage oneself. There was evidence that students were learning to do both.

The teachers reflected on the need for a high level of trust for such discussions to occur—something that takes time and skill to cultivate:

I also think that that discussion couldn't have happened in term one or even term two, that it had to, it's the kind of thing that has to happen much later in the year, when the kids are ... comfortable enough with their peers to share in this way. Yeah. Because they're risking ... they're putting their opinions out for someone to disagree with ... (Jessie)

Reflect on the relationship between texts, selves, interpretations

The teachers began to see that Managing Self also involves recognising the assumptions, beliefs, and values that inform our interpretations, and being able to interrogate these or have them interrogated by others:

You're hearing somebody else's voice or other people's voices about it, and ... I think it challenges you, challenges your perceptions, challenges what your beliefs are, and values and things like that, challenges what you think is true and what's not true. (Charlotte)

Every time we interpret a text we also, and at the same time, reinterpret ourselves. Readers have conversations about texts that involve *interpretation*. This involves sharing identifications with, for example, places, characters, things, events, or authors. In sharing potentially different interpretations of common experiences readers can build a sense of their own and others' identities.

Being a reader involves the capacity to reflect on this process and to consider questions such as "How do we reinterpret ourselves (as individuals, or as a collective, or as a culture) in reading this text?" There was evidence that some students in our study were beginning to build their capacity to ask and answer these questions—at least at the individual and group levels:

They're learning a lot about language, about other peoples' emotions and how they connect with themselves. (Nicola)

The discussions were so rich ... Most of it was about making our own connections and looking at our own relationships and then comparing them with the relationships in the story. (Charlotte)

We observed examples of this occurring. For example, following a spontaneous conversation about the father character in Anthony Browne's (2002) *Voices in the Park* two students in Elizabeth's class chose to share their reflections about their own situations with the teacher as the lesson was ending and the other students were leaving the room:

I don't have a father.

Elizabeth, my father doesn't live here and he has never even contacted us once!

Neither seemed to be seeking any particular reply but rather choosing to make a statement about how things were, and who they were. Interpreting the father of a character in a book gave them the time and space to think about their own situations, and on who they were and how they saw themselves in the world at that particular time.

Teachers from both schools also told us of other examples. Charlotte described how her students began to reflect on their own relationships with family members following a group discussion about the incapacity of the main character's father in *The Red Pony* (Steinbeck, 1975) to show his son affection or provide him with the support he needed:

And then we talked about perhaps, you know, other people in our own families or social circle who may be like that, who are actually kind-hearted but have difficulty relating emotions to people, or difficult situations. And so we had lots of lengthy discussions about that, which was fantastic. (Charlotte)

And so did you find that the kids were ... talking about experiences of *their* own connections with people like their fathers or other people? (Researcher)

Yeah. They didn't need a lot of encouragement. They really enjoyed that. And I actually let that go. And that's why it took us so long to get to the story, because we would read a few pages and then we would have a huge discussion. And then suddenly you know, half an hour had gone and it was over. (Charlotte)

Charlotte also described how one of the girls in her class was able both to interpret the main character's feelings of disappointment in Steinbeck's (1975) *The Red Pony* and come to a new understanding of her own past experience of loss and disappointment:

We talked about disappointment ... I remember one girl actually telling me how she had had a horse herself and in fact she did look after it, but for some reason, it got taken away from her, she just came home one day from school and her mum said, I'm sorry, the horse is gone, you know, it's not there anymore. And so it was you know, it was an uncanny resemblance to that [the main character's experience] and she just explained how she felt ... which was very similar to how the character in the story felt about things being taken away and adults coming in and making decisions and that sort of thing. And then all of them had a story to tell about it. (Charlotte)

And do you think, as a result of those discussions the ways students related to each other or thought about themselves or other people changed? (Researcher)

Absolutely. (Charlotte)

Some would say that school is not the place for such discussions. Some teachers may not have the confidence or the skills to respond to students' self-reflections or support them to maintain their boundaries as they draw on their experiences to interpret text and draw on text to reinterpret their experiences. However a skilled teacher can create an environment in which it is safe for students to share such reflections and learn how to manage how much or little of themselves they wish to expose. The examples we saw or heard about, including those presented here, were student-initiated contributions—the teacher did not ask for their responses. In these cases their contributions led to other students contributing in a similar way. Some students chose to just listen.

As other students shared their own stories the group collectively built a richer understanding of these ideas. This resulted in sophisticated interpretations of both the text of the novel and the texts of their own lives, individually and as a collective:

A real reinforcement of how important the conversations are around the reading ... It becomes—it's like building up a community of people who are reading things together and having rich conversations ... (Nicola)

I firstly found that this class ... strangely difficult to crack and that they don't give away a lot about themselves. They're very ... a tight knit community ... And I never felt that I really knew them. And in fact, this was sort of the beginning, I just wished that I had had it earlier in the year because of course, it's now the end of the year and we've sort of finished up now ... I learnt so much beyond just reading but in terms of working as a social group and again, it happened because of those conversations ... to have those conversations which are so important. (Charlotte)

Conclusion

The examples from Harakeke School and Mahoe School show how a focus on Managing Self through engagement with literary texts may better prepare students for life by providing them with opportunities to reinterpret themselves and develop a deeper understanding of the values, beliefs, and assumptions, underpinning their interpretations of text.

The competency Managing Self is associated closely with Relating to Others. We have presented these two competencies separately for reporting purposes but they are two sides of the same coin. It is only through encounters with the other that we come to know ourselves. Reading provides us with opportunities to encounter the other—authors, characters, ideas, and so forth. Knowledge of oneself—one's values, beliefs, and assumptions—is, in turn an essential component of relating to others.

To help students develop greater competency in Managing Self through literary engagement, teachers need to allow students to become immersed in complex interpretive situations for extended periods of time in which there are opportunities to practise:

- forming and expressing interpretations
- tolerating the uncertainty of there being more than one “right” answer
- defending and challenging interpretations
- adapting interpretations and changing one's mind
- building on the interpretations of others to generate knowledge that is new for all.

Teachers can provide such complex learning situations through the use of ambiguous text and open-ended questions or tasks, and by providing students with opportunities to repeatedly revisit these texts individually and as a group over an extended period of time.

7. Discussion

This section does two things. It looks back over the learning from the two years to review what we found out in relation to the research questions and makes some more speculative comments about the ways teachers might be supported to foster key competencies in their reading programmes.

The journey has taken some teachers further than others because they started in different places. This means that some of the examples of teaching and learning provided in this report go further than others. However there was every indication that for all teachers this was just a beginning and that the work they had started would continue.

Four broad themes are developed in relation to the research questions: living the key competencies; effective teacher-researcher partnerships; the role of resources in supporting change; and deep ideas across key competencies. Each theme is discussed in terms of an evaluation of our work with the teachers, and we then engage in a more speculative discussion of the transformative power of the ideas and actions discussed in the earlier sections.

At the outset the objectives of the project were:

- for researchers and teachers to work together to critically integrate the key competencies with reading.
- to use this emerging understanding to develop materials to support teaching programmes.
- to provide information for policymakers and teacher educators about the opportunities and challenges for improving learning through linking reading programmes and the key competencies.

And the research questions were:

- What does an integration of key competencies and reading look like in the middle primary school?
- How do students' opportunities to learn change as teachers work to integrate the key competencies with the teaching of reading?
- How does student engagement in learning change as teachers work to integrate the key competencies with the teaching of reading?

Comments from the teachers give broad indications that this joint learning journey did indeed unfold along the lines signalled by these objectives and questions.

At the outset of the project none of us were sure about what the integration of key competencies and reading would look like. However some of the teacher participants had already formed

tentative ideas about the transformative potential of key competencies. For example, one teacher commented:

Key competencies will enrich the reading programme ... give us a wider perspective ... more far reaching. The key competencies will help us make stronger connections [between] reading and other learning areas. [Nicola]

In general, their comments indicated that the teachers conceptualised the competencies as both potentially opening up student thinking and simultaneously representing reading *skills* and *strategies*. The following is a comment from one teacher which was representative of almost all:

They will give a more explicit focus to reading processes [and] constructing knowledge ... students will transfer knowledge across learning areas ... key competencies are the umbrella skills and strategies.

By contrast, the conversation during review day at the end of the first year was rich with possibilities. Discussions centred around four main themes. First was the idea that students need the freedom to make their own decisions as readers. Teacher responses included:

... children have to be able to access their own knowledge ... to build their own knowledge. (Sinead)

They should be able to turn to the last page [before they read the first] if they want to! (Principal 1)

It's a real privilege to work *alongside* students while they are doing that [learning what it is to be human through reading literature]. (Bronwyn)

They have to have the chance to choose their own texts. Adults won't read books they find boring but we expect kids to. (Principal 1)

Second was the idea that teachers of reading need to love reading. There was a long discussion about favourite books and about the people who had ignited a love of literature. Teacher responses included:

[I was thinking about] who influenced my thinking. Most influential were those at teachers' college. I was inspired by them. While I didn't know the nuts and bolts [of teaching reading], I went out inspired about children's literature e... I love being transported into another world. (Principal 2)

Third was the idea that teachers needed to start teaching in ways that reflected the way they read in their private lives. There was a belief that the teaching of reading was often unnatural and that teachers needed to approach texts as readers rather than as teachers. Teacher responses included:

... modelling the way you naturally read. (Jessie)

... making *thinking* [not just reading] a more natural process. (Elizabeth)

[I was] following a spontaneous conversation in the staffroom about Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* during morning tea. I thought to myself, Imagine a dozen conversations in your classroom just like that. That's all you need. (Principal 1)

These comments point directly to the first of our four themes: the importance of “living” the competencies in the classroom.

Living the key competencies

All the teachers provided at least some rich classroom experiences for their students at the start of the research. They did what felt right and they did it out of a deep interest in their children. But they were doing it intuitively—we saw little evidence of a metacognitive dimension in relation to key competencies. They may have been practising them, they may not. The teachers didn’t know and neither did the researchers. This was the dilemma we faced at the beginning of the project: none of us could describe the key competencies as being particular deep dimensions of reading practice, so we didn’t know what to look for in classrooms. The conversations we had at the workshops, the review day, and at schools, where teachers and researchers discussed what the key competencies might look like, moved our understanding on from the tacit to the explicit.

That explicit understanding, in turn, moved us into a space where we were able to model; that is, *live* the key competencies—live the *differences* they can make. This was a crucial transition because teachers who model key competencies can explicitly as well as implicitly show and talk about those differences to their students. They explicitly do this through focused modelling and talk, and they implicitly do it by acting on intuitive understandings while thinking about other things; this implicit modelling still gives the students messages about what it means to “be” someone who embodies key competencies.

It was at this realisation that we came to see the integration of key competencies as being very much about *who teachers are*. Once we had an explicit understanding of what key competencies might look like, we recognised that some of the teachers were already living them. Unfortunately they did not necessarily see the ways they were doing so as ways a teacher should properly be (see, for example, the chapter on Participating and Contributing). Our job, then, was to convince them of the validity of who they were and to give them permission to just “be” the passionate readers they were in their lives outside of school.

It is important that all teachers have the opportunity to foster these ways of being. The implication for teacher education here is that in order to be an effective teacher of reading, the teacher must be a passionate reader.

Effective teacher-researcher partnerships

At the outset of the project our intention was to build a partnership with teachers which would enable all of us to develop new understandings and share our emergent thinking. To us, the word “partnership” means that researchers and teachers will learn together, each sharing and building on our respective knowledge and skills. We decided to work indepth with a small number of schools over two years because the project was in a very new area for research and schooling.

Because of this, a generous and generative relationship between researchers and teachers has been paramount.

The process of transformation often takes people (teachers and researchers) outside their comfort zone (Garvey Berger, 2004). We believe the level of discomfort experienced by teachers has been kept to a minimum by our open admission that we did not have the answers—the researchers genuinely did not know what the integration of key competencies and reading would look like; we had neither a map nor a final destination in mind. The teachers appeared to appreciate our honesty and were, we think, more open to our ideas because of it.

Because our partnership recognised the distinctly different skills of both teachers and researchers we were able to use the skills of each group to complement those of the other. We were able to ask teachers to take risks with their teaching because they knew we were asking them to teach in ways we could not. We valued their expertise, and they knew it. We worked with the teachers for eighteen months in this way and believe it has very likely had a long-term positive effect on their confidence as teachers.

The relationship was not one-sided. While we made use of the teachers' knowledge and skills, they also made use of ours. When we saw that the Mahoe teachers were not able to easily analyse the language features of texts, we wrote them a resource. It was something we had expertise in, so we produced the resource and spent the time needed to make sure they understood it and would be able to independently use its ideas in other contexts. The teachers then developed lesson plans from the resource and the subsequent lessons demonstrated the potential of this kind of partnership to transform the teachers' practice and also their identity as teachers of key competencies (see above).

Our honesty about not knowing what the integration of key competencies might look like also has the potential to change the way teachers work. By being open about not having the answers, we modelled an acceptance of uncertainty and a process of genuine exploration—both, we believe, necessary traits for today's learners. We were trying to “live” the key competencies too.

The way we worked with teachers has also changed the way we will conduct research in the future. In particular the resource we developed for the Mahoe teachers showed us how sensitivity to teacher need, and backing up that sensitivity with practical help, can help realise the synergies of the teacher-researcher partnership.

The role of resources in supporting change

As part of our thinking about the transformative potential of key competencies we began to think about how that potential would play out in the classroom—what student work embodying the key competencies would look like. We decided to write the resource *How much is Cinderella's father to blame for her situation?* (see Appendix B) for the teachers at Mahoe because, although they were beginning to appreciate the transformative potential of key competencies—for example, they

knew the kinds of open-ended questions to ask in order to facilitate deep discussion—they did not have sufficient understanding of language features to be able to explore texts fully. The resource was essential because it enabled teachers to bring greater discipline knowledge to their teaching and so realise the transformative power of the key competencies which they had begun to recognise.

The resource not only gave the teachers discipline knowledge, it also increased their confidence in their ability to model or live key competencies; that is, it had a very real effect on who they were as teachers. We were surprised by the extent of this effect—that a resource which assisted the teachers to understand the *form* of a text would so positively affect their identity as teachers who modelled key competencies. We have speculated that, had the teachers not done so much thinking about the transformative potential of key competencies, they might have used the resource quite differently. They might have developed a lesson that focused the students on form only, and neglected the social function of the text—in this case its ability to generate discussion on parental responsibility. The role this resource had in supporting a change in teacher identity has highlighted the importance of a focus on text form as an essential part of the integration of key competencies and reading. The implication for teacher education here is that in order to be an effective teacher of reading, the teacher must have an understanding of how texts are constructed.

Deep ideas across the key competencies

A dilemma when researching complex aspects of learning such as key competency development is that all of the key competencies are always in play. For analysis purposes, and to highlight the unique characteristics of each one, it has been necessary to adopt a process of foregrounding one key competency and backgrounding the others. As the research progressed it became more and more clear that, regardless of which key competency was foregrounded, the same ideas surfaced. That is, we found that there is a group of ideas that do not “go” more comfortably with one key competency, but rather, it is more the case that they are engaged when any of the five key competencies is being modelled and discussed.

An example of an idea engaged by all key competencies is that of interpretive space. In essence, when any one of the key competencies is integrated into reading programmes, the same effect occurs—interpretive space is opened up. Interpretation occurs when the world announced by the text—sometimes called the “in-text” connects with the world of the reader—sometimes called the “out-of-text” (Sumara, 2002; Twist and Hipkins, 2009). We found that all key competencies increase students’ opportunities to interpret texts in ways that connect to their lived experiences. For example, when Participating and Contributing is foregrounded as it was at Mahoe, the students began to see themselves as literary critics. As a result of this, their confidence increased, and they showed an increased willingness to interpret. When the key competency Using Language, Symbols, and Texts was foregrounded at the same school, the students began to draw on contexts outside the text in order to make meaning. Because of the increased resources they then had to draw on, their interpretations became broader and deeper.

Once we realised that the same deep ideas are engaged within all key competencies, the focus of our investigation became even more firmly based on literacy ideas. More and more we came to see our job as an exploration of ideas generated at the intersection of key competencies and reading—an exploration of the space between key competencies and reading. The power of key competencies to shift the focus squarely onto ideas has perhaps been the most transformational aspect of our research—both for teachers and researchers.

Concluding comment

We see lively conversations about literary ideas, both ideas about the world and ideas about the construction of texts, when key competencies are integrated into reading programmes (Research Question One). It is clear that the nature of student opportunities to learn do change in powerful ways (Research Question Two). And, as students bring their lived lives to the interpretive space that opens up in the classroom, engagement with reading increases, often dramatically (Research Question Three). The challenge now is how to scale up these findings so that other teachers and students can enjoy these learning gains and what we now see as transformative (and hence outside the norm) becomes what we *expect* to see.

References

- Antsey, M., & Bull, G. (2006). *Teaching and learning multiliteracies: Changing times, changing literacies*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.
- Applegate, M. D., & Applegate, A. J. (2004). The Peter effect: Reading habits and attitudes of preservice teachers. *The Reading Teacher, 57*, 554–563.
- Baron-Cohen, S. (2001). The “Reading of the Mind in the Eyes” test revised version: A study of normal adults, and adults with Asperger Syndrome or high-functioning autism. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 42*, (2), 241–251.
- Bazerman, C. (2004). Intertextuality: How texts rely on other texts. In C. Bazerman & P. Prior (Eds.), *What writing does and how it does it* (pp. 83–96). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bornholdt, J. (2003a). The poem person. *School Journal, Part 4* (3), 12–13. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Bornholdt, J. (2003b). Instructions for how to get ahead of yourself while the light still shines. *School Journal, Part 4*(3), 11. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Browne, A. (Writer & Illustrator). (2002). *Voices in the park*. New York: DK Publishing.
- Carr, M. (2006). *Dimensions of strength for key competencies*. University of Waikato. Retrieved February 2008 from. http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_project_archives/references
- Chiu, C., Hong, Y., & Dweck, C. (1994). Toward an integrative model of personality and intelligence: A general framework and some preliminary steps. In R. Sternberg & P. Ruzgis (Eds.), *Personality and intelligence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Community Economic Development Action Research Project (2004). *Doing action research: Key learnings and emerging principles*. Wellington: Department of Labour.
- Dahimene, A. (Writer), & Stollinger, H. (Illustrator). (2005). *Donkeys* (C. Chidgey, trans). Wellington: Gecko Press. (Original work published 2002)
- Djivic, M., Oatley, K., Zoeterman, S., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). On being moved by art: How reading fiction transforms the self. *Creativity Research Journal, 21* (1), 24–29.
- Engle, R. A. (2006). Framing interactions to foster generative learning: A situated explanation of transfer in a community of learners classroom. *The Journal of Learning Sciences, 15*, (4), 451–498.
- Garvey Berger, J. (2004). Dancing on the threshold of meaning: Recognizing and understanding the growing edge. *Journal of Transformative Educatio..2*, (4), 336–351.
- Gee, J. P. (2008). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Hipkins, R. (2006). *The nature of the key competencies. A background paper*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research. <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/references>
- Hipkins, R. (2009). Determining meaning for key competencies via assessment practices. *Assessment Matters, 1*, 4–19.
- Hipkins, R., Cowie, B., Boyd, S., & McGee, C. (2009). *Themes from the Curriculum Implementation Case Studies*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Implementation-project-overview/Implementation-exploratory-studies-updates>
- Hunt, S. (1989). Boy’s song in *The sleepy giant and other poems*. Wellington, Learning Media.

- Knobel, M., & Healy A. (Eds.). (1998). *Critical literacies in the primary classroom*. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Lankshear, C. (1994). *Critical literacy*. Belconnen, ACT: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1999). A map of possible practices: Further notes on the four resources model. *Practically Primary*, 4 (2). Available at <http://www.alea.edu.au/freebody.htm>
- Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., Hirsh, J., dela Paz, J., & Peterson, J. B. (2006). Bookworms versus nerds: Exposure to fiction versus non-fiction, divergent associations with social ability, and the simulation of fictional social worlds. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40, 694–712.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Moje, E. B. (2008). Foregrounding the disciplines in secondary literacy teaching and learning: A call for change. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 52, (2), 98–107.
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60–92.
- Oatley, K. (2008). The science of fiction. *New Scientist*, 198,(2662), 42–43.
- OECD. (2005). *The definition and selection of key competencies: Executive summary*. Paris: Accessed 2 December 2005, from www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf.
- Penn, A. (Writer), & Gibson, B. L. (Illustrator). (2006). *A pocket full of kisses*. Terre Haute, IN: Tanglewood Press.
- Reid, A. (2006). Key competencies: A new way forward or more of the same. *Curriculum Matters*, 2, 43–62.
- Roberts, L. (Writer), & Roberts, D. (Illustrator). (2001). *Cinderella: An art deco love story*. London: Pavilion Children's Books.
- Sandretto, S., & Critical Literacy Research Team. (2006a). Extending guided reading with critical literacy. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 23–28.
- Sandretto, S., Tilson, J., Hill, P., Howland, R., & Upton, J. (2006b). *A collaborative self-study into the development of critical literacy practices: Final report*. Wellington: Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. Available at <http://www.tlri.org.nz>
- Steinbeck, J. (1975). *The red pony*. London: Pan Books.
- Sumara, D. (2002). *Why reading literature in school still matters: Imagination, interpretation, insight*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Twist, J., & Hipkins, R. (2009). Children's literary engagements with texts: Preliminary findings from the Lifelong Literacy research project. In M. Sinclair (Ed.), *A journey of discovery: Facilitating the initiation and application of schooling research*, pp. 31–41. Wellington: Cognition Institute.

Appendix A: Four Resources Model

Introduction

The teachers were introduced to Luke and Freebody's (1999) Four Resources Model at the first workshop. The following resource summarises the model, which we suggested might help them think about which elements were already part of their reading programmes and which elements were not.

The Four Resources Model is a broad and comprehensive approach to reading texts. Each element is necessary but not sufficient on its own.

The model is not a developmental sequence; the elements are not stages or levels to be dealt with in turn. Teachers need to include all four elements when developing reading programmes.

Code breaker	Meaning maker	Text user	Text critic
How do I crack this text? How does it work? What are its patterns and conventions? How do the sounds and marks relate, singly and in combinations?	How do the ideas represented in the text string together? What cultural resources can be brought to bear on this text? What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from this text?	How do the uses of this text shape its composition? What do I do with this text, here and now? What will others do with it? What are my options and alternatives when using this text?	What kind of person, with what interests and values, could both write and read this naively and unproblematically? Which positions, voices and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?

Code breaker:

Break the code of texts (i.e., find out how texts work by drawing upon knowledge of text features). For example: the alphabet, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, words (e.g., verb patterns and dialogue), visual resources (e.g., diagrams, illustrations and camera angles), punctuation, grammar and the structure or organisation of texts (e.g., the connection or conflict that arises between characters in the middle section of a narrative). [Useful ARBs: Moa WL2653; Variable oystercatchers WL2654; Changes of state WL2655; The Terotero WL2558; To spray or not to spray? WL2549; On the reclaim WL2618].

Meaning maker:

Participate in understanding texts by drawing upon knowledge of the text and knowledge of the topic (cultural or background knowledge) to infer meaning. Interpret unfamiliar details which results in the production of knowledge. [Useful ARBs: WL2547; WL4044; WL4046; WL4047.]

Text user:

Use texts for particular purposes in particular contexts (i.e., understand that texts perform different cultural and social functions) by drawing on a knowledge of genre. [Useful ARBs: Moa WL2653; Variable oystercatchers WL2654; Changes of state WL2655; Don't miss the bus! WL2652.]

Text critic:

Critically analyse texts by acting on the knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral—that they represent particular points of view while silencing others. This is done by drawing on knowledge of the techniques used to represent and silence particular points of view. [Useful ARBs: To spray or not to spray? WL2549; On the reclaim WL2618—this resource dips its toe into critical analysis.]

Who developed it?

Professor Allan Luke (Queensland University of Technology) and Professor Peter Freebody (The University of Sydney).

Is it current?

Yes, even though it was first developed in 1990, it has been modified over the years.

How might it be useful for this project?

It can be used as a map to help you work out where you want to go with reading in your classes. First examine the model and think about what you're doing well already, and where you need to get better. Ask yourself the following questions, keeping in mind that individuals and communities are likely to read in ways that you are unaware of:

1. What kinds of reading do the students do? (Relates to the breadth of the individual and community repertoire.)
2. How much control do they have when they read? (Relates to the depth and degree of control exercised by an individual or community.)
3. Do they have the knowledge and skills required to create new knowledge and gain insight when they read? (Relates to the extent of hybridity, novelty and redesign exercised by an individual or community.)

We chose this model for two main reasons:

1. Because it will reassure you that much of what you do is best practice, but it will also prompt you to think about where to go next.
2. Because when you feel comfortable using this model to evaluate where you are now and where you need to go next, we believe you will be in a strong enough position to be able to instinctively know what the integration of the key competencies within reading might look like. That is, a reading programme designed with the Four Resources Model in mind will be one that is conducive to the practice of the key competencies.

References

Four Resources Model article:

http://www.readingonline.org/past/past_index.asp?HREF=/research/lukefreebody.html

Webcast featuring Allan Luke entitled “The New Literacies” (55minutes):

<http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/may31.shtml>

Appendix B: Introduction to the *Cinderella* resources

These three teaching resources, or Thinking Objects as we prefer to call them, are not full lesson plans but questions with related text analyses designed to prompt teacher thinking rather than prescribe teaching practice. They provided teachers with an analysis of the text which they then use to develop lessons for particular age groups—probably Year 4 upwards, although the questions could be modified to suit lower year levels. All three Thinking Objects have been developed using *Cinderella: An Art Deco Love Story* (Roberts & Roberts, 2001)—a version of the traditional tale set in the late 1920s.

The first (A) *How much is Cinderella's father to blame for her situation?* was written for the teachers at Mahoe School. It became clear during the research that neither teachers nor students understood how texts were constructed, at least, not in sufficient detail. While students in both classes were attempting to engage with the ideas raised within picture books, they lacked any real understanding of how writers use language features for social purposes, and this lack of understanding limited the extent to which the bigger questions could be explored.

The researchers and teachers spent most of a day talking about the Thinking Object and about characterisation in more general terms. During this time both teachers began to plan their lessons around the *Cinderella* text and Thinking Object (which analysed the character of the father in terms of his appearance, dialogue, action, thought and what the author tells the reader about him).

The Thinking Object *How much is Cinderella's father to blame for her situation?* was later posted on NZCER's Shifting Thinking website (<http://www.shiftingthinking.org/>) and presented at two literacy conferences for teachers. Feedback was very positive. Because of this we decided to write two more Thinking Objects: *How much is Cinderella to blame for the bad situation she finds herself in?* and *How malicious is Cinderella's stepfamily?*

Because of the size of Thinking Objects we have not included them in the report. However, they are available online:

How much is Cinderella's father to blame for her situation?

<http://www.shiftingthinking.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Thinking-Object-Father.pdf>

How much is Cinderella to blame for the bad situation she finds herself in?

<http://www.shiftingthinking.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Thinking-Object-Cinderella.pdf>

How malicious is Cinderella's stepfamily?

<http://www.shiftingthinking.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Thinking-Object-Stepfamily.pdf>

Appendix C: Summary of presentations

In addition to the fieldwork done in order to prepare this report, we have given six presentations of our preliminary findings. Audiences have included teachers, principals, literacy advisers, academics, Ministry of Education officials and Cognition Institute Trustees:

Twist, J. (2009, December). *Key competencies: Giving readers the space to interpret*. Presentation at the Australian Association of Researchers in Education (AARE) conference, Canberra.

Twist, J., & McDowall, S. (2009, November). *Shifting thinking about reading*. Workshop at the Shifting Thinking conference, Circa Theatre, Wellington.

Twist, J., & McDowall, S. (2009, September). *Lifelong literacy*. Presentation at the Cognition Institute Thought Leader symposium, Hyatt Hotel, Auckland.

Twist, J., & McDowall, S. (2009, September). *Key competencies and reading*. Presentation at the New Zealand Reading Association (NZRA) conference, Queenstown.

Twist, J., & McDowall, S. (2009, June). *Integrating key competencies and reading*. Workshop presented at EHSAS (Extending High Standards Across Schools) Project mini-conference, Tauranga.

Twist, J., & McDowall (2008, November). *Thinking about key competencies*. Presentation to Wairarapa primary principals.