

*Creative Pedagogies for At Risk Adolescents in Alternative
Education Settings*

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ABSTRACT

It has been said in the invitation to this conference that “schools face new contexts and conditions for pedagogy”. This statement is especially applicable to a growing number of alternative schools targeting at risk adolescents. These are students who are at risk of failing to attain basic literacy skills, have dropped out of the mainstream school system, and have disconnected from community life. In the alternative education context teachers are endeavouring to develop pedagogies that will re-engage these adolescents. To do this they are having to creatively draw on a multiplicity of pedagogic practices.

This paper examines the creative programs and pedagogic practices at several alternative education sites participating in a doctoral study. There are four participating sites in Queensland, Australia, with a comparative site in Texas. Each site represents a unique type of alternative schooling. Additionally each site is implementing a distinctive type of literacy programming. How each of the alternative schools meet the challenge of redesigning their literacy pedagogies to re-engage at risk adolescents should prove informative to educators in both the alternative and mainstream sectors.

INTRODUCTION

What is common to all adolescents attending these alternative centres is none of them were previously attending a mainstream high school. They had either dropped out of school, been excluded or were being home schooled. The literacy levels of these students vary, but the majority when they first attended the alternative centres had literacy levels in the two bottom registers of the International Adult Literacy Survey’s (IALS) continuum of five literacy/numeracy standards (Statistics Canada, 2003; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). In Australia these standards have been converted into a national measure called *the National Reporting System* (NRS), with one difference the NRS also includes oral communication (Coates, Fitzpatrick, Mckenna, & Makin, 1996).

As applied to students participating in the study it means students at Level 1 cannot write a simple sentence with a capital letter and a full stop, and would find reading the newspaper difficult. Students at level 2 could only write simple sentences, use connectors such as ‘and’ and ‘but’, and read a newspaper but not fully comprehend all its contents; while attaining competencies at Level 3 indicates a sound level of comprehension of newspaper contents, and the ability to write complex sentences in two to three structured paragraphs.

Apart from not attending mainstream schools, and experiencing low literacy levels students experienced other at risk factors. Just under 25% of participating students live ‘independently’, not residing in the family home, while 90% had participated in some form of high level disruptive behaviour when at their mainstream school.

To ameliorate their students’ past patterns of behaviour and re-engage them in learning, the teaching staff at the five study sites employed a variety of programs and associated pedagogic strategies. This paper examines the literacy component of these programs and pedagogies. To have a benchmark to compare students across the study sites, the author, as an NRS assessor, will allocate an NRS level to students based on their work samples and assessment information collected.

LITERACY PROGRAMS

This purely descriptive section takes a long range view of how the literacy programs and pedagogies that facilitate them are being implemented at all case study sites. The next section will give a close up view of the programs and pedagogies at one site, and will use current literacy models to make a detailed analysis.

LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND NUMERACY PROGRAM (LLNP) – Regional TAFE, Queensland

Initially all research instruments were trialled for three weeks at a coastal Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college in a regional locality.

Alternative Education Sites	Regional TAFE, Qld [large coastal region]	Rural Flexi School, Qld [small mountain towns]	Suburban TAFE, Qld [in state capital, Brisbane]	Alternative Education Centre, Qld [rural city]	GED Program, Texas, USA [rural city]
Program	Language, Literacy & Numeracy Program [LLNP]	Brisbane School of Distance Education	Cert I Vocational Access for Youth at Risk	Individual Programs	General Education Development exam
Learning ... Theories / Focus	Gaining Employment OR Access to further Training	Gaining a High School Education to Year 10 level [Year 12 available]	Gaining Employment OR Access to further Training	Glaser's ... <i>Choice Theory & Quality World</i> . Students choosing to include learning and acceptable behaviours in their Quality World.	Blooms Taxonomy – <i>hierarchy of cognitive tasks</i> Gaining the equivalent of a basic High School education
Program's Literacy Outcome	Achieve NRS LEVEL 3 literacy	Gain Year 10 statement of attainment (NRS 4)	Achieve NRS LEVEL 3 literacy	a) Skills to participate in a mainstream class AND/OR b) Able to fill out forms, read & understand basic printed material (NRS 1)	Literacy proficiency to Pass the Year 12 equivalent exam in 5 subject areas
Main Literacy Focus	Oral and written literacy associated with gaining employment and the workplace	Year level Queensland English curriculum, OR Vocational /Daily Life focussed literacy booklets	Oral and written assessment tasks based on real life tasks, chosen democratically by students	1) Reading daily to students 2) Activities based on students' interests, "seizing the moment"	Reading & Written literacy tasks associated with business and traditional literature [GED] Oral/powerpoint presentations [CENTRE BASED]
Resources Used	TAFE – teacher developed workbooks and worksheets, daily newspapers, computers, internet, note pads.	Brisbane School of Distance Education - workbooks, note pads, online computer learning & research, TAFE course materials.	TAFE – Teacher developed materials. Student research in library, on internet, phonebooks, newspapers and community networks.	Teacher developed material based on individual student needs. Computer programs – typing, maths and spelling	Packets of worksheets photocopied from GED textbooks, computers, powerpoint & graphics software, internet as a research tool.

This centre conducts a literacy and numeracy program for unemployed adults, where a large number of disengaged adolescents are enrolled. In fact the coordinator stated that “at least half of our clients are adolescents.” The program is called the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), a federally funded program which is part of the requirements for unemployed adults and adolescents to receive their dole payment or youth allowance. This program has been in existence since 2002. TAFE is one of several providers contracted by the Australian federal government to deliver the LLNP program. Youth at risk of not having sufficient literacy or numeracy skills to gain employment are referred by Centrelink staff (Australian social security agency) to TAFE for literacy and numeracy assessment. Thus at risk adolescents entering the literacy program are

allocated a NRS level and placed in either a Level 1, or Level 2 class. If their skills are NRS 3 they are not eligible to enter the program. Apart from requiring an NRS attainment, TAFE has its own literacy curriculum comprised of three modules with six outcomes per module. Students have to successfully complete the six outcomes before being graded as competent for the module. The outcomes are similar but with increased skill levels. They are:

- OUTCOME 1. Written piece about a job/training program.
- OUTCOME 2. Oral presentation
- OUTCOME 3. Employment Forms
- OUTCOME 4. Research and present findings
- OUTCOME 5/6 Write instructions and present them to class

Resources used to teach this program are a series of workbooks, which have been developed by the literacy team. There is a workbook for each outcome containing teacher devised exercises based on real life or employment related activities. Also one of the team has developed workbooks with activities related to grammatical and structural aspects of writing such as apostrophes, common spelling patterns, sentences with subordinate conjunctions, and proof reading. Additionally on the two days students attend the literacy classes daily newspapers are provided for students to read an article, retell and give their opinion either orally and/or in writing. Teachers also provide their own worksheets as deemed appropriate, and use whiteboards. At least one and a half hours of the total nine hours allocated to literacy classes are spent each week in the computer room. There students type up written activities or utilize literacy websites such as the BBC *Skillswise* site (bbc.co.uk, 2005).

GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT (GED) PROGRAM – Texas, USA

At the comparative site in Texas, students enter the centre with a range of literacy levels from a 1st or 2nd grade (NRS 1) up to a 9th or 10th grade (NRS 3). The literacy program is based on two specific components of the General Education Development exam, the *Language Arts, Writing* segment and the *Language Arts, Reading* segment. Teachers prepare their students to pass these two segments, as well as have the literacy skills to read and interpret the other three subjects included in the exam: *Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies*. This federal program was first developed in 1942 for men and women enlisted in the armed forces to gain a Year 12 high school equivalent qualification. It has been updated three times. The last update was in 2002. Of this last revision, the official GED site says “GED candidates can expect to encounter more business-related and adult-

context information texts across all five tests.” (GED Testing Service, November, 2004a). Apart from the workplace and real life focus, the GED also focuses on traditional literature. The *Reading* segment is based on 75% traditional literary texts and 25% workplace and real life non fiction. It “contains 40 multiple-choice questions that measure [students’] ability to comprehend and interpret workplace and academic reading selections and to apply those interpretations to new contexts” (GED Testing Service, November, 2004b). The *Writing* segment is based entirely on business / real life issues, with students writing a 250 word essay of three to five paragraphs. There are also 50 multiple choice questions requiring grammatical revision and editing of documents (GED Testing Service, November, 2004c). To prepare their students the four teachers at the centre used packets of worksheets photocopied from commercially produced GED textbooks. These were supplemented by their own materials. Teachers also used classroom whiteboards. Another form of literacy provided for students at this centre was a computer class twice a week for one hour, where students learnt to research on the internet and then prepare a power point presentation which they delivered orally to the class. Additionally all students learnt how to prepare a resume using the computers.

BRISBANE SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM – Flexi School, Small Rural Mountain Town, Qld.

The rural Flexi school is one of the three main case study sites, which have been visited over a period of 12 months. This one room school is situated underneath a building housing governmental offices and agents in the industrial sector of a small rural mountain town. The vehicle to provide literacy to approximately 30 enrolled adolescents is the Brisbane School of Distance Education workbooks. Because of the diverse levels there are two types of literacy provision. Those students with a higher level are enrolled in the Queensland mainstream English curriculum, and those with a lower level of literacy are enrolled in a “literacy” curriculum. There are a series of workbooks addressing Queensland English curriculum content areas for each grade level, and there are also literacy curriculum workbooks covering vocational and real life topics such as “Behind the Wheel”, “Buyer Beware”, and “Job Hunting”. These literacy workbooks were originally produced for adults with lower literacy levels, but the centre has found them helpful for their adolescents. Other resources the students use at the centre are note pads, computers, printers, a digital camera, cable television with the education channel, and online learning via phone and the internet. Additionally some students are also enrolled in Certificate courses at TAFE or attend one or two classes up at the local high school. Students have various education goals. Some want to obtain their Year 10 statement of attainment or the Year 12 Certificate, others want to go on to gain apprenticeship certificates at TAFE, and some want to obtain immediate employment.

CERTIFICATE 1 IN VOCATIONAL ACCESS for YOUTH AT RISK – Suburban TAFE, Queensland

Unlike the first pilot study TAFE program where adults and adolescents learn together, the Certificate I in Workplace Access is solely for adolescents, aged 15 to 17. The goal of participating in this one year program is for “Youth at Risk” to access an alternative pathway to year 10 that provides an entry level to work or further study. Students entering this program have more uniform literacy levels than those at the other case study sites. Their levels ranged between a high NRS level 1 and NRS 2. The literacy goal for this program is for students to become competent in all the NRS level 3 skills. The literacy classes are just one component of the Certificate I in Vocational Access. This program had been specifically tailored to meet the needs of disengaged adolescents. It offers the students two vocational strands: the hospitality/office/retail strand, and the engineering/horticulture /construction strand. To gain their Certificate I students have to successfully complete two vocational workshops in their strand, complete 200 hours vocational placement, participate in a skills for the future course, a personal development course, as well as attend literacy and numeracy classes and exit with a NRS level 3.

In the literacy part of the program observed, there were no workbooks. All resource materials were developed by the literacy teacher, who taught all five literacy classes, assisted by a tutor. Students were placed in either a higher or lower ability class based on initial assessments. The teacher allowed a democratic process whereby students could vote on content areas for assessment tasks. For example, in three classes consisting mainly of boys they chose to do *Themes*. After brainstorming and a majority vote, music became their first theme. Assessment items being, “First, write and explain about a band, style or artist; and second, read about a band answer comprehension questions”. The boys then chose a second theme “drugs and diseases”. The two classes composed mainly of girls chose to raise funds for two different charities. The teacher then structured the fundraising literacy classes to take the format of a fundraising committee, with all the related literacy experiences becoming assessment items. Resources used for the literacy classes were whiteboards, blackboards, computers, printers, internet, fax machine, note pads, VCRs and television.

INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS – Alternative Education Centre, Rural City, Queensland

This centre like the preceding alternative education site was established purely for at risk adolescents. However these students were a much younger cohort, aged between 11 and 15. They were also highly disengaged students

who have often experienced a great deal of trauma, either at school or at home. This trauma has greatly affected their ability to function in every day society, let alone become confident risk taking learners. If graded on the NRS scale, the literacy level of these students would often be below level 1.

In 2000 the state education department gave this site, as one of five trial alternative education centres, a mandate to develop individual programs for highly disengaged adolescents who were not coping with mainstream schooling. Consequently students who are referred from state primary and high of this rural city have unique patterns of attendance and academic programming. Some students come just for an hour or two, once a week, attending the rest of the week at their own primary or high school. Other students come regularly every day from 9am to 1pm. For students attending on a daily basis literacy takes the form of daily book readings. This means one-on-one teacher or tutor reading *to* the student in one of the six small teaching rooms. Reading to students is part of the centre's philosophy based on Glasser's *Quality World*. And *Choice Theory*.

In helping these children catch on to the joy of reading, you are fighting for their educational lives.
There is absolutely nothing better to do with your time than to read a good book to a child.
That minimal effort is the strongest weapon you have to work against the *give up, we can't do it or we're not very good at it mentality* that locks poor readers into low school achievement and failure.
(Glasser, 2000, p.147, bold emphasis author's)

The second part of the literacy focus is teacher developed individual activities based on each student's skill levels and interests. For students attending on a more infrequent basis learning takes the form of a hands on approach, with subjects such as music, art, craft, woodwork and cooking. However for Mr and Mrs T the centre directors and teachers, every learning experience is an opportunity to teach literacy. Every conceivable type of material becomes a literacy teaching resource, from plasticine and sand trays, to cardboard, note pads, cooking lists, labels, computers, typing/maths/spelling software, and radio equipment.

LITERACY MODELS

To make a detailed analysis of the literacy teaching taking place at alternative education centres, a composite model has been developed (Table 2). This composite model draws on language and pedagogical models that have been constructed by academics and employed in mainstream schools and alternative education centres in Australia over the past twenty years, often in a somewhat hybrid form. These various language and pedagogical models are outlined below, with summarizing explanations in brackets.

LANGUAGE MODELS FOR LITERACY TEACHING

Four resources model: code breakers (decoders/functional skills); text participants (readers, listeners/comprehension skills); text users (writers, speakers/genre skills); text analysis (analysers/critical literacy skills), (Santoro, 2004). This model aimed to answer two questions:

'What does it mean for my students to be members of a literate society – full members, not just with access, but also with a zest for participating and an instinct to exercise agency?' And, in that light, 'What categories of practice should a literacy program include?' (Freebody, 2004, p.4)

3D model of literacy practice: operational dimension (code breaking); cultural dimension (meaning – cultural contexts); critical dimension (meaning – social contexts/access to criteria for transformation) (Knobel, 2003).

This 'model' or guiding framework develops a sociocultural view of literacy (Knobel, 2003, p.95).

Multiliteracies design modes: linguistic design (not purely mechanical skills/language as a meaning making system); visual design (colours, perspectives, foreground, background); audio design (music, sound); gestural design (behaviour, body, feelings, proxemics); spatial design (ecosystem, geographic, architectonic) and multimodal design (patterns of interconnection between modes).

Authors of the multiliteracy design model explained that one of its objectives was to provide an accessible "metalanguage - a language for talking about language, images, texts and meaning-making interactions" (The New London Group, 2000, p.24). This was done in the context of increasing cultural hybridity and multimodality (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Fairclough, 2000).

PEDAGOGICAL MODELS FOR LITERACY TEACHING

In the Australian context the above language models for literacy have often been used in conjunction with the following two pedagogical models, or with elements of these pedagogical models.

Multiliteracies four components of pedagogy: “Situated Practice (meaning making in lifeworlds, the public realm, and workplaces); Overt Instruction (through which students develop an explicit metalanguage of Design); Critical Framing (interpreting social context and purpose of Designs of meaning); and Transformed Practice (students as meaning makers, become designers of social futures)” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p.7).

New Basics Project, Productive Pedagogies – four dimensions of practice: Intellectual Quality (higher order thinking, deep knowledge, deep understanding, substantive conversation, knowledge as problematic, metalanguage); Connectedness (knowledge integration, background knowledge, connectedness to the world, problem based curriculum); Supportive Classroom Environment (student control, social support, engagement, explicit quality performance criteria, self-regulation); Recognition of Difference (cultural knowledge, inclusivity, narrative, group identity, citizenship) (The State of Queensland, Department of Education, 2001, p.5).

LANGUAGE & PEDAGOGICAL COMPOSITE ASSESSMENT MODEL

In developing a composite analysis model (Table 2), I have chosen to use the **Four Resources Model** and

Productive Pedagogies’ four dimensions of practice. The **Four Resources Model** was chosen firstly because its focus is the detailing of linguistic skills, which are only a component of the other models. Secondly, it clearly includes a critical literacy focus which the Multiliteracies language model does not include. Thirdly, the Four Resource Model represents an integrated approach where adolescents with low literacy levels can still access all four areas of expertise, unlike in a hierarchical approach where, for example, critical analysis is only taught to higher level students (Nichols & Bayetto, 2004). **Productive Pedagogies** was chosen because it minutely details the pedagogic practices needed for successful student engagement and learning. The key elements of these two models are outlined in Table 2 combining to form a literacy analysis check list (or model) of students’ language acquisition and teachers’ pedagogical practices.

Applying this composite model to teaching and learning practices at one of the alternative sites will demonstrate how it is possible to obtain a clearer and more detailed picture of the creative pedagogies employed to facilitate language acquisition for at risk adolescents.

TABLE 2 – LANGUAGE & PEDAGOGICAL COMPOSITE ASSESSMENT MODEL					
<i>Language Model:</i> 4 RESOURCES MODEL (Freebody, 2004; Santoro, 2004)					
1. Code Breakers (decoders / functional skills)	C h e c k	2. Text Participants (readers, listeners / comprehension skills)	C h e c k	3. Text Users (writers, speakers / discourse & genre skills)	C h e c k
i) Grapho /phonic decoding		i) Stated / unstated patterns of meanings ...		i) Genres’ form / function	
ii) Punctuation / formatting conventions		- vocabulary - clauses		ii) Genres’ socio-cultural expectations	
		ii) Genres’ conventions & components			
					ii) Cultural & ideological bias
					ii) How author positions reader
					iii) How gaps, silences, missing points of view – constrain & influence reader
<i>Pedagogical Model:</i> PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES - 4 Dimensions of Practice (Education Queensland, 2001-2003)					
1. Intellectual Quality (depth of knowledge)	C h e c k	2. Connected-ness (student knowledge to a widening community knowledge)	C h e c k	3. Supportive Classroom Environment (student ownership, behaviours, teacher scaffolding)	C h e c k
i) Higher Order Thinking		i) Knowledge Integration		i) Student Control	
ii) Deep Knowledge		ii) Background Knowledge		ii) Social Support	
iii) Deep Understanding		iii) Connected-ness to the World		iii) Engagement	
iv) Substantive Conversation		iv) Problem based Curriculum		iv) Explicit Quality Performance Criteria	
v) Knowledge as problematic				v) Self-regulation	
vi) Metalanguage					
					i) Cultural Knowledge
					ii) Inclusivity
					iii) Narrative
					iv) Group Identity
					v) Citizenship

CREATIVE PEDAGOGIES THAT FACILITATE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

RURAL FLEXI SCHOOL – 2 Embedded Case Studies: John, 14 & Nicole, 16

Two students, John and Nicole chosen from approximately 30 enrolled adolescents aged 14 to 18 were representative of age groupings, literacy levels, and level of at-riskness educationally and socially. John and Nicole, like all students attending the Flexi school had an individual program written for them at the beginning of each year. These programs generally included not only an academic component (the Brisbane School of Distance Education materials [BSDE]), but also possibilities of work experience/traineeships and TAFE or High School subjects, as well as personal goals.

The first student, John was 14, the youngest of five brothers with two older brothers also attending the Flexi school. He is also one of the youngest students at the Flexi school. Because his family lives on a boat and has moved around, he has had gaps in school attendance. For example, he attended primary school up to grade 6 but then missed a couple of years, not enrolling at Flexi until grade 8. In 2004 he was in grade 9 and attended every day; however, keeping on task was an increasing problem, more than the previous year. His teacher reported “It’s hard work getting him to do work. It’s tough to get him to sit down.” The para teacher also reported, “He has completed 20 pieces of BSDE (Brisbane School of Distance Education) work, which is a good result considering the efforts required by staff to encourage him to do any work. A lot of energy has been expended trying to keep John on task.” As a researcher I observed the same thing. In a 16 minute interview, less than half the time all other students in the study spent responding to interview questions, it was hard to gain more than a yes/no answer, and he often spent time discussing personalized number plates with his friend who came and went throughout the interview (the interview taking place in the one room school). Nevertheless the discussion of personalized number plates was a learning activity; in fact a student directed learning activity, where John and his friend were using computers and the internet to investigate how to design a personalized number plate, initial information having been found in a magazine. This type of learning activity fits in with the Flexi school philosophy. For apart from completing their set workbook tasks, the centre also encourages “unofficial literacy”. Teacher Jack commented,

So the literacy stuff is very important to those students. But you don’t necessarily do it all the time through the programs, the BSDE. You know it can just happen in conversation. Talking about things generally, news items, things that are in the news. There’s a lot of unofficial work that goes on too that’s as important as the BSDE ... technology – how things work, describing how things work. So I think there’s a lot of incidental stuff that is also important.

The second teacher who was also the Flexi coordinator wrote on the questionnaire regarding “Literacy with inbuilt flexibility”:

Formal BSDE – No [no inbuilt flexibility], but [Yes] informal tasks, eg writing article for newspaper. Working on issues of recognising achievements in literacy that don’t fit into formal programs. Maybe a folio approach and how this might demonstrate various skills.

To this end the coordinator had bought a digital camera for the school so the students, especially the boys would find this digital “literacy” fun and be encouraged to write stories to go with the pictures. The resultant articles could then be published regularly in the town newspaper. In this way literacy would be a useful tool in establishing community links, promoting a positive image of the Flexi school, and have a real life application.

So for John applying the **Composite Literacy Assessment Model** (Table 3) his linguistic or language acquisition has strengths mainly in the areas of factual or concrete literacy skills. From two assessment items, one from the beginning of 2004 and one from the end of the year, it was evident that his decoding and grammar skills had

TABLE 3: <i>Composite Literacy Assessment Model-abbreviated</i> <i>FLEXI SCHOOL STUDENT: JOHN</i>					
<i>Language Model:</i> 4 RESOURCES MODEL (Freebody, 2004; Santoro, 2004)				55%	
1. Code Breakers	2/2	2. Text Participants	3/4	3. Text Users	1/2
i) decoding	✓	i) patterns of meanings ...	X	i) Genres’ form / function	✓
ii) grammar	✓	- vocabulary	✓	ii) Genres’ socio-cultural expectations	X
		- clauses	✓	iii) gaps, constrain influence	X
		ii) Genres	✓		
<i>Pedagogical Model:</i> PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES (Ed Qld, 2001-2003)				55%	
1. Intellectual Quality	1/6	2. Connectedness [K = knowledge]	3/4	3. Supportive Classroom Environment	3/5
i) Thinking	X	i) KLA integration	X	i) Student Control	✓
ii) Knowledge	X	ii) Background K	✓	ii) Social Support	✓
iii) Understand	X	iii) to the World	✓	iii) Engagement	X
iv) Substantive Talk	✓	iv) Problem based Curriculum	✓	iv) Explicit performance criteria	✓
v) Problematize	X			v) Self-regulation	X
vi) Metalanguage	X				
				4. Recognition of Difference	4/5
				i) Culture	✓
				ii) Inclusivity	✓
				iii) Narrative	✓
				iv) Group identity	✓
				v) Citizenship	X

increased. In the initial assessment piece “Unit 8, Born to Shop” from *English for Living* he was just filling in forms, obtaining basic information from text, and giving one to three word answers. However, by October in completing “Unit 20, Welcome to Antarctica” not only had his handwriting improved, he was now able to write in complete sentences, extending the sentences with phrases and subordinate clauses. John had also been able to extract the factual meaning from a 500 word passage on Antarctica and had used related vocabulary appropriately. Consulting the **Language Model: 4 Resources Model**, John had become a successful *Code Breaker* and a fairly successful *Text Participant*.

The Brisbane School of Distance Education *English for Living* materials, unlike the integrated approach of the **4 Resources Model**, takes a hierarchical skills approach to literacy, so students at the lower skills levels are not taught *Text Analysis* skills,

with only the functional competencies as *Text Users* being developed. John therefore had not attained any *Text Analysis* skills and was only becoming aware of the formatting and use of different types of genres for reading and writing. The social contextualising and critiquing of genres, that is part of both *Text Participant* and *Text User*, was absent from his language skills acquisition. So he only received a 55% rating on the language model. Graded on the NRS scale mentioned above, which is a hierarchical measure, John had moved from NRS 1 to working within NRS level 2.

The pedagogies used to keep John engaged, as a regular attender and in the literacy learning event itself, fell mainly into the areas of *Supportive Classroom Environment*, *Recognition of Difference*, and *Connectedness*. These three areas received a reasonably high rating because of the flexible nature of program delivery, where the BSDE materials were supplemented as described above with “in the moment”, “student interest based”, “multimodal” literacy activities. Also the large amount of “relaxed”, “laid back”, “incidental talk” helped students explore a more in-depth understanding of many learning related issues, as well as modelling social skills and tolerance of different points of view. Perhaps it was this flexible, tolerant attitude that kept John attending daily for the past two years, compared to his non attendance of regular mainstream schooling two years previously. Additionally for John the explicit nature of the BSDE workbooks, suited his short attention span, while providing him with the opportunity to at least increase his basic literacy skills, gain positive feedback from the Distance Education school in Brisbane by way of returned, marked workbooks, and hence feel a sense of achievement. The deficit in his learning was the lack of deep thinking, knowing and understanding of a subject. There was no problematising or embedding the learning subjects in an expansive metalanguage. This was as much caused by John’s unresponsiveness to engage in any learning activities that were not self generated, as it was a result of the literacy teaching materials and their related pedagogies. So although of all the possible pedagogical practices only 55% were utilized, for John the pedagogies used kept him attending and enabled him to improve his literacy acquisition – even if it was only at a functional level.

The second student, Nicole had a different but similar story. She had been attending the Flexi school off and on since grade 8, in some part due to her father moving around. During this time she had also attended mainstream schools. The year previous to the interview, 2003 she been enrolled in and dropped out of two high schools, a private high school and the local state high school. Of the private “Christian” school she said the “the kids were very, very judgemental. They judged you on everything.” Of the local state school she said “I got into a bit of a bad cycle hanging out with older friends” and not attending. So like John, Nicole had had a problem with not attending school. Added to this was a recent problem of homelessness. In the year of the interview, 2004, at age 16 Nicole said she had moved seven or eight times, and in the process had lost a lot of her Distance Education workbooks; nevertheless by the year’s end she had managed to “submit 17 pieces of work” (End of Year Report Card, 2004) and would be completing her Year 10 course at the beginning of 2005.

The literacy component she was enrolled in was the Year 10 Core English, which the para teacher said was not very different to the mainstream Year 10 English curriculum. This literacy component consisted of core English related activities such as book and film reviews, poetry, and news report analysis. The written assignments required at least 500 words. Nicole’s practice was to work on her workbooks at home, but also to come in to the Flexi school at least twice a week. This way she was able to hand in completed tasks, get help with work she could not do herself, use the computers and internet access, and occasionally ring the Distance Education teachers in Brisbane. The para teacher commented that “she actually has fairly high levels, of literacy”. The BSDE assessment sheets showed she had achieved an overall grade of “B” for English for that year. Nicole recounted what some of the literacy tasks entailed:

And English I’m doing on movies and how they have themes and why and that stuff, you know. How movies speak, yeah. ... Watch movies, take notes and write essays like how a character’s grown throughout the movie and why. And compare how two movies represent Australia. Which one represents it better. ... And I’m reading a book now, *Z for Zachariah*. It’s about a war.

So applying the first component of *Composite Literacy Assessment Model* Nicole’s linguistic competencies rate a lot higher than John’s. Not only was she competent in the functional aspects of *Code Breaking*, *Text Participant*, and *Text User*, she also was able to socially and culturally contextualise different genres and determine their bias. This was evident in some of her written assessment tasks. However, her critiquing only extended to differentiating social or cultural practices. From the *Text Analysis* subset, there was no awareness in either her interview or in her work samples of critiquing ideological or political positioning, nor an awareness of the impact of gaps or silences in a text (written, symbolic or audio). So although she received a rating of 82% competency in the **4 Resources Model**, she actually had a deficit in what is termed in Australia “critical literacy”. Rather she possessed “higher order comprehension skills”, which Luke explains is how critical literacy has been formulated in the North American context. He outlines these skills as ranging from “metacognitive

reading strategies to reader-response orientation toward inferring endings, authorial intent, bias, or stereotypes" (Luke, 2000, pp. 49-50).

Again the **pedagogies** the Flexi school had used supplemented the fairly inflexible Distance Education materials' approach to teaching. The Flexi staff *recognised the "different" situation [Recognition of Difference]* Nicole found herself in, and became a buffer between the student and the administrative requirements of the distance education program. Teacher, Jack explained, "the most important thing is the student. We push some of them as hard as we can. We ease up on some." To keep the students involved in the learning process each student's needs and external pressures were taken into consideration. So for students like Nicole with housing, work and transportation difficulties he said the following:

If BSDE say they're behind. Well fine they're behind. We'll do something just to keep things ticking over. Not pressure them the way we would probably pressure other kids who aren't doing anything at all outside.

Regarding this recognition of individual student differences and flexible response, particularly in relation to Nicole, para teacher Michelle added,

Yeah, it's given her the freedom to make independent choices. That's what it has done for her. And to be able to feel safe, while she's making those choices, that she's not like kicked out because she didn't have a uniform on. Or kicked out because she wasn't at school every day, or, you know what I mean. It has given her that stability and a back up.

Which meant after a year of severe housing and income crises Nicole was still turning up at the Flexi school, submitting work and receiving both *academic and social support [Supportive Classroom Environment]* from the staff, even though the work was submitted somewhat behind schedule. Extra activities like writing an article for the affiliated high school magazine, allowed Nicole to have some control over her own learning, as she of her own initiative interviewed Flexi school participants and then wrote the article. The explicit nature of the literacy for lower levels that John experienced, at Nicole's level became less clear in that written instructions on task objectives were wordy and not as explicit as they could be. A result of this inexplicit instruction Nicole reported taking overly long to do more tasks than was required. Also she had to redo one assignment, because it was not until she had received a detailed explanation from her distance education teacher that she fully grasped the task objectives.

The English program did *connect [Connectiveness]* the individual adolescent interests and knowledge to the wider community issues. For example the novel studied combined the current issue of war with how rural Australian youths would respond if it happened in their town. In the film review unit, they were given some control in that they were allowed to choose a second movie to analyse and compare with an initial compulsory film. Poetry, often an onerous task for teenagers was allowed to be assessed as an oral presentation, which in Nicole's case was an easy option. Then finally students connected into their communities by reading the local newspaper, analysing the articles and then writing their own report. All the assessment tasks were "problems" or real life tasks that take place in the adult world. The only way the English curriculum in this case was *disconnected* was the fact that it stood alone. However, a second subject "Skills for Citizenship" did combine Mathematics and English as students were taught the practicalities of the adult world: banking, renting, bonds, how to budget and write appropriate correspondence. Acknowledgement of this component has been made in the *Recognition of Difference* section. Since debating, political critiquing was absent from the "citizenship" segment only a "1/2" score was awarded. In fact many aspects of critical literacy teaching were absent from the pedagogies, as they were from the student's language acquisition. As far as *Intellectual Quality* was concerned Nicole was enabled to write beautifully descriptive flowing prose that displayed a good knowledge and understanding of the unit tasks, recognizing a multiplicity of language, grammar and technical vocabulary

TABLE 4: *Composite Assessment Model-abbreviated*
FLEXI SCHOOL STUDENT: NICOLE

<i>Language Model:</i>		4 RESOURCES MODEL (Freebody, 2004; Santoro, 2004)		82%	
1. Code Breakers	2/2	2. Text Participants	4/4	3. Text Users	2/2
i) decoding	✓	i) patterns of meanings ...	✓	i) Genres' form / function	✓
ii) grammar	✓	- vocabulary	✓	ii) Genres' socio-cultural expectations	✓
		- clauses	✓		
		ii) Genres	✓		
				4. Text Analysis	1/3
				i) bias	✓
				ii) author positions reader	X
				iii) gaps, constrain influence	X
<i>Pedagogical Model:</i>		PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES (Ed Qld, 2001-2003)		75%	
1. Intellectual Quality	4/6	2. Connectedness [K = knowledge]	3/4	3. Supportive Classroom Environment	3.5/5
i) Thinking	X	i) KLAs integration	X	i) Student Control	✓
ii) Knowledge	✓	ii) Student's background K	✓	ii) Social Support	✓
iii) Understand	✓	iii) to the World	✓	iii) Engagement	1/2
iv) Substantive Talk	✓	iv) Problem based Curriculum	✓	iv) Explicit Performance Criteria	1/2
v) Problematize	X			v) Self-regulation	1/2
vi) Metalanguage	✓				
				4. Recognition of Difference	4.5/5
				i) Culture	✓
				ii) Inclusivity	✓
				iii) Narrative	✓
				iv) Group Identity	✓
				v) Citizen-ship	1/2

suitable for each genre. However, she was not enabled to interrogate the texts, politically or ideologically contextualise beliefs represented, or produce a transformed version of literacy (Healy, 2004; Knobel, 2003). Instead she was directed to merely analysed the internal structure of the movies, books, news paper articles and poem, and then reproduce them. The result was even though the unit texts spoke about “empowering your language skills” and “the power of language” the literacy pedagogies therein only empowered Nicole to reproduce not transform her literacy practices.

Consequently an overall score of 75% represented pedagogies that first of all provided a high level of classroom support, recognition of difference and connectedness, mitigated by the student’s own personal situation and a lack of direct teaching of critical literacy skills.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To return to the beginning – what have the long range and close up pictures shown? The close up picture revealed two students enabled to attend school because of a flexible tolerant teaching approach. Further it showed two students who were increasing their literacy skills levels even though the curriculum was fairly inflexible and allowed little student input. The increase in skills levels was due to the “laid back” but friendly constant monitoring of the teaching staff. Thus *Recognition of Difference* was a big factor in student engagement, engendering a sense of belonging, which is often acknowledged by educators as crucial in the learning process (Healy, 2004). This sense of belonging was specifically fostered by another site, the Alternative Education Centre as part of their core philosophy of *Choice Theory* (Glasser, 2001) for engaging traumatised younger adolescents. Within Choice Theory *belonging* is considered the foremost of four basic psychological needs determining whether students will choose to engage in learning as a valued part of their *Quality World*.

The long range picture showed a vista of various program types and strategies for their implementation. A common theme emerged of giving at risk adolescents the literacy skills necessary for employment and participating in everyday life. However, participating in everyday life, at all sites except the Suburban TAFE simply meant being able to fill in appropriate forms, do banking, write a resume, pay the rent and so on. It did not include critical literacy skills. The composite analysis model detailed how missing “critical” pedagogies and a resultant lack of critical literacy skills affected students at this site; for the student John there was negligible effects as his basic learning need was to stay connected, but for Nicole, she surely would have benefited and had her horizons and options extended, by adding a deeper level of thinking and analytical skills to her literacy repertoire.

This problem of providing more than a “back-to-basics” level of education for at risk youth was grappled with by the Suburban TAFE’s program. For example they employed a democratic practice that allowed students to have input into the content of their course; in class discussions and research prior to writing the teacher guided students into interrogating and finding the gaps in their own points of view as well as those of others. Multimodal literacy was included with ideological, political and cultural contexts being evaluated. However at this alternative centre unlike the other sites, students were relatively at the same literacy skills level, within a narrower age range and designated on the lower register of at riskness. For centres with a disparate student body of highly at risk adolescents implementing more than a functional literacy program often seems too daunting, and even unrealistic. Nevertheless, by providing an education related only to the surface levels of the at risk student’s immediate world are centres in danger of what the Alternative Centre’s mentor, William Glasser describes below?

We are building a large underclass of uneducated people who have less and less real knowledge and therefore less access to legitimate power and more and more access to our already overcrowded prisons and drug rehabilitation centres. ... What is repeated over and over is the **simplistic, get-tough, back-to-basics approach** that has been offered as educational reform for over forty years and the situation is worse, not better (Glasser, 2001, pp. 79-80).

That none of the alternative education sites were taking a “tough” warder/prisoner approach to their at risk students mentioned by Glasser is a positive. Instead they all valued flexibility and one-on-one individualised teaching. But more needs to be done in the way of critical literacy teaching and learning if we are not to purely produce functionally literate drones for the workforce.

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