

# Exploring practical applications of 'Scaffolding Academic Literacy' (Rose et al. 2008) in EAP reading and writing

Karin Whiteside & Stuart Wrigley

## Slide 3

Original context – indigenous UG health science ss – U o Sydney (i.e. equivalent to UK 'non-traditional'): "literacy needs not met by standard academic pedagogies" (Rose et al., 2008, p165) → Scaff. Ac. : integration of ac R&Wr skills wit study of ac curriculum.

Health Science has both:

TECH – hierarchically organized filed of empirical knowledge

SOC SCIENCE – contingently negotiated arguments for abstract categories/principals ('horizontal')

→ "Access to these discourses typically requires a long apprenticeship in reading, writing and discussing them in secondary School" (Rose et al., 2008, p166) → the need to bridge this 'gap' in a highly accelerated way (suggestion of wider application re: needs to ss who do not enter university with high levels of academic literacy)

→ Will focus on the reading part of the cycle – that's where we identified a deficit in our curriculum/approach that Scaff Ac Lits could possible help redress

## Slide 4

Scaff Ac Lit pedagogy – premise – primary skill ss need for university study is independently learnt from ac reading – assumption of high levels of ac literacy

→ Rather than demand independent tackling of complex texts -→ class time used to prepare ss to read diff texts with critical understanding

[1] Intro to field of text → easily understandable synopsis before ss required to read text

[2] Reading aloud each section of article – each para prepared w. general summary – easily understandable BUT including key academic terms from text. Key elements of text elaborated – definitions of tech terms/explanation of new concepts/discussion building on field knowledge

N.B. [1] + [2] "provides sufficient support for all ss to independently complete reading with greater depth of understanding than is normally possible"

[3] guided identification of key info – N.B. "position cues avoid extraneous load of skimming and scanning for wording"

[4] word meanings elaborated with a definition, explanation or discussion relating the element of meaning to sentence/passage/text as a whole

(Rose et al., 2008, pp169-170)

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- Content largely sidelined in much of our own materials – not seen as necessary to the acquisition of literacy
- Emphasis on apparently transferable 'skills' such as skimming, scanning etc rather than genuine comprehension of source texts – but this approach has been extensively critiqued e.g. Leki (2007) finds little transferability from ESL writing classes to sts' writing in majors; in the UK Lea & Street (1998) question the 'study skills' approach which assumes a neat transfer of writing skills; Wingate (2006) also critiques an approach to writing which divorces skill from content.
- Underpinned by a particular epistemic position, now largely discredited: that of language as transparent conduit of knowledge/meaning (Turner, 1999); literacy couched largely as set of transferable skills – knowledge seen as separate from language
- Teachers generally shy away from close reading of short excerpts, avoid getting their hands dirty with the 'what' of the texts, as too busy trying to teach the 'how' – because the 'what' not seen as transferable – 'we don't/can't do content – we're EAP tutors'.
- Student interaction with source materials weak – many students lacked sufficient contextual/background knowledge, or often the entire *premise* of an article to engage satisfactorily with content
- Disappointing essays – sts' writing characterised by poor/phony use of sources, often through parachuted/token referencing. Strongly indicative of lack of engagement with and comprehension of sources.

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We initially developed materials that followed Rose et al's Scaffolding – buoyed by apparent efficacy of and potential applicability to ESP/EAP contexts

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Indeed, Rose & Martin (2007) show this ESL application in practice, in which learners in a scaffolded reading and writing pedagogy learn through talking about the texts with the teacher; the paper includes interesting transcriptions of the kind of scaffolded class talk produced in a Chinese ESL context

Our application had some success: students' field knowledge improved, as plenty of time devoted to 'preparing for reading' stage; students also better able to interact with texts; better use of sources reported; familiarised students with the 'genre' of academic texts; less plagiarism as comprehension better

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But there were some problems with simply transferring the approach directly to our own context, particularly after the approach bedded in and the novelty wore off:

- Not enough time/curriculum space to progress through all 4 of Rose et al's (2008) stages – in practice only first two stages (preparation for reading and paragraph reading) ever accomplished in a single lesson. In this sense, the approach is 'all or nothing' – new curricula would have to be devised to accommodate a fully scaffolded pedagogy
- In time, students became rather passive and 'tired' of the process: quite 'samey'

-the approach is very teacher-centred and 'hard work' – you stand at the front, talking, inevitably more than the students, as you're essentially doing the 'initiate' and 'feedback' bits of the initiate-response-feedback cycle. Oftentimes, students would not respond, so teacher just ends up 'lecturing' the students through the text...

-As such, the approach suffers from other symptoms of being teacher-led: dominant students ... dominate; not much student-talk going on; teacher can't monitor comprehension

...and students' expectations changed – they came to expect EVERY text dealt with in class to be 'scaffolded' for them

...and so the approach did not really promote independent learning

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Pre-master's reading & Writing topic – Globalization and Culture – Ritzer text = first/easiest of 4 texts used for a multipally-drafted coursework essay

This is the Preparing-before-reading stage – easily understandable synopsis of text – theories from text given within speech bubble 'opinions' – discussion task requiring students to respond to opinions makes the stage more interactive

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Part of 'Paragraph by Paragraph' stage. Only a small variation here – vocabulary introduced in a more ad hoc way, in oral form, by teacher in pure Scaff Ac Lit pedagogy. Here there is an EAP-style written record for students. BUT – choice and organization of vocabulary influenced by Scaff Ac Lit aims – high level relative to length of text of vocab explained – organised in terms of rhetorical function in the text – part of explanation of the way the text works.

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Also part of Paragraph by Paragraph Reading stage, but more inductive/interactive – use of 'EAP style' comprehension questions

Task 4 – 'paragraph-by-paragraph marking' phase – modified to make it into a task – marking features learnt about looking at the first section – less cued than original Scaff Ac Lit pedagogy – students starting to work more independently, applying what they've learnt from the close supported work with the first section of the text. Also, a 'slimmed-down' version of this stage (considerations of time constraints within our curriculum) – focusing on one particular type of language for one particular function

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Example of student writing – showing good level of interaction with the text, but also problems to do with accurately positioning Ritzer in relation to the theory – this is, however, a 'good' problem to come out of us dealing with more complex/theoretical texts on the pre-master's – problems become visible that may have remained 'under the radar' if students only dealt with simpler types of texts – we can therefore tackle these problems rather than students taking them to their master's degree.

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A more successful example. Here, also, a 'useful' problem has come up in terms of her use of the Watson text – again, working with complex texts allows these issues to surface and be dealt with.

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Another pre-master's lesson on the 1999 Seattle protests. Here is an example of how we adapted the 'Sentence-by-Sentence marking' stage of the Scaffolding Academic Literacy pedagogy. The task is made more inductive with (a) comprehension questions, (b) a contract between two texts with different views. We argue that dealing at this sentence level is crucial – students could easily miss the author's stance altogether without this kind of treatment of the text. Second example – contrastive markers used to 'concede' opinion the writer is going to take an opposing stance to.

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Again, the 'Preparing-before-Reading' stage adapted to become a discussion activity (similar to example 1)

### Slide 18

There is little adaption of the original Scaffolding Academic Literacy 'Paragraph-by-Paragraph' stage for this lesson – it needs to be heavily scaffolded and teacher led – a highly complex text which first-year students are confronted with in their second week of study!

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A similar example later in the first year. Students given a synopsis of the text and the wider debate between McSweeney and Hofstede re: Hofstede's national cultural dimensions – McSweeney's critique here is of the methodology and we focused in on one section and looked at the 'If...Then ...But' patterns. An adaption of the 'Paragraph-by-Paragraph Reading' stage – more adapted/inductive than example 3 – students asked to pull out and attempt to explain the content of each 'If ... Then ... But' sequence.

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A move from foregrounding 'strategies' in reading instruction to foregrounding 'genre understanding' of texts.

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