

**Final Report to the Office of the Board of
Studies NSW**

**Evaluation of the Years 7–10 English
Aboriginal Support Pilot Project**

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While the information presented in this report draws on the contributions of a range of stakeholders, the accuracy of the findings and the conclusions drawn are the responsibility of the evaluation team.

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Executive Summary

The Office of the Board of Studies NSW engaged Erebus International in mid-2005 to evaluate the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project. The overall pilot project has five explicit objectives relating to both processes and outcomes. Each objective is outlined below:

- to increase awareness and expertise among teachers of the teaching and learning needs of Aboriginal students in need of culturally and pedagogically appropriate support to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* and provide the basis for equitable student demonstration of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* outcomes
- to develop a range of explicit scaffolding teaching/learning strategies and authentic assessment tasks that meet the learning needs of targeted students, based on the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* literacy program
- to critically engage Aboriginal students about their learning within experiences of the English syllabus and as it integrates with other key learning areas
- to critically engage students through effective pedagogic practice and discourse so that they are able to consider how success in English and English-related school experiences might provide immediate and enduring engagement with school and education
- to develop links between schools, Aboriginal communities and the wider community, that support effective teaching and learning practices; to encourage the development of learning partnerships; to improve the overall school achievement of students; and to facilitate students' becoming engaged and active lifelong learners.

The Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project has three separate yet related phases. During this second phase of the project, an evaluation was planned to be undertaken during the period of the pilot from March to December 2005, focusing on the following issues:

- the impact of the approach on student literacy
- the impact of the approach to professional development on teaching practice
- the overall efficacy of the approach with a view to future implementation.

Members of Erebus International attended briefing sessions, undertook on-site interviews at the beginning and end of the pilot with teachers (and in some cases Principals and Aboriginal Education Assistants) from the schools participating in the project, attended the teacher professional development sessions, sustained ongoing contact with each school during the pilot, and examined and analysed all relevant policy and school-based documentation during that period.

Five schools were chosen to participate in the pilot project:

- o Sydney Secondary College (Leichhardt campus)
- o Alexandria Park Community College
- o Ballina High School
- o Richmond River High School
- o Bonalbo Central School.

The following findings are particularly relevant.

While the initiative was designed initially with the needs of Indigenous students in mind, the program benefit has also extended to students with many different characteristics. More particularly, a selection of comments taken from teachers readily encapsulates the impact of the approach:

- Increased engagement for all students involved in the pilot, including Aboriginal students.
- Many students found the learning experience intensive but rewarding work.
- Students generally appreciated the very structured approach to both teaching and learning and soon locked into the sequence of steps involved, thereby building confidence in their own capability as they repeated particular steps.
- Students were prepared to attack new reading situations with increased confidence and less hesitancy.
- While the approach may have been designed initially for slower students, teachers witnessed a general improvement level in all students irrespective of reading ability and literary experience.
- The approach can be readily adapted to more senior students in terms of appropriate selection of text and designing the critical response required of them, rather than a personal response in order to take them out of their comfortable learning zone.
- Evidence of improved student attendance over the period of the pilot, particularly with those students whose attendance had previously inhibited patterns of learning. In some classes attendance had elevated from seven students attending from fourteen (50%) to twelve from fourteen students (86%) attending on a regular basis
- A work ethic became evident among those students who had never previously been able to engage for anything more than very short periods.

The professional development component was considered by participating teachers to be integral to the pilot project because of the potential for generalisability of the approach under consideration. Teachers attended four separate two-day sessions of professional development. This component was only one aspect of the professional development experience which may be described as input, collaboration, trialling, feedback. The model was seen as superior by practising teachers in relation to other previous professional development experiences. Nevertheless there was some criticism of the repetitive nature of the professional development workshops, indicating that more time could have been spent in action

rather than input and reflection. Despite these limitations, the potential to apply this model, while resource-intensive, is enhanced when the outcomes of the experience for teachers is considered.

In terms of the future of the initiative, the following factors appear to be key success factors to facilitate sound implementation:

1. The active support of the Principal and the school leadership team for the initiative.
2. Individual-teacher and whole-school ownership of students' results.
3. Working in a paired or team-based context.
4. The link between the professional development model and the ongoing accountability for performance.
5. The focus on success within the project and the importance of praising students for their achievements.
6. The importance of identifying personal/professional benefits for teachers as a motivation for participating in the project.
7. The key role to be played by Aboriginal Education Assistants, and by parents.
8. The emphasis on explicit teaching and student engagement.
9. Use of the approach by other teachers in other key learning areas.
10. An identification of the key assumptions underpinning the teaching of literacy.



Background

The Office of the Board of Studies NSW engaged Erebus International in mid-2005 to evaluate the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project. The following report provides an overview of the background to, and purpose of the project, the evaluation activities undertaken during the review and the key outcomes identified as a result of the conduct of the pilot project.

The overall project has five explicit objectives relating to both processes and outcomes. Each objective is outlined below:

- to increase awareness and expertise among teachers of the teaching and learning needs of Aboriginal students in need of culturally and pedagogically appropriate support to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* and provide the basis for equitable student demonstration of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* outcomes
- to develop a range of explicit scaffolding teaching/learning strategies and authentic assessment tasks that meet the learning needs of targeted students, based on the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* literacy program
- to critically engage Aboriginal students about their learning within experiences of the English syllabus, and as it integrates with other key learning areas
- to critically engage students through effective pedagogic practice and discourse so that they are able to consider how success in English and English-related school experiences might provide immediate and enduring engagement with school and education
- to develop links between schools, Aboriginal communities and the wider community, that support effective teaching and learning practices; to encourage the development of learning partnerships; to improve the overall school achievement of students; and to facilitate students to become engaged and active lifelong learners.

The Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project has three separate yet related phases. **The first phase**, which commenced in 2004, established a clear definition for the nature and purpose of the project, established the project school sites, learning teams and training peer mentors. **The second phase**, which commenced in 2005, represents the pilot project stage. During this phase, four two-day English teacher training workshops were conducted. The focus of these was on various aspects of the *Learning to Read:*

Reading to Learn (L2R:R2L) approach to literacy teaching developed by Dr David Rose from the University of Sydney. Members of the Erebus International team attended a range of the workshops both on the North Coast and in the inner city area of Sydney. **The third phase** of the project was designed to focus on the same areas as the pilot, but modified by what was learned from the evaluation of the pilot project.

Evaluation Objectives

During this second phase of the project, an evaluation was planned, to focus on the following issues:

- the impact of the L2R:R2L approach on student literacy, through analysing students' pre- and post-writing samples
- the impact of the approach to professional development on teaching practice
- the overall efficacy of the approach.

Evaluation Data-gathering Activities

Activities undertaken to inform data-gathering for the evaluation included the following:

- Developing, piloting and refining key teacher and stakeholder instruments for data-gathering and preparing the Teacher Interview Schedules (see Appendices 1 and 4) and Other Project Stakeholders Interview Schedule (see Appendix 2).
- Reading and analysis of related documentation, including Teacher Workshop Manuals, CD-ROMs, relevant articles published by Dr David Rose et al.
- Preparing Project Outline (see Appendix 3) for distribution to relevant stakeholders.
- On-site interviews with teachers (and in some cases Principals and Aboriginal Education Assistants) participating in the project, from the following schools:
 - Sydney Secondary College (Leichhardt campus)
 - Alexandria Park Community College
 - Ballina High School
 - Richmond River High School
 - Bonalbo Central School
- Analysis and synthesis of gathered data and its conversion into key findings with implications for future directions for the project.



Project Findings

The trends from the data gathered are outlined below and are presented in two separate stages.

In the **first stage**, the data from the progress report is presented. The **second stage** of information relates to the findings as they have emerged at the conclusion of the pilot. It was considered useful to present both sets of data in order to more easily identify growth and changes in the nature of the findings from June 2005 to November 2005.

General Comments

Stage 1 (June 2005)

At the outset it is noteworthy that project participation has assisted all teachers in refocusing on their own style of pedagogy in the classroom. For some teachers the personal benefit of the project for teachers has already been a reaffirmation of current approaches. For others it has challenged existing paradigms and provided new ways of teaching that provide success for all students. Indeed, a preliminary but recurring comment from teachers has been the efficacy of the approach, not just for Indigenous students but for all students who may not have learned the essential skills for effective literacy in the past. For these students in particular, the initial impact of the approach has been in both reading and writing. While evidence at this stage is only anecdotal, teachers are now committed to collecting and dating work samples that will be used as a tool for measuring progress later in the year when both teachers and students are more accustomed to the approach.

It should be stressed, however, that one challenge that has already emerged is the limited time available for teachers to be able to embed the approach for students into their practice in such a way that it becomes a normal part of classroom learning and an integrated component of the culture of student learning of literacy.

The work of one school has already highlighted the value of involving Aboriginal community representatives in the project if it is to be sustainable into the longer term and the notion of a partnership is to be pursued.

Stage 2 (November 2005)

As this pilot draws to a close, it has become readily apparent that teachers are now feeling more comfortable with the overall methodology underpinning *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*. Most of the teachers who took part in the pilot project are experiencing no difficulties in implementing the approach, although with differing success. Major issues for teacher discussion now focus on such matters as the continuation of the program into 2006 and the level of support and resourcing available for this initiative. It is apparent that all the teachers have seen the early signs of success for their students and are therefore committed to extending the approach to other students in the school or ensuring that they had the opportunity to further embed the skills with students taught during 2005.

While all teachers suggest that there has been an increase in students' engagement, motivation and confidence levels, the project did not collect the range of objective evidence required to substantiate these claims. However, most of the teachers have kept samples of students' work both prior to and after their involvement in the pilot project. This evidence indicates significant improvement in the students' ability to compose interesting sentences in sequence and an improvement in literacy skills generally.

The Impact of the Approach

Stage 1 (June 2005)

Teachers with a wide range of experience have been selected to participate in this pilot project. The level of experience ranges from 'first-year-out' status to over 30 years' experience. In all cases, interviewed teachers have identified benefits for students and themselves. In the case of the students, all teachers have appreciated the explicit and structured nature of the approach. Equally, students are appreciating the paradigm, understanding the sequence of steps and the engagement with the task that had previously been a foreign experience. While only anecdotal evidence is available about changes in student behaviour, teachers' comments indicate that students exhibit more positive attitudes towards literacy learning. Sustainable changes in behaviour cannot be judged at this stage.

For teachers, irrespective of experience, there is growing comfort with the approach, despite the fact that it conflicts with many of the more constructivist approaches being practised by many teachers at present in other key learning areas. Moreover teachers are feeling in control of their strategies, and understanding how and why children are learning. A common comment refers to the increased level of student engagement. In some ways this is also attributable to more concerted efforts by teachers to proactively praise students for their achievement, particularly as they approximate desired behaviours.

In essence the comments from teachers listed below, in no priority order, cite favourable characteristics of the *Learning to Read, Reading to Learn* approach:

- Gives substance to the concept of explicit teaching of English.
- Provides scaffolding that has applicability across a broad range of KLAs.
- Focuses on the bigger picture at the outset then moves to the finer detail.

- Is consistent with the principles of adult learning around 'advance organisers' (Ausubel).
- Strongly emphasises student engagement, and praising students, which may positively impact on student attendance at school.
- Provides an opportunity for those students who have never seen success in the previous 10 years of schooling to experience this now for the first time. A great motivator for ongoing success.
- Stakeholders agree it is different from the way they have taught reading in the past.
- Demands a different questioning style that is less confrontational.
- Provides a means for engaging the whole class irrespective of ability level.
- Provides a structure in which all students can experience success at some stage during every lesson.

Stage 2 (November 2005)

Recent research in the areas of both Numeracy and Literacy (see *Review of Aboriginal Education, 2004*) highlights the general inability of more traditional approaches to close the gap for Indigenous students. This pilot project represents an opportunity to trial a different paradigm that has been used and adapted in a variety of ways in previous times. As a pilot, the approach appears to have had a positive impact on students' reading skills in a range of ways. However, any consideration of the overall impact of this approach should include the effect on students in the first instance. While the initiative was designed initially with the needs of Indigenous students in mind, the program benefit has also extended to students with many different characteristics. For example, teachers cite the benefits for children whose first language is not English. In contrast, other students who have benefited include English-speaking young people who are experiencing challenges in relation to reading.

The universal response from both teachers and parents has been an identifiable initial increase in students' confidence in reading. In some cases this has also extended to students' writing skills, where they have willingly picked up a pen and attempted to construct a sentence for the first time in their lives. While such evidence is relatively anecdotal, some teachers have collected samples of students' written work both before and after the pilot. Without engaging in intensive content analysis, it is readily apparent, even to the untrained eye, that some students have developed the ability to express themselves in a more coherent manner and with a growing sense of word and sentence structure. More particularly, the following selection of comments by teachers readily encapsulates the impact of the approach on students:

- Increased engagement for all students involved in the pilot, including Aboriginal students.
- Many students found the learning experience intensive but rewarding work.
- Students generally appreciated the very structured approach to both teaching and learning and soon locked into the sequence of steps involved, thereby building confidence in their own capability as they repeated particular steps.

- Students were prepared to attack new reading situations with increased confidence and less hesitancy.
- While the approach may have been designed initially for slower students, teachers witnessed a general improvement level in all students irrespective of reading ability and literacy experience.
- The approach can be readily adapted to more senior students in terms of appropriate selection of text and designing the critical response required of them, rather than a personal response in order to take them out of their comfortable learning zone.
- Evidence of improved student attendance over the period of the pilot, particularly with those students whose attendance had previously inhibited patterns of learning. In some classes attendance had elevated from seven students attending from fourteen (50%) to twelve from fourteen students (86%) attending on a regular basis.
- A work ethic is being established among those students that had never previously been able to engage for more than very short periods.

Such comments clearly reflect a change in both the attitude and productivity level of many students engaged in the project. Nevertheless, it is the long-term sustainable effect that is the true measure of success. At this stage, there has been a short pilot with a relatively positive response, with a number of examples of student writing to vindicate teacher perceptions. Genuine measures of success in terms of student output, student attitude and motivation levels must be applied for some time to ascertain the long-term benefits of the approach. The next stage of implementation of the strategy may provide the opportunity to make such measurements and associated judgements against baseline data. Teachers interviewed during the latter stages of the pilot also highlighted the need for tangible measures of student achievement from which informed judgements can then be made about student progress. Such measures should also be able to gauge the achievement of even the weakest students for whom relative growth may be minimal.

Impact on Professional Development

Stage 1 (June 2005)

A significant feature of this pilot project is the manner in which professional development has been integrated into the overall project. While most teachers are accustomed to professional development taking the form of a one-day 'injection in the arm', the approach adopted in this project has three key steps, discrete yet integrated: input, trialling and feedback. The context within which this occurs is essentially one of collaboration among peers. The opportunity for teachers to share ideas with peers and seek feedback from colleagues in neighbouring schools has already been seen as a very positive aspect of the professional development experience. Moreover the fact that more than one person from each school is participating in the project ensures that they are constantly interacting with each other and encouraging each other with ideas.

The additional impetus for change in relation to the pilot is the interest and commitment of the Principal. While not evident in every school at present, in those schools where there is positive response from the school leadership team, opportunities have been provided to present at staff meetings and to discuss and share the philosophy and principles behind the L2R:R2L approach.

As to the longer-term sustainability of the approach for literacy and its applicability to other KLAs, it is anticipated that these schools will lead the momentum towards sustained change. In terms of cultural change in schools, the Principal is always seen as the gatekeeper of change. The history of change in schools clearly demonstrates that where there is interest and commitment from the Principal, the possibilities for long-term change are significantly enhanced.

A key aspect of the professional development model has been the two-day planning workshops for teachers. These are designed to provide teachers with direct support in understanding the key elements of the approach, including its implementation and evaluation.

Comments directly from teachers – samples are outlined below – connect to the strength of the pilot model at the midway point.

- Powerful model that encourages active learning and peer discussion.
- Professional development days considered to be very full and very useful opportunity to exchange ideas with teacher colleagues.
- Some teachers prefer to process new information differently, with time to reflect before use.
- The notion of inputs in bite-size chunks followed by the opportunity to collaborate using trial feedback is seen to be very attractive.
- The project is providing skills to teach students how to read — a skill not previously part of the professional repertoire.
- Model requires commitment and encourages all participants to be constantly engaged.
- Small sample size ensures non-threatening interaction in a safe environment.
- While recognising limitations of budget, two-day sessions were too dense for some, too detailed, too repetitive and the pace was not fast enough; however, views varied on this issue.

Stage 2 (November 2005)

The professional development component is considered by participating teachers to be an integral component of the pilot project because of the potential for generalisability of the approach under consideration. It should be remembered at the outset that most of the experienced teachers participating in this project would have been accustomed to a style of professional development that normally included one day out of the school characterised by heavy input from a ‘technical expert’ in the relevant field, following which the teacher is cast away to attempt, with very limited future support, to implement any new learnings that may have occurred.

The model of professional development described in this project has been regularly described by teachers as a three-phase process: input, trial, feedback. The key element of these three steps, however, is the collaborative culture within which they are taken. It is the notion of cooperation and collaboration that teachers have most appreciated in relation to the professional development sessions. Having been immersed in four separate professional development sessions, participating teachers are in a strong position to critically evaluate the approach towards professional development being employed. While they acknowledge the advantages of the model, the more experienced teachers have suggested that fewer days are needed. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that there was some repetition of consolidation exercises by the facilitator after teachers had already understood the concept being explained. Such a suggestion is also consistent with the need to reduce the amount of time taken by professional development should the model be further expanded. It is clearly apparent that the approach towards professional development is resource-intensive and therefore potentially costly. While the pilot has been subsidised by relevant Regional Offices of Education, the point was clearly made during the interview process that it is now the responsibility of schools to fund any professional development, as this is where the funds for such initiatives now reside. Indeed it is considered, both by observers and teacher participants, that the resource-intensive nature of the professional development model may be seen to be the greatest inhibitor of the pilot in terms of future expansion.

Despite these limitations, should the initiative continue, the approach towards professional development must be carefully considered. There is a need to achieve balance between all participating teachers understanding a new paradigm and the provision of flexibility to cater for the individual learning needs of the participating group. This calls for a high degree of sensitivity on the part of the facilitator and an understanding of the participating teachers' learning needs. This, in a sense, reflects the demands of the scaffolding approach that is central to this program.

In terms of the future expansion of this program, the implication of the above observation is that future professional development needs to build on local structures that have non-threatening collegial relationships which provide ongoing support, as well as expert input over a continuing period of time. The concept of peer mentoring, envisaged as part of the original design of the pilot project, but which did not feature strongly in the implementation at the school level, should be re-examined as a powerful means of supporting teachers' learning. The teachers who participated in this pilot program may have much to offer as potential peer mentors in the future.

In addition it is noteworthy that as the approach is devolved towards the local level, there is also considerable potential to harness the support and expertise of personnel that reside in DET district structures. Many teachers on secondment to positions of school and teacher support have the skills and experience to provide practical assistance to participating teachers in a variety of ways to enhance classroom implementation.

Overall Efficacy of Approach

Stage 1 (June 2005)

The early stages of this pilot project indicate that the explicit teaching and strong scaffolding approach has broad generalisability across a range of key learning areas, especially those that encompass factual text like Science and Human Society and Its Environment.

However, particular inhibitors have been identified at both the philosophical and practical levels. In the first instance the approach is perceived to be in direct conflict with the more constructivist paradigms that frequently characterise students' approaches to learning. Such issues may need to be resolved before the R2L:L2R approach can be adopted more broadly. Indeed, for many teachers, the approach represents a conflicting paradigm in relation to the way that they have been taught to teach children to read and the way that they engage in such activities.

At a practical level, the approach under consideration requires practical support. In the eyes of some teachers the pilot project appeared under-funded, with some reflecting on the lack of texts, and the need for additional time back in school to implement the program. This is particularly the case in light of the fact that some teachers have found the project to be demanding in terms of available time. The key message for the future implementation of the approach, however, is that, in order to build genuine school and teacher commitment, some form of buy-in from the schools should be required in order to build genuine school- and teacher commitment. This could be in the form of providing professional development funding or casual relief to facilitate the participation of teachers. In this way, the school's investment would represent a level of buy-in that would indicate commitment rather than scepticism.

Despite these limitations, in their interviews a number of teachers highlighted the value of the partnership between the Board of Studies and Sydney University to provide expert direction. Such partnerships were suggested as the foundation for future similar projects. Moreover the role of an overall coordinator for the project has already been seen to have significant value. This value to the project has been enhanced by the Co-coordinator's knowledge of the realistic day-to-day constraints and the pressures on teachers involved in the project. The coordinator has been seen to add value, especially in terms of translating the project's philosophy and ideals into workable solutions in partnership with teachers. Such messages provide pivotal lessons for the future should the pilot be expanded to include other schools.

Stage 2 (November 2005)

Any consideration of the overall efficacy of the approach must take account of gains in student literacy that have been measured since the commencement of the pilot. Over the period of one year many teachers and parents cite multiple examples of student behaviour that reflect elevated levels of student confidence and their motivation to read books something that had never previously been considered by such students. Nevertheless, while this evidence is anecdotal, there are many recurring examples of increased confidence being demonstrated by students in both inner-city and rural schools.

Moreover, teachers in both inner-city and rural settings have suggested that it was particularly challenging to demonstrate reading gains with weaker students during the period of the pilot study. Despite these limitations, the overall efficacy of the approach appears to have been greater where existing school structures have supported the initiative – for example, in terms of flexible timetabling and the support of teachers from other key learning areas. Even more importantly, participating teachers cited the value gained by having the visible support of both Head Teachers and Principal. In these circumstances decisions could be expedited with a minimum of fuss because of the Principal's active engagement in the project.

Student absenteeism represented a major limitation in the attempt to measure student achievement during the pilot project. Nevertheless there is enough anecdotal evidence from participating teachers to indicate that if the approach were used consistently across a range of key learning areas, it could help students with low literacy levels in other classes besides English. In fact, the comments of one teacher are instructive: 'The techniques we were initially shown do work with teenage students with reading difficulties, especially in a whole-class situation'. In particular, teachers cite the notion of explicit teaching which can be used intensively or as part of a regular teaching program. Despite this strength, a number of teachers suggested that the approach was limited in terms of the depth of understanding required, which meant that the approach had to be used in an inflexible manner until it was totally understood. Acknowledging these initial limitations, the approach does represent a structured means by which teachers in secondary schools can teach students to read – a key responsibility for all teachers.

At a practical level, both experienced and inexperienced teachers suggested that the approach is more effective when it is used in at least one lesson per day and students are operating in small groups. In addition, it was suggested that, in order to enhance the efficacy of the approach, all members of the school's staff need to be aware of the basic strategies and even be applying some of them in other key learning areas. In this way students have an opportunity to apply the methodology across diverse key learning areas, and teachers in other departments build empathy and understanding in the use and application of the approach.

It is also noteworthy that a number of teachers participating in this pilot project have had primary school and/or special education experience. It has been suggested that such teachers have developed a greater initial understanding of the L2R:R2L approach and its underlying philosophy. In these circumstances it has been valuable for such teachers to willingly share their experiences with the more traditional subject-based secondary teachers, thereby enhancing the efficacy of the approach. It was suggested that secondary teachers can assist the primary/special education teachers to select appropriate texts and passages for use with L2R:R2L. Despite these differences teachers have genuinely appreciated the collegueship that has been established, both within the school and the local district, and have suggested that they will continue to adopt and adapt the L2R:R2L methodology in 2006.



Next Steps

As this pilot draws towards an inevitable conclusion, there is a strong sense of anticipation among teachers participating in the pilot that it may continue in some form. It is readily acknowledged that the professional development model is an integral component of the approach and it is greatly valued by all participating teachers. Nevertheless it is also acknowledged that the model is resource-intensive and that schools will now need to find the funds from their own resources to continue the project. It may therefore be very difficult to sustain the project in its current form.

It is also readily evident from the pilot that the model provides a challenging approach to conventional teaching pedagogy that can only be sustained through whole-school participation. It has been stated elsewhere in this report that the model will only be successful if it has the active support of the school Principal and is being used across a range of key learning areas. Such requirements impose considerable responsibilities on schools in light of the range of other priorities that they currently address. Moreover, for many teachers the model requires a fundamental shift in terms of the pedagogical paradigms currently employed in schools.

Despite this situation, the pilot project has demonstrated that the model can produce student success (based on qualitative evidence) and is theoretically sound. Yet it has also been established that the approach is not necessarily the preferred pedagogical style for many teachers and may therefore require considerable professional development in order to challenge and change existing teacher practice. Many advocates of the approach would, however, suggest that it is worth the effort to pursue this initiative, even though quantitative evidence of student achievement is patchy at best at this stage.

A key argument in favour of the further pursuit of the initiative is that the model has already demonstrated its applicability beyond Aboriginal students to both slower learners and more gifted students. Under these circumstances, any approach that can be applied across such a broad spectrum of students is worthy of closer consideration. Moreover there is emerging evidence in some pilot schools that the approach has been employed successfully across other key learning areas, thereby strengthening its case for closer scrutiny in the endeavour to assist students from a broad range of backgrounds and with varying student abilities. Its potential applicability across a variety of ability levels and key learning areas certainly justifies the need to attempt to replicate and broaden the model.

In light of this situation, it is therefore proposed that there are a number of possible future directions.

The first option, based on the absence of resources for future implementation: the pilot could be allowed to self-perpetuate, with teachers from the pilot study attempting to keep the initiative alive in their own schools across more diverse key learning areas. This option assumes no further support for the existing initiative except at the local level through school-based funding. Each pilot school would make its own decision about the future of the model and fund its directions accordingly. Under these circumstances, a significant financial investment is somewhat wasted except at the local pilot level. It is probable from a longer-term perspective that the initiative will not be driven, and will most likely become disjointed as pilot teachers leave and move to other schools.

The second option may involve some additional funding but is strategically designed to consolidate the gains already made in pilot schools. In this situation, a further limited trial could continue in existing pilot schools, where early achievements could be consolidated through the introduction of new English teachers to the model. Alternatively, other KLAs, eg Science and Humanities, could be targeted for application of the model. In both of these situations, professional development would be required, to be funded by the pilot schools in the absence of regional funding.

The third option involves a strategic expansion of the model, continuing to focus on English teachers in selected interested schools. In this situation, existing pilot teachers could become mentors to new teachers, assisting them to accommodate to the new strategy. The cost of replacing the pilot teachers as ‘internal champions’ would have to be borne by the newly implementing schools. Issues around the provision of professional development in this model are discussed later in this report. One possible approach towards funding is to identify those schools that currently receive funding through the ‘Kids Excel’ initiative. It is assumed that, in this way, the original target population — that is, Aboriginal students — is attracted, and the literacy needs of students would be a key focus and highly consistent with the intention of ‘Kids Excel’. It is clearly understood that this initiative could only be sustained on the basis of ongoing professional development and therefore requires a budget for the purpose. Without this constant form of input, the momentum would most likely be dissipated and teachers could lose interest as they came to see it as yet another task.

As indicated earlier, strategic expansion of the pilot would also require a close analysis of the current model of professional development. It is therefore imperative that government schools move away from the ‘expert’ model towards an approach where a number of teachers could be trained as key contact people in each region. In this way, key teachers with the appropriate skills would be trained to understand and implement the approach with their peers. Where a region made a commitment to this approach, the initial cost of establishing a package, and of training appropriate Regional Officers to use it, would be seen as an investment for the future.

Using this model, it appears that current requirements would mean eight days’ teacher relief for professional development and approximately three to four days for lesson preparation/planning for each teacher. It is possible, based on teacher feedback, that some reduction in the amount of time allocated to professional development could be achieved. In this way it is perhaps feasible that the professional development allocation could be four to six days rather than eight days. In addition to the cost of casual

relief, funding must be found for expendables that are used during the project, eg materials for professional development and students' books, photocopying and stationery.

Irrespective of the option to be adopted, it is recommended that a pilot project exit strategy be undertaken in the near future to ensure that the gains already achieved in terms of both student achievement and teacher development are sustained for the longer term. This may involve meetings in both the inner city and on the North Coast, with each of the participating teachers seeking suggestions to ensure that their work continues and that the gains made by the students are not lost if funding is withdrawn. Meanwhile it is appropriate to advise regional personnel of the success of the model so far and the benefits that have accrued as a result of the financial investments being made.

Key Success Factors

In terms of the possible future expansion of the pilot project, a number of key factors may be identified that will contribute to the future success of the project. Each of these is detailed below. They should be carefully examined if the project is to continue in its existing or some adapted form.

1. *The active support of the Principal and the school leadership team for the initiative*

It is well understood that, without the Principal's and/or school leadership team's support, any educational initiative will receive limited resources and ultimately will not be seen as part of the school's core business. Under these circumstances, it will remain on the periphery of school priorities and ultimately wither away. In those pilot schools where the Principal has been an active supporter, participating teachers have made presentations at whole-school staff meetings and have sparked the interest of teachers from other KLAs, resulting in professional sharing. In these circumstances, the potential for the initiative to have a whole-school focus is significantly enhanced.

2. *Individual teacher and whole-school ownership of students' results*

It is important that each teacher take individual responsibility for the measurement of student outcomes from the initiatives. This includes accountability for the results achieved from the initiative. Again, in those schools where the initiative has had whole-school acceptance, there is a strong sense of whole-school ownership for the students engaged in the program and the resulting progress made as a result of the pilot initiative.

3. *Working in a paired or team-based context*

Participating teachers have clearly identified the benefit of having a soul mate with whom they can share aspirations, ideas and frustrations during the period of the pilot. Research on adult learning also supports the model that facilitates teacher dialogue with 'trusted others' during personal learning. In this way teachers can clarify perceptions and regularly learn from each other during the periods of professional development and implementation. The advantage of a committed team rather than a pair is that the members of the team become advocates for the

initiative. Consequently there is a critical mass of internal champions within an organisation that can be employed to facilitate learning and implementation as the initiative is being expanded.

4. *The link between the professional development model and the ongoing accountability for performance*

The overall learning model employed during the pilot is not the only key attribute of the collaborative professional development model. As importantly, there is a built-in expectation that participating teachers will trial ideas, activities and strategies introduced during the professional development sessions and report back to peers on their return to the next session. This means that all teachers will need at least to trial the initiative under discussion and be prepared to share successes and challenges with peers. Such an approach provides the opportunity for teachers to follow through the ideas introduced and ensures that a safe environment is provided where teachers can talk openly about successes and initial failures and discuss openly why these may have occurred.

5. *The focus on success within the project and the importance of praising students for achievements*

A particular benefit of this pilot for students has been the emphasis on incremental learning where teachers have the opportunity to offer praise for work completed. For some secondary school teachers this aspect of their pedagogy has been a recent addition to their teaching repertoire. Also, in some cases the opportunity to use praise has been transferred to teaching other students in other classes and in other KLAs. One of the identified strengths of this project has been the focus on student success and its appropriate acknowledgement. This has been a development experience for some teachers irrespective of experience and will continue to be employed by those teachers regardless of the future of the pilot project.

6. *The importance of identifying personal/professional benefits for teachers as a motivation for participating in the project*

From a school leadership perspective, the L2R:R2L pilot is an example of a change-management initiative within the school setting. Under these circumstances, the history of educational change suggests that some teachers will be more sceptical about the change than others. In the case of these teachers, it is necessary to identify for them the key personal and professional benefits that will be derived from their participation in the project. While advocates of the model suggest that the benefits relate to increased skill development in relation to pedagogy and student engagement, these benefits must be clearly articulated at the beginning of the project to ensure maximum commitment from the teachers.

7. *The key role to be played by Aboriginal Education Assistants and parents*

The notion of developing key partnerships to facilitate student learning has become very important. Evidence gathered during this pilot project in North Coast schools suggests that there are two key partners who must be involved in the planning and implementation of such initiatives at each step of the process. Initially, this pilot was established for Aboriginal students. In schools

where the Aboriginal Education Assistants have been involved, students are more comfortable in their learning and a link has been established between school and home through the AEA. Such a measure is a necessary and important step if the school is to enhance the potential for student attendance, and the learning is to be supported and sustained at home. In light of the experience in the pilot, it is considered important that the AEA should be involved in the project as early as possible, concomitantly clarifying the scope of the particular roles and responsibilities of the AEA in relation to the initiative. In this way genuine partnerships can be established at the outset and complementary roles can be undertaken for the mutual benefit of students and other key stakeholders. It should be noted that, in some cases, the AEAs may require considerable assistance to undertake their roles. Equally, however, it is considered that such an effort would be worth the investment.

This pilot has also demonstrated the impact of the model on non-Aboriginal students who may have been experiencing learning difficulties. In these situations, any gain in literacy made by such students must be sustained through active parental support and interest. Sustained success appears to be greatest where parents have been advised of the nature of the pilot and the roles that they can take to support students at home. While many parents are willing to assist, this project again demonstrated that they need specific assistance with the activities they can take into the home context to assist their children. In those relatively few situations where this occurred, there appears to have been a range of positive results for students.

8. *The emphasis on explicit teaching and student engagement*

Many teachers engaged in the pilot project have commented on the benefit of their now understanding the nature and implementation of explicit teaching and how it can be applied across a range of learning disciplines. While many teachers and students engage in more inductive and discovery-based activities, the place of explicit teaching as a possible teaching methodology has been re-established and many teachers are already seeing the benefit of such an approach in particular learning contexts and with particular students.

One of the greatest challenges confronting teachers at present relates to their ability to engage difficult students in the learning process. It would appear that this pilot project has offered teachers a range of strategies that can be employed with such students. Indeed, many teachers have commented on the reduced disruptive student behaviour they are experiencing when teaching the L2R:R2L model.

9. *Use of the approach by other teachers in other key learning areas*

It is readily apparent that the L2R:R2L model will only be successful when the key aspects of the pedagogy can be applied across a range of learning disciplines. The pilot has already demonstrated the capacity of the model to satisfy this criterion.

A fundamental step of building wider acceptance of the model is to ensure that teachers from other key learning areas are constantly trialling the methodology successfully. Where this has

already happened, acceptance is accelerated and the potential for sustainable impacts on student learning are decidedly greater.

10. *An identification of the key assumptions underpinning the teaching of literacy.*

If the literacy teaching model under consideration is to be successful over the longer term, it is apparent that existing assumptions about the teaching of student literacy must be considered, challenged and/or supported where necessary. While there is no single approach most appropriate for all students, it is imperative that teachers have the opportunity to argue the key assumptions underpinning this and other approaches to teaching student literacy so that they clearly understand the elements of the pedagogy being applied. Once this has occurred teachers are in a stronger position to use the methodology with understanding and commitment.

Concluding Statement

Evidence gathered during the review from teachers and related stakeholders indicates the early success of the pilot project. While the data relating to student achievement is essentially anecdotal at this stage, it is clear that the confidence and motivation levels of students participating in the pilot have increased. It would also appear that these trends relate to students of varying ability levels and backgrounds. Equally, participating teachers have found the experience instructive and challenging. For many teachers, existing pedagogical paradigms have been challenged and new teaching methodologies have been successfully trialled.

At the heart of the pilot project is the collaborative professional development model which has been found to be extremely beneficial yet resource-intensive. It is apparent that there is a growing groundswell of support for strategically expanding the model, perhaps in different contexts within New South Wales and even with different key learning areas. It has also been acknowledged that any expansion of the pilot will require considerable resource allocation for the purposes of teacher professional development and lesson planning. Only time will tell whether schools perceive the benefits of the pilot project to be sufficiently significant to identify this initiative as core business in the future and therefore a targeted school priority for future and ongoing school funding.



Appendices

Appendix 1 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – June 2005

Appendix 2 — Interview Schedule: Other Project Stakeholders – July/August 2005

Appendix 3 — Project Outline

Appendix 4 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – Late 2005

Appendix 5 — Stakeholder Schedule

Appendix 1 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – June 2005

The Project

1. What is your motivation for participating in this project?
2. What do you consider to be the major goals of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project?

The Approach

3. What do you consider to be the greatest strengths of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (L2R:R2L) approach?
4. How does this approach differ from the way you have taught student literacy in the past?
5. In what ways do you anticipate this approach will more effectively address the literacy needs of students? Do you anticipate any particular differences for Indigenous students? Why?
6. What examples of student evidence will you be able to provide that suggests the L2R:R2L approach used in your classroom may be making a difference for students?
7. How could you apply the 'scaffolding' approach across other KLAs?
8. In what ways do you believe your teaching of Indigenous students will change as a result of participating in this pilot project?
9. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will assist you in the measurement of student achievement?
10. Have you spoken to other teachers in your school about this approach to teaching student literacy? If so, what has been their reaction?

Professional Development

11. What benefits does your participation in this pilot project provide for you in terms of professional development? Can you give some examples?
12. In what ways has this approach challenged your existing strategies for the teaching of student literacy?
13. Could you comment on the usefulness of the professional development days for the pilot so far? What worked well? What could have been improved?
14. Do you consider the lesson videotaping to be an integral part of the project?
15. How has lesson videotaping enhanced student learning to this stage?

16. How has lesson videotaping enhanced the quality of your own teaching?
17. The model of professional development being applied in this project is one of input, trialling and feedback in a collaborative context. What do you see as the major strengths/limitations of this model of professional development?
18. What role do you see for peer mentoring in a project focusing on teaching and learning strategies like the Years 7–10 English pilot project?

Overall Project Efficacy

19. At this relatively early stage of the pilot project what do you see as its greatest strengths and limitations?
20. Given that the pilot project is still in its early stages, what aspects do you consider could be readily applied in similar projects of this kind?

Appendix 2 — Interview Schedule: Other Project Stakeholders – July/August 2005

The Project

1. What do you consider to be the major goals of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project?
2. How do you believe this pilot project will assist students and teachers?

The Approach

3. What do you consider to be the greatest strengths of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (L2R:R2L) approach?
4. What do you see as the major differences between the L2R:R2L approach and more traditional approaches to student literacy?
5. In what ways do you anticipate this approach will more effectively address the literacy needs of students? Do you anticipate any particular differences for Indigenous students? Why?
6. What particular challenges do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will provide in determining whether the approach makes a difference for students?
7. Do you consider that there is potential for applying the 'scaffolding' notion across other KLAs? Is this particularly the case for Indigenous students? Could you give some examples?
8. In what ways do you anticipate that the teaching of Indigenous students may change as a result of teachers' participation in this pilot project?
9. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will assist the measurement of student literacy achievement?

Professional Development

10. What benefits do you believe teachers' participation in this pilot project will provide in terms of professional development? Can you give some examples?
11. In what ways does this approach challenge existing strategies for the teaching of student literacy?
12. Could you comment on the usefulness of the professional development days for the pilot so far? What worked well? What could have been improved?

13. Do you consider the lesson videotaping to be an integral part of the project?
14. The model of professional development being applied in this project is one of input, trialling and feedback in a collaborative context. What do you see as the major strengths/limitations of this model of professional development?
15. What role do you see for peer mentoring in a project focusing on teaching and learning strategies like the Years 7–10 English pilot project?

Overall Project Efficacy

16. At this relatively early stage of the pilot project what do you see as its greatest strengths and limitations?
17. Given that the pilot project is still in its early stages, what aspects do you consider could be readily applied in similar projects of this kind?

Appendix 3 — Project Outline



Evaluation of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project

Project Outline

Background

The Office of the Board of Studies NSW has engaged Erebus International to evaluate the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project. The overall project has five explicit objectives relating to both processes and outcomes. Each objective is outlined below:

- to increase awareness and expertise among teachers of the teaching and learning needs of Aboriginal students in need of culturally and pedagogically appropriate support to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* and provide the basis for equitable student demonstration of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* outcomes
- to develop a range of explicit scaffolding teaching/learning strategies and authentic assessment tasks that meet the learning needs of targeted students, based on the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* literacy program
- to critically engage Aboriginal students about their learning within experiences of the English syllabus and as it integrates with other key learning areas
- to critically engage students through effective pedagogic practice and discourse so that they are able to consider how success in English and English-related school experiences might provide immediate and enduring engagement with school and education
- to develop links between schools, Aboriginal communities and the wider community, that support effective teaching and learning practices; to encourage the development of learning partnerships; to improve the overall school achievement of students; and to facilitate students to become engaged and active lifelong learners.

It is recognised that Indigenous students require greater levels of support in order to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes. This support includes increasing awareness by teachers of culturally and pedagogically

appropriate teaching and learning strategies for Indigenous students. These strategies include the need for provision of explicit scaffolding techniques and authentic assessment tasks. Each of these will be reviewed during the pilot phase of the project.

The Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project has three separate yet related phases. **The first phase**, commenced in 2004, established a clear definition for the nature and purpose of the project, established the project school sites, learning teams and training peer mentors. **The second phase**, commenced in 2005, represents the pilot project stage. During this phase, four separate English teacher training workshops will be conducted each term. The focus of these will be the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* approach to literacy teaching developed by Dr David Rose from the University of Sydney.

In addition the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* strategies will be implemented in the six confirmed schools with thirteen teachers and two teacher mentors.

The pilot project also involves:

- providing personal support to each teacher through a consultation in which the teacher, consultant and mentor will discuss video footage of them trialling the approach in class
- a second consultation aimed at assisting teachers with future planning/programming
- a professional development day for teachers to be held in Term 3
- the collection of data by teachers (student writing samples – before, during and after the project – one to be a story, the other a response text)
- the publication of annotated samples of student writing on the Board's website.

During this second phase of the project, an evaluation will be undertaken, focusing on the following issues:

- the impact of the approach on student literacy through the analysis of students' pre- and post-writing samples
- the impact of the approach to professional development on teaching practice
- the overall efficacy of the approach.

The third phase of the project is designed to focus on the same areas as the pilot, but modified by what is learned from the evaluation of the pilot project.

Project Objectives

It is anticipated that the pilot project evaluation will:

- identify and critically evaluate existing research, reports and projects in two key areas: effective models of peer mentoring as well as strategies for facilitating significant change in the professional development of teachers
- develop qualitative and/or quantitative data collection tools to capture the extent to which teachers understand the need for explicit teaching strategies to help improve the literacy outcomes for Aboriginal students

- develop qualitative and/or quantitative data collection tools to capture the extent to which teachers have engaged with the approach, taken ownership of it, and implemented it in their classroom practice, in particular, as well as English teaching in general terms.

Project Methodology

This evaluation requires information to be provided to key stakeholders within the Office of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training (Sydney Region) about the outcomes of the pilot project and the strategies for achieving those outcomes.

The methodology for the evaluation will include:

- documentary analysis
- interviews with participating teachers
- analysis of pre- and post-program assessment data
- videotaping methodology of teachers engaged in the implementation of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* approach in their classrooms
- analysis of data derived from teacher journals developed for the purpose of documenting relevant insights and learning during the project
- development and delivery of a teacher survey/questionnaire to be completed by each of the thirteen teachers and two teacher mentors involved in the pilot project. The parameters of this survey will be in direct accordance with the five key outcomes of the project and the stated objectives of the evaluation.

Project Timeline

The evaluation is to be completed by the end of December 2005. Data-gathering activities are planned to take place from June to November 2005.

Contact for Further Information

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Appendix 4 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – Late 2005

The Project

1. Do you remain positive about your participation in this project? Why?
2. What do you consider to be the greatest strength and limitation of this project?

The Approach

3. What is your current view of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (L2R:R2L) approach for your students? Could you provide any reasons?
4. Could you describe how you have adapted the L2R:R2L approach since the beginning of the year?
5. What are your current views of the ways you anticipate this approach will more effectively address the literacy needs of students? Have you noted any particular differences for Indigenous students? Why?
6. What examples of student evidence have you gathered to suggest the L2R:R2L approach used in your classroom may be making a difference for students?
7. How could you apply the 'scaffolding' approach across other KLAs?
8. In what ways do you believe your teaching of Indigenous students has changed as a result of participating in this pilot project?
9. How would you plan to apply this methodology in 2006 and beyond?
10. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will assist you in the measurement of student achievement?
11. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach could be most effectively marketed to other teachers and schools?

Professional Development

12. What benefits has your participation in this pilot project provided for you in terms of professional development? Can you give some examples?
13. How could the impact of the professional development component of the project be further enhanced?
14. Could you comment on the usefulness of the professional development days for the pilot? What worked well? What could have been improved?
15. To what extent have you employed lesson videotaping to enhance student learning during the project?

16. How has lesson videotaping enhanced the quality of your own teaching? How would you plan to use it in the future?
17. What do you see as the major strengths/limitations of the model of professional development? Does it require adaptation for use with other schools in the future?
18. Are there any other comments about the professional development process with a view to applying this model more broadly?

Overall Project Efficacy

19. What do you see as the greatest strengths and limitations of the pilot project?
20. How do you believe this project could be adapted in order to be employed in other schools throughout the state?

Appendix 5 — Stakeholder Schedule

Organisation / School	Name
Richmond River High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Karen Yager • Ms Jane Ryan • Mr Mark Ippolito • Ms Gae Masters
Ballina High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Sue Page • Ms June Burtonwood
Bonalbo Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Sue Smith • Ms Jan Maslen
Alexandria Park Community School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Garry Ledwidge • Ms Rachel Varela • Ms Jesse McMaster
Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Bruce Barclay • Ms Zoe Smith
NSW Office of the Board of Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Kevin Lowe • Ms Suzanne Ziems • Ms Jennifer Munro • Dr Maree Stenglin • Dr David Rose
Sydney Education Region, NSW Department of Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Phil Lambert