Partners, pedagogy and technology: A Year 7 boy's reading progress

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Introduction

In a world of technological change and cultural diversity, empowering students for academic, economic and personal success necessitates new ways of doing literacy (Lankshear & Snyder, 2000; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Unsworth, 2002). This paper explores the 'new basics' of literacy during reading tasks in a primary classroom, involving student interaction with diverse partners and contexts, including the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A qualitative study undertaken in Western Australia, tracked the reading progress of Art, a Year 7 student who engaged in multimodal activities in the learning community. Selected results suggest that Art increased his level of development and re-positioned his identity during learning opportunities involving scaffolding, or support.

Setting the scene

Until the 1970s, the process of becoming literate was generally viewed as linear and involving basics such as the recognition of letters prior to reading words and sentences. Prominent researchers have since challenged this definition (Heath, 1983; Luke, 1993; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Rogoff, 1990; Sahni, 2001; Toobey, 2000). From a sociocultural perspective, literacy is no longer viewed as simply acquiring a set of skills, but also as engagement in meaningful reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing tasks, which take place in learning communities. In post-industrial societies, the effects of ICT and globalisation have recently been incorporated into new explanations about how students engage with texts (Anstey, 2002; The New London Group, 2000; Turbill, 2006). Anstey argues that 'new basics' of literacy should promote skills for decoding as well as understandings such as the awareness that texts are consciously constructed for social, cultural and political purposes. 'New
basics' of literacy should also encourage students to reflect on knowledge and apply it to life and school-based worlds (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003) through tasks that interweave traditional and innovative forms of communication media (Beavis, 2001; Education Queensland, 2000).

In this paper, the 'new basics' of literacy are explored by examining the process of scaffolding, which evolved as primary school students engaged in 'reading circles' with a variety of partners and contexts (including the use of ICT) during a qualitative study undertaken in the region of Perth, Australia. The general aim of the study was to further our understanding of how students obtain, apply and transform knowledge during group 'reading circles' in diverse classroom contexts. This paper focuses on selected results pertaining to Art, a Year 7 student, who was identified as 'challenged' by the literacy curriculum. To track Art's ways of learning during sequences involving different contexts, partners and technology, the analysis is informed by a social constructivist view of learning, with particular emphasis on utilising a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) and the four reading resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Consequently, the scaffolding tracked for Art in this study cannot be divorced from the situated nature of 'new literacies' that cross students' life and school-based worlds (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003). Shifts in students' literacy learning must be considered in relation to systemic issues such as resources, teacher pedagogy, curriculum policy and implementation, including ICT (Carrington, 2006; Comber & Reid, 2006; Green & Durrant, 2001; Lingard et al., 2003).

**Theoretical framework:**

**A critical/social approach to 'reading circles' and scaffolding**

Over the past decade, literacy practitioners and researchers have developed critical/social methods to foster environments where students question language and respond critically to social issues (Knobel & Healy, 1998; Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004; O'Brien, 2001). Amongst these teaching methods, shared reading has recently been implemented via 'reading circles', whereby students deepen their understanding of texts through discussions about plot, language or personal experiences (Schlick & Johnson, 1999; Whittle, 2002). Whilst 'reading circles' have become popular teaching tools in primary classrooms, empirical research has focussed on their successful implementation (McNair & Nations, 2000; Short et al., 1999) and on the teacher's role (O'Flahavan, 1994; Maloch, 2002) rather than on examining children's ways and means of learning during these scaffolded activities.

The metaphor of scaffolding was developed from social-constructivist theory to describe how adults support children's learning through assistance (Bruner, 1983; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). This process was further explicated by the work of Vygotsky (1978) which identified at least two developmental levels to describe children's learning processes and capabilities. The first or actual developmental level indicates the child's level of mental functioning on an independent task. The second level measures children's accomplishments with the assistance of others. The zone of proximal development, argued Vygotsky, was the difference between the child's actual level of development and the potential development, which was determined through the process of scaffolding. Recently, practitioners have embraced the metaphor of scaffolding to describe the temporary structures of teacher support to facilitate children's understanding and skills in classroom settings (Hammond & Gibbons, 2001; Maloch, 2002; Sharpe, 2001). This metaphor often describes scaffolding as a linear process, involving a patient adult, who directs the child's attention to key aspects of tasks, monitors progress and adjusts degrees of assistance to eventually relinquish control to a co-operative child.

Some researchers have proposed a less teacher-focussed view of scaffolding, which has allowed for further consideration of the child's active participation in problem-solving activities (Comber, 2003; Paris & Cross, 1988; Rogoff, 1990; Stone, 1993). For example, Rogoff widened the concept of the zone of proximal development by emphasising the notion of guided participation during social interaction: the interdependent and complementary role of children, their caregivers and companions. Stone claimed that the potential for learning within the zone of proximal development was not dependent on fixed attributes of the learner, but rather varied as a function of interpersonal relationships and interaction between participants. Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw & Van Krayenoord (2003) argued that time, partners and contexts also affected the zone.
of proximal development. A phenomenon titled 'multi-tiered scaffolding' (Cumming-Potvin, 2001) illustrated how networks of dialogue allowed some children to extend their learning through peer, sibling and/or adult-child interaction that spanned diverse contexts and time frames.

Still, the processes through which student learning in scaffolded activities is influenced, by factors such as context (e.g. small group versus whole class), relationships (e.g. peers or adult-child) and differences in tools employed (e.g. books or multi-media texts) are largely unexplored. Moreover, empirical studies have not closely investigated how scaffolding evolves as students participate in 'reading circles' with a network of partners and contexts, including the use of ICT. Examining these questions will extend knowledge about children's level of development as determined from various support structures (Vygotsky, 1978). Aiming to enrich our understanding of scaffolding, the study tracked primary school students' experiences in understanding, analysing and adopting critical stances towards texts, during 'reading circles'. This intervention, which blended the study of literature with the use of ICT, provided tasks to engage students in constructing, applying and adopting knowledge via the process of scaffolding. To support students' responses to literature, an on-line literacy component, involving a class Reading Web Page, was offered for children (and parents) to access collaboratively at school and/or at home.

The research context and methods
The field site involved a state primary school situated in the metropolitan region of Perth, Western Australia. Composed mainly of middle-class families who spoke English as a first language, the school population involved predominantly parents employed as tradespeople or small business owners. Many families were reported to be dual income, a phenomenon which was perceived by some school staff members as sometimes restricting parents' availability to support their children and/or the school. With an increasing population of over 900 students, the school building included a single story brick construction and several portable classrooms, which were bordered by parklands, horse paddocks and a small shopping centre. The school grounds included tennis courts, a recreational oval, a billabong, many shady trees and several outdoor wooden benches.

In Year 7A, the atmosphere appeared cheerful and industrious, partially due to displays of brightly coloured student work and posters, but also due to the emphasis placed on collaborative learning. Through her extensive knowledge relating to ICT, children's literature and educational research, the classroom teacher provided positive leadership to the 21 students in Year 7A, as well as the school community. The researcher worked intensively with Year 7A (consisting of 12 boys and nine girls) to design, implement and track literacy activities involving 'reading circles'.

The qualitative research design aimed to gain in-depth descriptions to capture participants' perspectives and situate data in a social context. An action research design was chosen due to its effectiveness in studying phenomena that have yet to be extensively investigated and in promoting processes whereby the researcher and participants can pursue new paths of discovery through the cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999; Paixão, 2002). In this sense, the researcher becomes an investigator and a facilitator of change (Minichillo et al., 2000; Sarantakos, 1998). The detailed descriptions characteristic of this approach are also useful for investigating the relationships between people, objects and space (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

The focus on social relationships promotes direct contact with the participants and recognises the researcher's experiences as critical to understanding the phenomenon investigated. For example, the format for 'reading circles' was partially developed prior to the field entry and adapted through consultation with the classroom teacher and subsequent observation of student engagement. The researcher and classroom teacher collaboratively made decisions about selecting 'reading circle' groups based on student learning needs and engaged in a flexible cyclic process of action/reflection (Costello, 2003) to plan and adjust learning tasks. Within this process, thematic analysis was used to identify, code and categorise patterns emerging in the data (Ezzy, 2002).

The intervention process in Year 7A: 'Reading circles' to support student progress
Following Phase 1 of the study, which focussed on negotiating access to the field site, Phase 2 involved school entry, collaborative planning and the intro-
duction of the project to students in Year 7A. Phase 3 generally consisted of an intensive period of data collection over one school term; here the researcher and research assistant spent two mornings per week observing and recording interaction with Year 7A and working with groups and individual students. Data gathering was triangulated using a range of methods, including participant observation, audio and videotaping, work samples, journal entries and semi-structured student interviews in small groups. Examples of interview questions directed at students included: ‘How do you think someone learns to read?’ and ‘Do you read at home?’

Over a period of one term, the ‘reading circle’ intervention involved whole class, group and individual tasks that combined the use of conventional and multi-modal texts. For example, Day 1 began in the classroom with a whole class task whereby students described the kinds of texts they liked to read and brainstormed suggestions for a class Reading Web Page. Here, groups of students recorded ideas on large sheets of paper; using the program Inspiration, students refined their ideas on computers located in the school library. The classroom teacher and students read and discussed a series of picture books and short stories over several subsequent sessions. Students were then organised into ‘reading circles’ (approximately four members per group), to commence a study of the novel Tuck Everlasting (Babbitt, 1975). Once the class Reading Web Page was functional, students used it at school and/or at home, to access reading tasks and tips, as well as a notice board for sending messages to peers or the classroom teacher. Apart from the support students received via peer discussion in their respective ‘reading circles’, diverse resources provided scaffolding to enhance reading comprehension and critical reflection. For example, cards offered written suggestions about tasks (Raisin, 2002) related to the four resources reading model (Freebody, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1999) which recommends the interrelated and simultaneous use of:

- code breaker: knowledge of the relationship between spoken sounds and graphic symbols;
- text participant: knowledge of the meaning of texts, by creating links with personal worlds;
- text user: knowledge of form-functions and the various genres;
- text analyst: knowledge of cultural and ideological bases of texts.

As Year 7 students’ learning during ‘reading circles’ was tracked, three focus groups (each composed of four students), were chosen for analysis. This paper focuses on results pertaining to a student from the ‘male focus group’, Art, who experienced dyslexia; he was identified as being one to two years behind year level benchmarks in spelling and decoding, and as having average comprehension in Reading. Results from ongoing teacher assessment, researcher’s observations and standardised testing, such as the Western Australia Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WA LNA), identified Art and the other three members of the ‘male focus group’ as being challenged by the literacy curriculum. The boys’ low levels of academic achievement related to factors such as behavioural disorders, learning disabilities, absenteeism and limited reading comprehension.

**Art’s literacy identity: Intersecting worlds of home and school**

The term literacy identity (Anstey & Bull, 2004) is characterised by life and school-based discourse worlds that overlap and inform one another (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003). Data collected from field notes and a student group interview indicated that Art’s knowledge and sociocultural background involved complex discourses that matched and mismatched literacy practices privileged at school. As the only child from a first generation English speaking migrant family, Art relocated to Australia with his parents, from the United Kingdom. As owners of a small business, Art’s parents worked long and irregular hours, which sometimes involved travel within Western Australia.

Emotional and relational complexities and uncertainties are often characteristic of the contemporary life worlds of students (Keddle, 2005). Art’s frequent absences from school appeared to hinder his progress in literacy; although Art responded well to in-class support, he also often arrived late and appeared tired and unfocussed. Whilst Art read some magazines, such as BMX, he readily acknowledged that he rarely read at home. In addition, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the student interview, Art’s view of learning to read appeared to focus on spelling, which he described as a pre-cursor to reading words:

“Like when you learn to spell, you learn how to read the word that you’re spelling because if you can spell the word, you can read it.”
Art’s view of reading appeared consistent with the practices of many interventions designed for students with learning disabilities. Nichols and Bayetto (2004) argue that remedial instruction in withdrawal situations often focus on students’ achievement of code breaking skills prior to introducing other forms of literate competence.

Data from the student interview also indicated that Art’s home world involved extensive access to and multiple experiences with ICT. For example, in the family home, Art and his parents used three desktop computers as well as two laptops. Generally though Art appeared to engage in these practices through individual or on-line activities, such as completing homework alone, or playing computer games with remote partners via electronic chat rooms. In the following passage, Art describes the process he normally used to play interactive computer games, with remote partners he had not previously met:

I like, download the games off the Internet and then play players, like that I don’t know, like from chat rooms and stuff- MSN ... Umm I get a partner from MSN, like I was chatting too for about 15 minutes and then I’d say go to a certain website and I’ll play you there.

Close up on scaffolding: Shifting pedagogy, roles and context

During the action research process, Art engaged in scaffolded tasks designed around the four resources reading model (Freebody, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1999) within a framework of pedagogy for multi-literacies (The New London Group, 2000). The following analysis focuses on a selected audio taped sequence from the school library, which illustrates Art’s positioning as a member of Year 7A’s reading community. Here, the classroom teacher used a data projector to model logging on to the Reading Web Page and sending messages via an electronic notice board. Students were invited to log on from a desktop computer, then send a message(s) about the novel to the classroom teacher, their ’reading circle’ members or the whole class.

As indicated in the following transcript, Art spontaneously asked the researcher for assistance with ‘code breaking’ as he typed in a message to his peers:

1. Art Is that how you spell ‘reckon’?
2. Researcher Well, ‘reckon’? (emphasises R sound)... Can you hear the sound?
3. Art Umm
4. Researcher It starts with an ‘R’.
5. Art Oh, so there’s no ‘W’. (Observes text on the screen, points and types in changes.)
6. Researcher That’s it. And, mmm it’s a ‘Re’ (sounds out Re), and the C-K makes the ‘K’ sound, (points to text on screen), so instead of ‘A’ you’ve got a ‘C’ and it’s RECK-ONS, so that’s an “O” (points to text on screen).
7. Art (Observes text on the screen, then types in changes.) Umm.

As the researcher responds to Art’s purposeful query about conventional spelling, the understanding of the relationship between spoken and written sounds and letters is emphasised (particularly in turns 2 and 6), and the interaction focuses on a pedagogy of overt instruction (The New London Group, 2000). Throughout the interaction, multiple scaffolds involving oral language, gestures, a computer screen and keyboard play interdependent roles. As Art becomes positioned to engage in a conversation about literacy, he also poses physical gestures that allow for text revision (see turns 5 and 7).

The sequence continues with Art revising his message prior to sending it to the bulletin board. Despite strategies used to support the male focus group’s comprehension, such as a listening post and intense teacher-led discussion about making meaning from texts, Art still appeared challenged by the sequencing of events in Tuck Everlasting. By asking a series of probing questions, the researcher encourages Art to articulate the reasoning behind his thoughts (see below in turns 12, 14, 16 and 17). As such, in turn 18, the discussion widens to include the practice of ‘text participant’ as Art links to discourse worlds outside the novel. In turn 19, the researcher focuses Art on the strategy of supporting his statements with examples from the novel.

10. Researcher That’s it. (Sound of keyboard as Art continues to type.) So what did you write?
11. Art (Looks at the screen, then reads slowly.) Do any of you reckon this book is a bit boring? I also don’t get the story. I think it is all out of order.
12. Researcher Mmh. Out of order... What do you mean by out of order?
13. Art Like it's not... it's all different parts of it.
14. Researcher The different parts don't seem to be in order. Is that what you mean?
15. Art Yeah.
16. Researcher Like the sequencing of the days?
17. Art O.K. So do you find that confusing? Yeah, it's like it's not really as though... it wouldn't really happen in real life... you wouldn't like at be one place one moment and then another place in the next.
18. Researcher O.K. Can you give me an example of what happens in the book when that happens?
19. Art Well, like it's as though they're like at the, umm, they're riding along and all of sudden they're at the Tucks house and then all of a sudden they're in this boat going down the stream and stuff...
20. Researcher (Listening) Umm hm, umm, hm...
21. Art Then all of a sudden they start saying that the brothers have just arrived and they've been there for while in the story.
22. Researcher O.K. so it's the timing that you find...
23. Art Yeah...
24. Researcher Do you think the author did that intentionally?
25. Art Umm, I'm not sure.

Finally, in turn 24, the researcher introduces the practice of text analyst, which relates to the pedagogical principle of critical framing (The London Group, 2000). Art is thus encouraged to position himself as a reader who questions the intentions of writers.

As the interaction continues, the researcher's scaffolding shifts to a code breaking emphasis as she and Art revise language conventions, such as capital letters and full stops. Shortly thereafter, the practice of 'text user' is also introduced as the researcher directs Art's attention to particular text genres and their relations to text audiences. In turns 72, 74 and 76 at right, the researcher asks questions relating to language conventions used on chat rooms and mobile phones, such as the use of 'u' rather than 'you'. As Art's home literacy world involves multiple experiences with ICT, these connections allow for situated practice in pedagogy (The London Group, 2000) that build on the learner's interests and knowledge. As illustrated in the following excerpt, as a frequent user of MSN, Art is able to position himself as the expert who informs the researcher about the processes and conventions of this genre. The social interaction as well as the open-ended nature of these 'real-time' learning tasks appear to provide a place in which Art can increase his zone of proximal development.

72. Researcher ... When people type on MSN do they often umm don't worry about capitals and things like that?
73. Art (Sound of keyboard.) No they just go,
74. Researcher Just go straight... O.K so it's almost like a different kind of a text?
75. Art Yeah.
76. Researcher So you wouldn't worry about this? (Points to a capital letter that Art recently inserted, following his discussion with the researcher.)
77. Art Yeah, because you're trying to type as quick as the conversation when you're chatting.
78. Researcher O.K
79. Art So you just try and type as quick as you're talking so you don't bother doing capitals and all that.

Moments later, when a student spontaneously approaches Art for advice relating to the computer network, it can be argued that Art's role of expert in the area of ICT is reinforced.

Apart from scaffolding centred around desktop computers, the intervention provided students with a reading bulletin board to send messages. Through this mechanism, students could interact electronically over an extended period of time and with various partners, who articulated a variety of opinions as they responded to on-line texts. The students also added graphics, such as smiling faces or devils to add humour or emotions to their personalised messages. The day following Art's original message, a member of the male focus group posted a message supporting Art's view of the novel as 'boring'. One week later, Ursula, a high achieving student involved in another 'reading circle', posted the following message, which accentuates her enjoyment of the novel and encourages others to read on:
I think the book is very interesting and the more you read the more interesting it gets. It really puts you in suspense and I like that a lot. When I pick up the book, I can’t stop reading, read on and you will enjoy it too. Don’t get bored with this book.

Excerpts from the following transcript illustrate that as the researcher asks probing questions, which reflect the role of ‘text user’, Art begins to re-position his view about the novel.

6. Researcher So she (Ursula) has a completely opposite opinion from you?
7. Art Yeah, but I got... I got the same opinion as Ursula now, because I was only up to chapter six.
8. Researcher O.K. so have you changed your opinion now?
10. Researcher So have things started to change in the book?
11. Art Yeah, it’s a lot more interesting.
12. Researcher What happens that makes it more interesting, or a lot more interesting, as you say?
13. Art Yeah... (brief pause)
14. Researcher (brief pause) What happens?
15. Art It’s just like… I don’t know... Mae hit the man in the yellow suit over the head with the gun and stuff like that starts happening.

The preceding sequence suggests that the content of Ursula’s statements, the researcher’s probing questions and the on-line nature of the bulletin board, which allowed for asynchronous time, encouraged Art to reflect on his original statement.

**Discussion**

Valentine & Holloway (2002) interviewed 11 to 16 year old Internet users and argued that the disembodied and asynchronous nature of on-line interactions offer opportunities for young people to position themselves in new ways. Similarly, to provide Year 7 students opportunities to discover new voices within the English curriculum, Bullfin (2006) used e-mail correspondence connecting in-class conversations with students’ on-line activities occurring out-of-class (i.e. on-line chat, blog, etc.). More broadly, Carrington (2001) argued for educators to widen the literate landscape presented in classrooms, due to the increasing influence of popular culture whereby children commonly develop identities and literacy skills through multiple resources (including film, print, television, shopping centres and clothing styles). Whilst results pertaining to Art are limited to a specific classroom community, it can be argued that Art’s reflection represents a powerful resource for identity formation for an upper primary student who began to mediate self-representations through reading and responding to texts. As multimodal activities unfolded in the learning community, Art re-positioned his literate identity (Anstey & Bull, 2004) during a process known as multi- tiered scaffolding. Through this process, the nature of scaffolding is viewed as involving changing contexts, texts and partners.

The first scaffolded partnership involved the researcher and Art, who collaborated to compose a message on a desktop computer. The second partnership involved on-line interaction between Art and at least two of his classmates, which was complemented by face-to-face interaction with the researcher and teacher. It can be argued that Art extended his zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) as he began to internalise understandings about language and literature through this web of partnerships involving purposeful child-directed tasks, the interplay between multiple interlocutors and the use of ICT. As such, the complex nature of the scaffolding provided networks of peer and/or adult-child interaction, which spanned both on-line and off-line texts and real and asynchronous time.

In particular, the use of on-line tools, such as the bulletin board provided opportunities for Art to do more than report and interpret information but also to ‘try on new identities, where meaning could be transformed and re-designed. Here, as Art and other students employed the subject ‘1’, they positioned themselves as agents and authors who interwove their voices with the those of others situated in the class community. Similarly, Kenway and Bullen (2001) argued that the Internet offers interlocutors a range of voices with which to take on new identities, in an enjoyable yet earnest manner.

ICT has emerged as integral to the social fabric of everyday life, which shapes and is shaped by social practices in both real and delayed time (Luke, 2000). Still, in classrooms, the role of pedagogy remains at the forefront to collaborative learning constructed during scaffolded partnerships. For Art,
engagement in activities which were underpinned by a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000) and the four practices of a literate person (Luke & Freebody, 1999) provided avenues to cross boundaries between the worlds of home and school literacy. For example, probing questions allowed Art to make connections between his opinions about a novel studied in class and the language conventions used in 'out of school' chat rooms, such as MSN.

The teacher/researcher’s guidance as facilitator, rather than as director during interaction, also provided opportunities for Art to shift smoothly between the role of expert and novice as he began viewing knowledge from a critical framework. This integration of explicit pedagogical practice with the use of technology and multiple partners allowed Art to talk explicitly about language and to express, justify and modify opinions over time, during ‘reading circle’ activities. For example, as Art composed a message to peers via the bulletin board, the researcher guided him towards reflecting on Natalie Babbitt’s intentions in creating seemingly ‘out of sync’ time patterns in the novel Tuck Everlasting.

Art’s reading progress involved tasks that integrated printed literature, on-line interaction and students’ home interest in ICT. Whilst these ‘new literacies’ helped blend Art’s life and school-based worlds (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003), the wider picture of student learning must be considered.

Student progress in the area of literacy takes place in classroom environments impacted upon by a multitude of factors such as resources, teacher pedagogy and curriculum development, including ICT (see Carrington, 2006; Comber & Reid, 2006; Green & Durrant, 2001; Lingard et al., 2003). In a Western Australian state school, Art (along with a minority of students), was privileged to work with a Level 3 teacher, in this instance, a professional well-versed in ICT related pedagogy. As an educational leader in Western Australia, the Level 3 teacher demonstrates excellence for numerous criteria, including:

- exemplary and innovative teaching strategies to effectively cater to diverse individuals, groups and classes of students;
- knowledge of educational trends, issues, theories and systems’ initiatives;
- sustained engagement in high-level self-reflective professional practice (Department of Education and Training, 2007).

Similarly, numerous Australian research reports and curriculum documents have highlighted the fundamental role that classroom teachers can play in relation to pedagogy and the situated context of student learning (see Department of Education and Training, 2004, 2006; Education Queensland, 2000; Lingard et al., 2001; Lingard et al., 2003; Louden, 2005). These texts point to ongoing issues, such as the need for classroom teachers to have adequate subject knowledge to cater for individual learning needs and pedagogical innovation in delivering and assessing curriculum (Ewing, 2006), particularly for increasing use of digital technologies (Carrington, 2006).

**Concluding remarks**

This study, which blended traditional aspects of print with the use of ICT in ‘reading circles’, tracked student experiences in understanding and adopting critical stances towards texts. Qualitative results gathered from a single site may only be translated to other sites with caution. In addition, further research to investigate how scaffolding evolves as students participate in ‘reading circles’ over extended periods of time, is recommended, particularly at the early childhood level. However, results reinforce the argument that in societies imbued with technological change and cultural diversity, new literacies demand new pedagogies (Beavis, 2001; Green & Campbell, 2003). Amidst this diversity, explicit pedagogy for ‘new basics’ needs to provide a converging point for scaffolding and equity. Creating equitable places for students assures avenues of intellectual and social exchange. These avenues blur traditional teacher-student divisions of authority. As life and school-based worlds (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003) become interwoven in asynchronic time frames offered by on-line/off-line environments, these equitable places also allow students to try on new identities when reading and responding to multimodal texts.

Still, discussions focussing on new literate identities must be mindful that notions of how and why students become literate are constantly in a state of flux (Durrant & Green, 2001). In this sense, to empower students for successful citizenship in a democratic society, new ways of doing literacy must
be dynamic, in that they transcend linear notions of time, identity formation and construction of knowledge. In the current political landscape whereby Australian teachers face increasing pressure to report improved student outcomes, Ewing (2006) argues that forging connections between high quality teaching and sustained professional development is vital for empowering young citizens to be literate in multiple ways.

References


