



A TEACHING-LEARNING CYCLE

The pedagogy associated with a functional approach to language provides a proven approach for teaching literacy in every subject, at every year level.

The approach arose in the 1980s from a concern for students who were being left behind – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

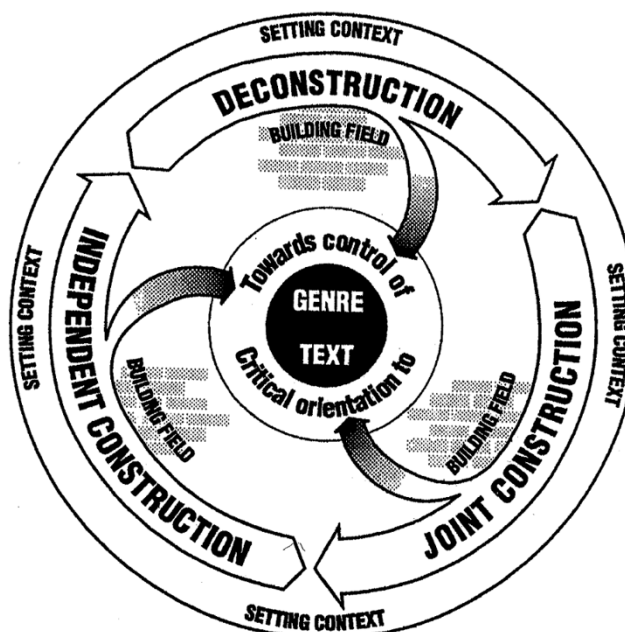
A teaching-learning cycle

To address this issue, a series of major research projects set out to investigate the impact of the explicit teaching of language and literacy in primary and secondary schools¹. The results led to the development of a teaching-learning cycle that is still influential in Australia and internationally.

An early version of the model was developed by Joan Rothery and colleagues in the context of an inner-city Disadvantaged Schools Program in Sydney.

It is based on the Vygotskian principle of gradual release of responsibility

- as students are supported in working towards increasing independence,
- learning through guided interaction with more proficient others,
- in the context of shared experience.



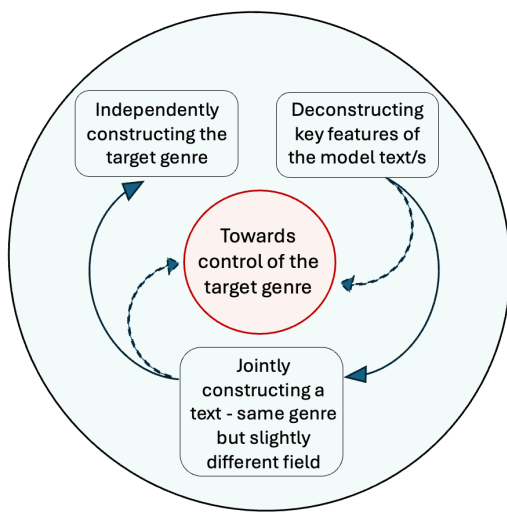
Importantly, it promoted the explicit teaching about how language functions to enable us to achieve our goals – in our daily lives, in school learning, and in the

¹ The Writing Project (1979); Language and Social Power (1986); Write it Right (from 1991)

wider community. In the early 1980s, the notion of genre was a radical breakthrough at a time when explicit teaching was discouraged in favour of discovery learning.

Explicit teaching in pursuit of the goal

From this simplified version of the original cycle, we can see that the early model was focused on developing students' control of the target genre through explicit teaching as they moved from apprentice towards mastery.



A genre relevant to the curriculum task is identified and the class examines the social purpose of the genre – to explain, describe, narrate, recount, problem-solve, review, persuade, and so on.

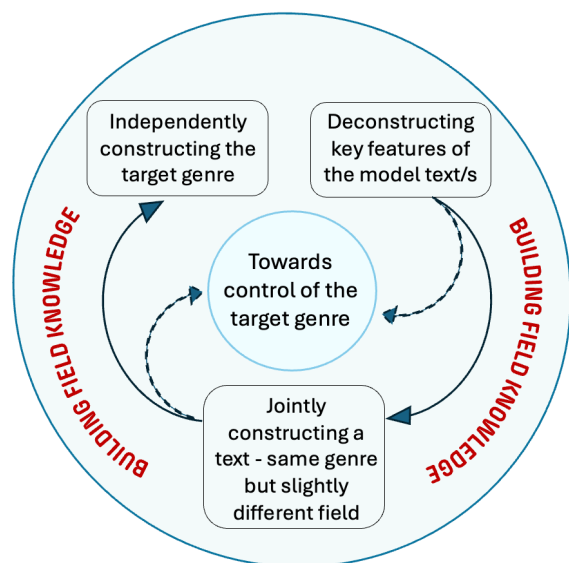
Rather than making assumptions that students have sufficient control of the language and literacy to achieve the outcome of the curriculum task, students are explicitly taught the skills and understandings needed to succeed.

Building knowledge of the field

The teacher sets the context through such activities as establishing what students already know about the topic, identifying any misconceptions, developing a curiosity about the field of inquiry, and explaining the learning outcomes.

Throughout the cycle, students are building a shared understanding of the field (subject-matter) through a variety of activities such as:

- dynamic classroom interactions;
- group discussions;
- explicitly teaching students how to analytically read source texts and make notes;
- the collaborative interpretation of print, multimodal and digital texts;
- the analysis of visual resources and artefacts;



- field excursions and guest interviews;
- watching videos and taking notes;
- hands-on activities accompanied by purposeful talk.

Hammond & Gibbons (2015) refer to this as ‘message abundancy’ where students engage with a number of different meaning-making devices as they learn new concepts.

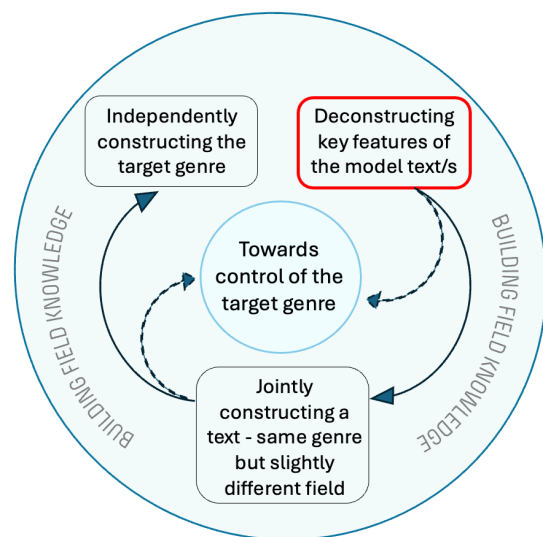
Importantly, the activities are interactive so that students have opportunities to use, hear, and see the language associated with the topic.

Differentiation is provided through adjusting the level of scaffolding depending on the identified needs of students in a particular task.

Modelling the target genre

After identifying a clear purpose for writing, the teacher demonstrates what success looks like. He/she provides a model text similar to the one the students will be composing. The model would typically represent the same genre but employ a slightly different field. If the students are writing a review of a particular film, for example, the model text would be a review of a similar film.

Through a range of practices, the teacher ensures that the class can comprehend the model text.



They might skim it first for the overall gist. The teacher might then engage the class in a more detailed close reading of the text, focusing on key vocabulary and any challenging sections of the text.

On their copy, the students could summarise sections of the text in the margin or highlight main ideas.

Projecting the model text, the teacher now guides to students to observe how such texts are typically structured to achieve their purpose, identifying and labelling the function of each stage and minor phases within these stages.

Students are then introduced to selected language (and multimodal) features relevant to the task and the genre. If the purpose is to create a narrative, for example, the class might be guided to identify:

- descriptive language such as the use of rich noun groups to build the characters and setting;
- how events might include vivid verb groups to specify the action, along with phrases to indicate 'how', 'where', 'why' and 'when';
- how the illustrator has brought the characters and setting to life;
- any interpersonal language choices to engage the reader (e.g. creating suspense or a particular mood).

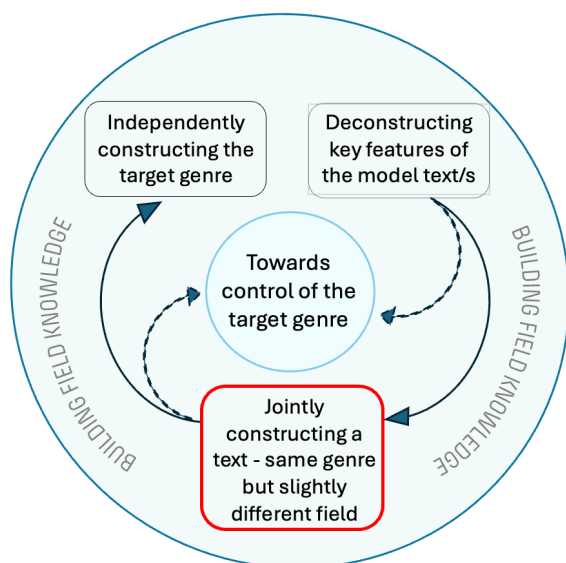
Students could then be given opportunities to practise using such features in brief texts.

Jointly constructing a text

Having deconstructed the features of the model text, the teacher leads students in the joint construction of a similar text (and images), keeping the genre the same but perhaps slightly changing the field. This might involve the whole class or smaller groups. Certain students (e.g. EAL/D) could be guided to jointly reconstruct the model text drawing on notes previously made.

The teacher ensures that all students have adequate control of the topic (or field) so that each can contribute to the joint construction, drawing on any notes made previously.

After discussing the overall structure, the teacher leads the class in jointly composing sections of the text. Referring back to the model text, the teacher might model how to plan, consider key stages, identify topic sentences and so on.



Students contribute to the content and organization of the text, discussing options with the class/group. The teacher elicits suggestions from the class and might demonstrate how to enhance the contribution by, for example, choosing a more 'academic' vocabulary item, or combining elements into a single sentence, or incorporating previously-studied language features characteristic of the genre.

Before offering a contribution, students might be given opportunities to discuss possible input with peers.

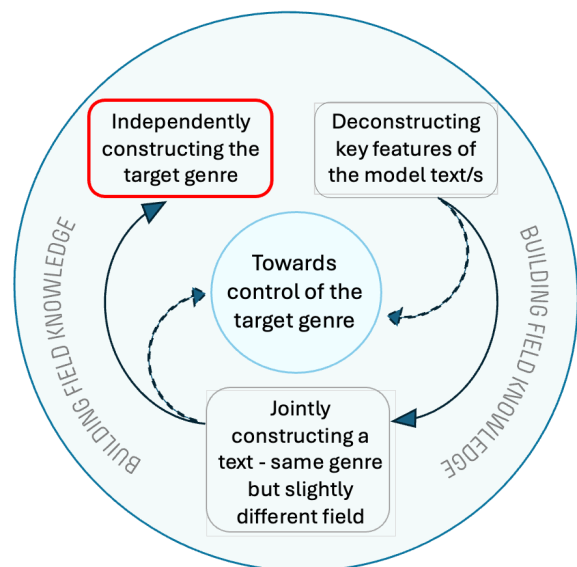
Jointly constructing a text (or a section of the text) has the benefits of practising with support before working alone and gaining confidence in making language choices.

Independent construction of a text

Students now know what to do and how to do it. They are confident to independently apply what they have learned by composing their own text, following the model and demonstrating their understanding of content and language patterns.

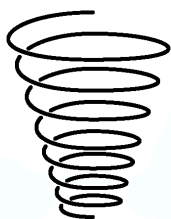
At points in the cycle, students will be engaging in the writing process:

- undertaking further research into the topic of their text (where appropriate) and making notes;
- composing drafts of sections of their text;
- consulting with others;
- incorporating into the drafts feedback received and input from various sources;
- editing the text to ensure that meanings are clear, and that the text is interpersonally appropriate and well organised;
- proofreading the final draft to check for any errors;
- ensuring that all assessment criteria have been met.



Students now feel a sense of achievement and pride in their work as a result of the high levels of scaffolding provided. They are in a position to further build their field knowledge and to transfer understandings of the genre and language features to other contexts.

The model as a cycle

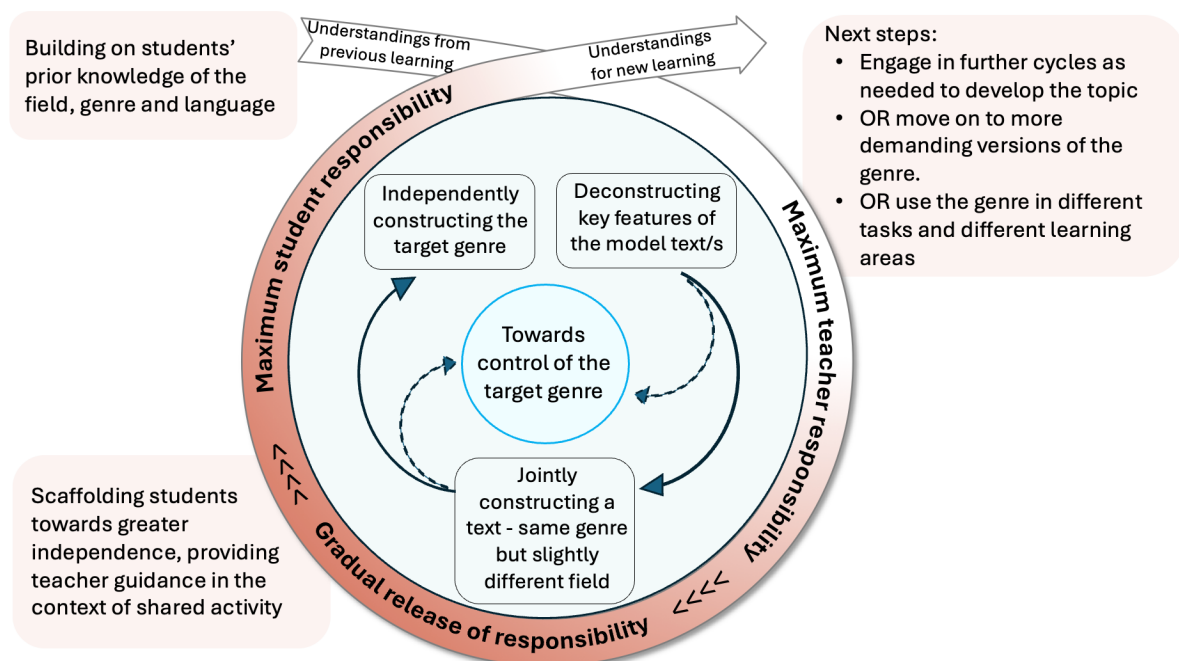


In the context of a curriculum task or unit of work – or even across longer spans – the use of the TLC is envisaged as cyclical, with knowledge of the genre and the field developing cumulatively over time.

Within the cycle, there might be some shunting back and forth as necessary to reinforce understandings and provide opportunities to correct misconceptions or deepen knowledge of the field or language.

As indicated in the diagram below, students might enter the cycle with certain understandings of the field and the genre. The teacher would identify any prior knowledge and engage the students in further field-building and developing a confident control of the genre, scaffolding the students towards independent achievement of the curriculum task.

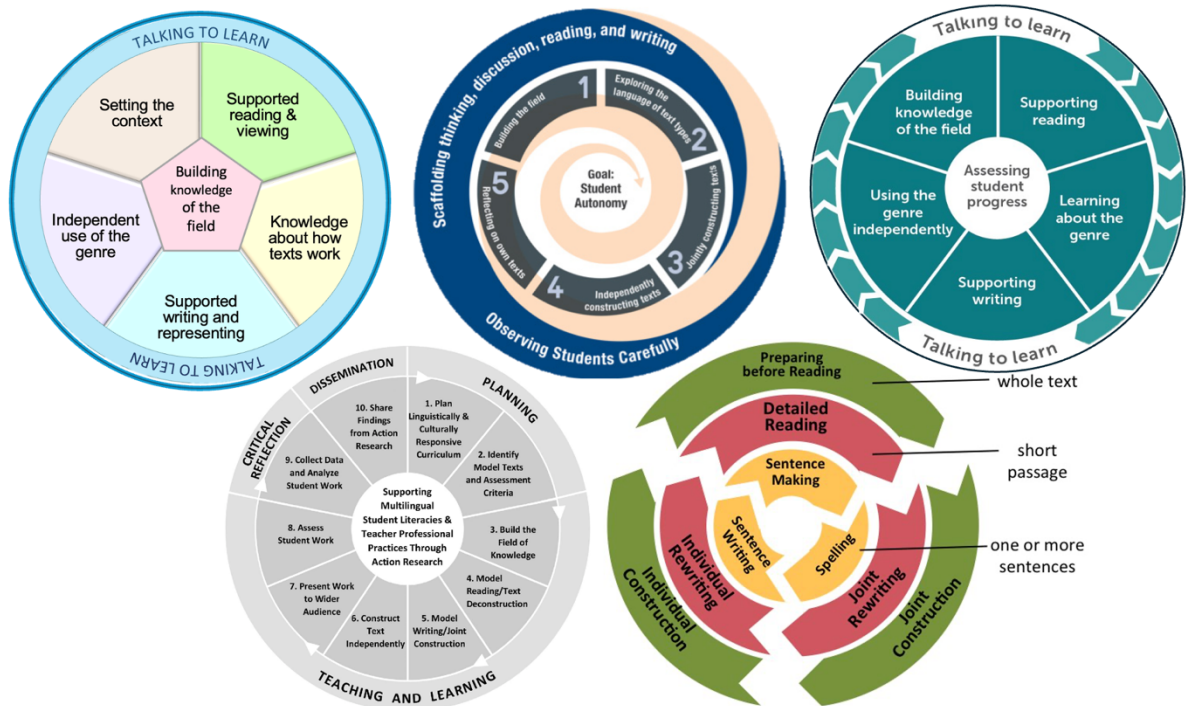
The students are then in a position to transfer these understandings to other contexts.



The cycle might last only a few lessons, especially if the text is brief. It might, however, span a whole unit of instruction lasting several weeks. Alternatively, the unit of instruction might include several cycles, particularly if the overarching curriculum task involves a portfolio of contributing activities dealing with different aspects of the topic (for example, a unit on body systems that might move through a different cycle for each system).

Elaborating on the model

More recent versions of the cycle retain all the core features above but might modify the model for a particular context or might elaborate on various elements, as these examples from various sources illustrate:



In Australia, many school systems, educational institutions and professional learning providers include a version of the TLC in their resource materials. Internationally, versions of the cycle can be found in regions such as the USA, Scandinavia, Japan, Indonesia and China.

For an example of other versions of the TLC, [CLICK HERE](#).

For a more detailed description of the functional model of language at work in the classroom (Captain Cook’s First Voyage), [CLICK HERE](#).

Author: Beverly Derewianka with contributions from other LLEN members (The text was jointly constructed 😊.)

References

Rothery, J. (1994). Exploring Literacy in School English (Write it Right Resources for Literacy and Learning). Sydney: Metropolitan East Disadvantaged Schools Program [republished 2007 by Adult Migrant Education Service NSW]

Hammond, J. & Gibbons, P. (2005). Putting scaffolding to work: The contribution of scaffolding in articulating ESL education. *Prospect*, 20(1), 6–30.