# Case study 3: Primary and middle years

Classroom literacy has many elements which effective teachers constantly monitor to ensure students are included, engaged and achieving. An important principle is that a good proportion of classroom speaking, reading and writing activity should be taught and incorporated within units of work on curriculum areas. This enhances class participation by students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds with different levels of EAL/D and literacy precisely because they can make more links to the curriculum content. Such links are not fostered if literacy is only addressed as an endeavour separate from curriculum area learning, for example, in stand-alone reading programs with levelled readers. A key point here is that, although convenient, off-the-shelf reading programs are always off topic, may take up considerable classroom time and do not contribute directly to student participation in curriculum learning.

Break it down, build it up: Teaching curriculum content, language and literacy in parallel

Of great assistance, then, is a planning framework which focuses on the language and literacy demands required for learning and assessment in a curriculum area. This is the reason we developed *Break it down, build it up* (see Figure 5.4) with the assistance of many teachers working in EAL/D language coaching roles in whole-class contexts with diverse student cohorts.

Each of the four sections of the planning framework—Break it down, Bridge it, Build it up and Better it—are now illustrated.

Figure 5.4 *Break it down*, *build it up* planning framework
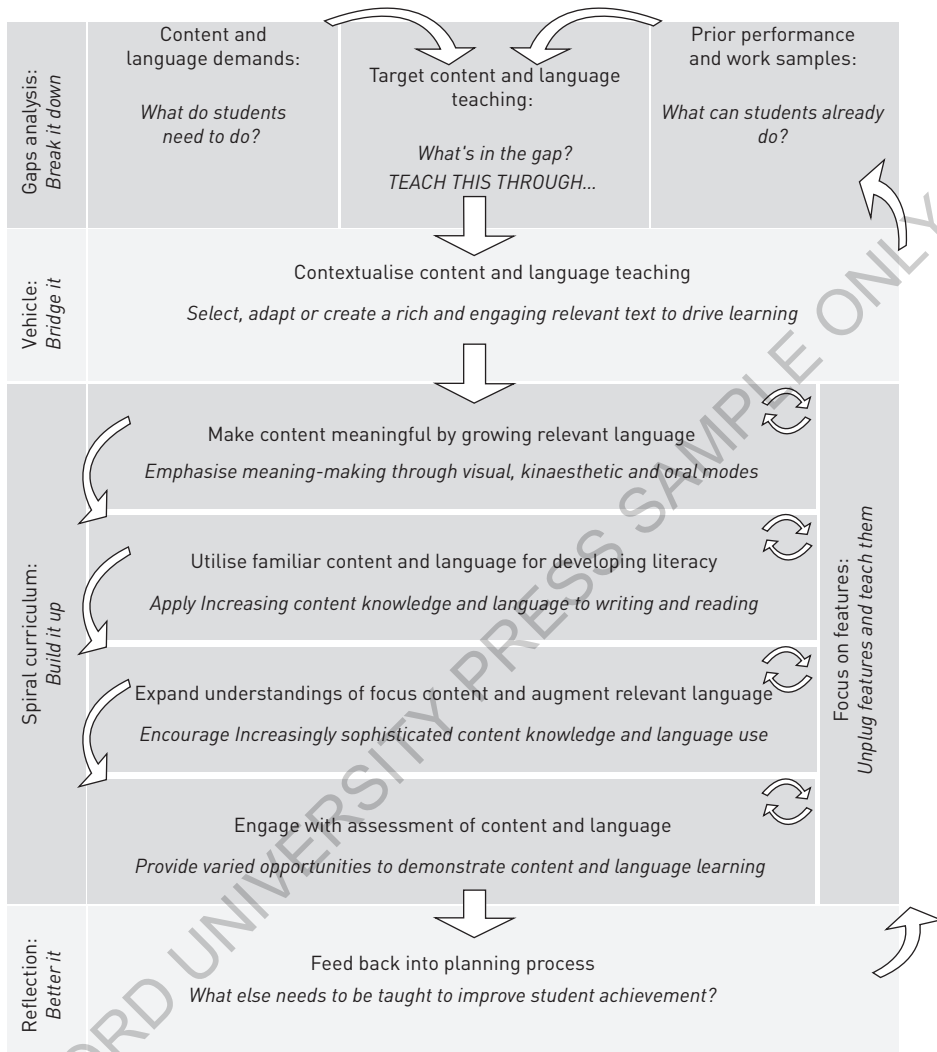
Source: Angelo & Carter (2015)

1 Break it down: A gaps analysis

Teachers consider the assessment task(s) and the curriculum area knowledge plus the language/literacy demands they require. Each Australian Curriculum area has student work samples or teachers can produce their own exemplar of the task. Teachers compare the sample/exemplar with what students have demonstrated so far. The difference between the target and student outputs gives an indication of major language and literacy teaching points, as well as the focus curriculum area content.

Teaching example

Sample task: Design a pamphlet informing readers about the need to save water and persuading them to take action (Year 3).

Exemplar of assessment piece

Side A. Front Cover **Amazing water facts**	Side A. Back Cover **Save water, save money**	Side A. Inside Cover **Saving water is a team effort**
» Just 1% of the water on Earth is fresh. » Most inland Australia lacks surface water and is severely dry. » Australians have the highest rate of water use per person in the world. » All living things need water: People too. **We must learn to save water!**	Saving water helps the environment. It definitely saves money too. Start saving now! Visit <www.dnrme.qld.gov.au/__data/ assets/pdf_ file/0006/1407642/ whizzys-incredible-journey. pdf>.-	» Talk to your family! » Be a water-saving team with your friends! » Your class can lead the way at school. **What's your best tip for saving water?**
Side B. Inside Left: Fold in last **HOW CAN** **In the bathroom**	Side B. Inside Centre **YOU** **In the kitchen**	Side B. Inside Right: Fold in first **SAVE WATER?** **In the garden**
» Have a shorter shower. » Don't leave the water running while you brush your teeth. » Only use the full flush when you need it.	Don't leave the tap on to... » wash fruit and vegies » rinse dirty dishes Fill the sink instead.	» Water some plants with water which you catch in a bucket in the shower. » Collect rain water in a tank or in buckets. » Only water at night.

Source: loosely adapted from Language for Learning unit exemplar by Ellena Rose Brownlow

Analysis: For a start, teachers can just highlight words and expressions they think students might not use, as in the exemplar above. Next, they can make lists of obvious language and literacy elements to teach (see the list below). As teachers tune in to how their students speak and write, they might notice whether word endings and little function words (e.g. *with*, *at*, *is*, *are*, *have*, *has*, past tense etc.) cause difficulties, as is often the case for EAL/D learners. They can list these for attention too.

Useful language/literacy elements from exemplar

- Commands: Save water! Don't waste water! Only water at night. Fill the sink instead.
- Making longer sentences: …when/if you need it; … while you brush your teeth; … which you catch in the shower
- Using -ing phrases to start sentences: *Saving water is a team effort.*
- Addressing the audience: *you, your* or *we, us, our*
- Quantity/frequency facts: 1% of all the water; the highest rate of water use per person; all/most/many/some …
- Persuasion: we must/should/need to learn to save water; definitely, severely …

2   Bridge it: A vehicle for driving the unit along

The teacher selects (or creates) a text that will serve as a foundation for learning interactions about the host curriculum area(s). The text needs to be accessible to students (e.g. have useful illustrations) and manageable (e.g. be not too long) but sufficiently complex and interesting as to be a source of information, inspire student interactions and further learning on the topic, and last for a few weeks. If no suitable text can be located, teachers often develop a text themselves (e.g. a PowerPoint) which may be complete like a book or it can be a 'living text' like a learning diary which the teacher adds to every day and rereads with students.

KEY REFERENCE

Oxenham, H, Stephens, B, Brown, K & Buckingham, H (2014), *Whizzy's incredible journeys*, Brisbane, QLD: Queensland Department of Energy and Water Supply, retrieved 5 November 2020 from <www.dnrme.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1407642/whizzys-incredible-journey.pdf>.

3   Build it up: Follow a spiral curriculum approach to go deeper into learning

Initially the teaching and learning progress by working on the meaning and information in the text, primarily via reading and discussing the text, using mostly speaking, visual or kinaesthetic activities: students are not required to produce independent writing on the topic at this stage (so that from the outset students with lower levels of literacy and EAL/D feel included rather than excluded from participating). A class wall display consisting of 'posters' with teacher-scribed notes on information, class ideas and language teaching points is a key focal point for building student engagement and confidence.

Example oral language, meaning-making activities

- Introduce the text and how it relates to the students' assessment task. Read the text, or parts of it (as it's quite long), each day. Discuss the information you get from the text and illustrations. Record notes on posters for the class to revisit.
- Start building a visual wall display with information about the water cycle from the text and from student experiences. Revisit and read what's here each day, adding to previous posters/sections and beginning new posters/sections.
- You could display the water cycle poster from the text and prompt students to explain what Whizzy the raindrop's journey looked like at each point. Scribe their versions and display them around the water cycle poster.
- Use the text as a springboard for beginning to consider where water could be wasted and how it could be saved. Add these water wasting and saving ideas to the visual wall display (e.g. in thought bubbles).
- Do kinaesthetic activities to enhance meaning and engagement, like creating handsigns to explain meanings of words. Doing every single word in a sentence is a

challenge because it involves little function words, but is well worthwhile for EAL/D learners. Acting techniques such as team freeze-frames can demonstrate important concepts and language about water use too.

- Make reference charts with lists of important vocabulary and their explanations, of useful sentence patterns and of sentence starters etc. Practise using them orally each day (e.g. in pair work).
- Use images from the text. Discuss and label everything in each image, especially with their connectives (*into the river, through the pipe, out of the water …*). Add to the visual wall display.

Then, the teaching and learning focus expands to include written and reading activities for students on the foundation of the talk and understanding built up so far. Activities appear to concentrate on the productive skill of writing. However, students are drawing from the visual wall display elements (textlets), the main class text plus any additional texts such as websites the teacher has introduced (i.e. reading), as well as from their oral language learning experiences.

Example writing–reading activities

- Continue to develop written resources with students, such as reference posters with relevant information or focus language structures, for the visual wall display. Still practise using them orally, but now link them to everyday writing tasks.
- Make explicit links between spelling, reading and writing and the visual wall display items.
- On the visual wall display, include thought-provoking statistics and information from web searches conducted with the class about water (e.g. the global scarcity of fresh water).
- Set short 'quick write' sessions based on oral activities about the text/visual wall display, for example, thought bubbles for Whizzy; labelled diagrams such as a water cycle poster or a house with water points identified; lists of water use in daily life; potential water wasting/saving activities in particular settings; changing bossy advice to more persuasive advice etc.
- Undertake activities for a class water-consumption journal, such as measuring the amount of tap water that runs out of a tap in a minute (and use it for watering etc.), calculating the amount of water students use daily by thinking about all the things they do with the tap running and timing how long each takes or making a solar still to emulate part of the water cycle etc.
- Gradually expand writing sessions by increasing the scope of tasks, for example, writing a paragraph on water usage for common household tasks; expressing the most shocking statistics on world water situations; explaining how saving water will impact positively on people, animals, finances etc.

As the unit progresses, the teaching purposefully augments the original text with extra information and concepts required by the curriculum area. This unit would naturally integrate HASS, science and English.

Example curriculum area activities

- As a whole class, in pairs or individually, do targeted research on relevant areas identified by the class, such as the nature of artesian water and how it is used/wasted; information on local water-storage facilities, where the water comes from and the rate it is used; average households' water usage; average rainfall/temperature patterns in Australia and any changes; wildlife access to water; health of waterways etc.
- Display student findings on the visual wall display under headings decided with the class (e.g. consider how questions, snappy titles and layout all engage audience attention).

Finally, the assessment task is explained and scaffolded to ensure maximal student involvement.

Example assessment scaffolding activities

- Explicitly teach students about the structure of a pamphlet.
- Model and develop a planning chart with students, display this planning chart and refer to it in class discussions.
- Practise thinking of information for different sections of the pamphlet (in whole-class discussions, then in pairs feeding back to the class again)—display ideas in note form on the visual wall display.
- Discuss potential layouts of words and pictures in the pamphlet and their effects—make posters with this information.
- Students use the planning chart to develop their pamphlet:
  - Students illustrate their pamphlet.
  - Students explain the content of their pamphlet to peers, teacher, classroom visitors etc.

Throughout the teaching and learning process, on the basis of rich class interactions teachers spot language/literacy features which students demonstrate difficulty with or maybe do not produce at all (in comparison with how the teacher talks or the target exemplar). These tricky features are 'unplugged' from the teaching context, explicitly taught and then 'plugged' back into the context to be practised.

Example focus language feature activities

For example, expressing conditions:

With conditions, one thing depends on the other. Something might happen only if another event happens … or doesn't happen. The opposite also works: one thing won't happen if the other doesn't.

☑ This happens *if* ☑ that happens. [save water, save money]

☑ This happens *if* ☒ that doesn't happen. [run out of water, don't save it]

☒ This won't happen *if* ☒ that doesn't. [won't save water, don't try]

Practise making these sentences with students: Think of two water facts that are linked and decide how they are linked using ticks and crosses as above. Then choose a joiner such as *if, when, whenever, every time*.

For example: We save water ***every time*** we turn off the tap.

We can't grow food ***if*** we don't have water.

Related points

- Word order: the *if* part of the sentence can go first, it doesn't always have to follow.
- Negation: interesting things happen when we negate sentences. *We have water > We don't have water.* We add the extra helper 'do' as well as 'not'—which we run together as the contraction 'don't' in speaking. The shape of 'do' depends on what goes before: *We don't try hard enough* (we: do + not = don't); *We think it doesn't matter* (it: does + not = doesn't).
- Tense and modals: sometimes we need different verb forms or groups on either side. This might be because the one thing in reality occurs before the other or because we're talking about the ability, obligation, possibility of somebody doing something, something happening etc.

4 Better it: Reflecting on our teaching to improve student learning

Finally, our teaching only improves if we reflect on the results. What worked and what didn't, for which students and why? How might we change this for better student learning next time?

Example reflection activity

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY POINTS	WHY DID I PICK THIS?	HOW DID I TEACH THIS?	WHAT DID I SEE IN STUDENT WRITING?
Sentences with conditions			
Quantity & frequency			
…			

> ### KEY REFERENCES
>
> Language Perspectives website, retrieved 5 November from <www.learningplace.com.au/showitem.asp?pid=52159>.
>
> Queensland Government Department of Education and Training (2020), *Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners: A national review of programs and approaches*, pp. 129–30.