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National Newsletter: Secondary Literacy

Information and resources for Leaders of Literacy in secondary schools | Term 2 2014

Greetings to you all, Kia ora, Kia orana, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Mālō e lelei, Tālofa lava, Talofa ni.

Through this newsletter we provide a national overview of secondary literacy, discuss issues relevant to our community as they arise, and provide information and links to relevant materials and resources. In this edition we focus on Quality Teaching and feature the work of Cynthia Greenleaf.

Denise, Irene, and Mal

Quality Teaching *A discussion starter...*

All of our students deserve to experience quality teaching that includes ongoing instruction in how to engage with, understand and create texts that are relevant to each subject area. As students move through secondary school they experience increasingly complex and specialized tasks and texts, and therefore literacy instruction is vitally important to continue through to senior levels. Without paying attention to the literacy demands in each subject area, and explicit literacy instruction embedded in the context of subject learning, we risk a lack of engagement by students and low levels of understanding subject knowledge.

So what does quality **literacy** teaching look like? There are many aspects to consider. We outline three considerations here (please do not regard this a complete list) - you may wish to take up the discussion in your school and communities as well.

Evidence-based knowledge of the learner

When we have quality literacy information about each learner, we are able to make better teaching decisions about student learning in each subject context. What subject-specific and general literacy information do you gather and use?

Knowledge of subject area literacy demands

What are the ways of reading, writing, thinking, researching, speaking, presenting etc. that are relevant to each subject area? What knowledge and skills are valued? e.g. personal responses to texts, accurate recording of observations etc. Understanding the literacy demands in each subject area leads to the question: *How does my classroom teaching practice support students to develop the subject-specific literacy skills they require?*

Embedding literacy practices as routine and monitoring progress

For example - engaging students in discussions about what they have read, or how to interpret, analyse and respond to texts; modelling written responses, allowing time to practice writing.

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Featured researcher and practitioner: Cynthia Greenleaf

Cynthia Greenleaf is Co-Director of the [Strategic Literacy Initiative](#), where for two decades she has conducted cutting-edge research in adolescent literacy and translated it into teacher professional development. We were fortunate to have Cynthia visit New Zealand recently - hosted by the University of Auckland. You may have been lucky enough to attend one of her seminars.



Dr. Greenleaf's work focuses on discipline-specific literacy practices in secondary and college settings. She designs and studies professional development for teachers aimed at transforming traditional content area instruction into active inquiry engagement in which literacy plays a vital role.

One of the key messages she emphasizes about reading across learning areas is to view reading as a **problem-solving** exercise.

By creating a collaborative environment where **'we don't expect to comprehend straight away, we expect to problem-solve'**, we are acknowledging that some texts are challenging, but by working collaboratively we can figure out ways to make meaning. This kind of approach applies to all types of texts – for example diagrams, maps, reports, digital texts, narratives.

After students have attempted to problem-solve around a challenging or unfamiliar text, you could ask them to consider:

- What did you do to make sense of the text?
- What got in the way of your reading?
- What problems did you solve?
- What problems, if any, remain?

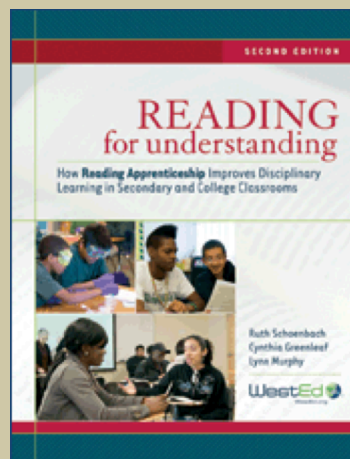
Students will come up with a range of responses that show how they individually made sense of a text. By engaging in this type of problem-solving, students and teachers can build strategies in each learning area that assist everyone to build understanding. (Schoenbach, Greenleaf and Murphy, 2012).

NZLA conference: *Surfing the Literacy Wave*

Tauranga, 28 September – 1 October 2014

This conference offers valuable literacy professional development. Keynote speakers include Ewan McIntosh, Steven Graham, Mem Fox, Professor Jill Lewis-Spector, and Brendon Spillane.

Register at www.nzla.org.nz



Reading for Understanding: How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms, 2nd Edition

By Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, & Lynn Murphy (2012)

Read about the WestEd [Reading Apprenticeship](#) Programme. This programme aligns with our Secondary Student Achievement Contract approach to literacy:

- Subject-specific literacy development
- High-level comprehension development
- Connections to background knowledge
- Opportunities for guided, collaborative practice

Links to Reading Apprenticeship video and resources outlining teacher practice:

<http://readingapprenticeship.org/middle-school-high-school-overview/>



Note that NZLA (NZ Literacy Association) was formerly known as the NZRA (NZ Reading Association).

Questions to elicit student thinking

Because so much of classroom dialogue takes the form of teacher initiation/student response/teacher evaluation, students may be inexperienced in responding to questions that invite thinking rather than retrieving information. The following questions help to develop student thinking. A non-judgmental response such as a nod, thank-you or follow-up question invites further conversation.

Invite Thinking. Ask questions that do not presume everyone has the same ideas:

- So...what do you think?
- What was especially interesting for you?

Invite Confusion. Ask questions that encourage students to reveal their reading difficulties:

- How did you know that your understanding was breaking down?
- Can you point to certain places in the text where you lost comprehension?

Probe. As needed, help students share or uncover why they may have offered a particular answer:

- Help us understand your thinking on that
- Can you tell us a little more?
- What in the text makes you say that?
- Can you give us an example?

Document. Record students' ideas so that they are easily available for others to respond to and to compare and connect.

Extend. Ask questions that explicitly focus students on responding to others' ideas and confusions:

- Does everyone agree?
- Did anyone else have a similar problem?
- What might be another way to look at that?

Link. Help students connect to previous learning and student thinking:

- How might this relate to...?
- What connections come up for you?

Reference: Schoenbach, Greenleaf and Murphy (2012) Reading for Understanding, pp 99.

E-learning

QR codes are part of our daily living now – airline check-in, purchasing products, but they are also useful for learning. These can link us to websites, or feedback posts, surveys, or even learning activities. Research by Sheldon (2014) shows how student engagement was increased through the use of these in the classroom (spelling activities, analysing visual sources, reading comprehension bookmark) and how learning developed for the teacher as well as the students. Literacy skills can be built through digital means and bridge the digital divide between in-school and out-of-school communities.

Further resources to support effective questioning....

Ofsted report (2012)

[Questions to Promote learning](#)

How Can Quality Questioning Transform Classrooms?

[Questioning to Advance learning and Achievement](#)

Asking questions to improve learning:

[Strategies and examples of questions](#)

Useful Link:

NZQA - Literacy



[Literacy and Numeracy home page](#)

Here you will find information about and links to:

- NCEA literacy requirements
- UE literacy requirements
- Literacy Unit Standards resources
- English for Academic Purposes resources

Smith, R. (2014) Crossing the digital divide: A middle years teacher's reflective journey. Published in *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years*, 22,1, pp41-47. (ALEA Journal)

