

# Introduction: Aims and Context of the NALP Evaluation

## Indigenous Literacy in the NT Context

The Northern Territory has a unique demographic and geographic profile. The Department of Employment, Education and Training website (NT DET 2008) reports that Indigenous Territorians comprise 30% of the population, most of whom live in remote communities spread across 1,346,200 square kilometres. Thirty-nine percent of NT government school students are Indigenous, and a high proportion of these students have English as their second language, a few as their third or possibly even fourth language. Seventy percent of Indigenous students are located outside the Territory's major urban areas (Alice Springs and Darwin), while there are currently 104 registered Indigenous languages and dialects.

It should be no surprise that Indigenous contexts and issues dominate current educational priorities, policies and approaches in the NT. An independent review of Indigenous education in the NT, *Learning Lessons*, reported that the "single greatest challenge for the NT Department of Education is to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students" given that, despite "a widespread desire amongst Indigenous people for improvements", there was "unequivocal evidence of deteriorating outcomes" (Collins & Lea 1999: 1). Among the issues highlighted in *Learning Lessons* and later reports are unequal access to quality education and poor school attendance by students; these are held to be important determinants of the failure of members of (particularly remote) Indigenous communities to become literate in English.

## Background of NALP

The *Learning Lessons* report identified many direct, proximate and distal causes of Indigenous educational failure, from those relating to poor educational performance at the school or classroom level to broader socio-cultural and socio-economic phenomena which may affect participation and attendance and the capacity of children to learn, to systemic issues that underpin the capacity of teachers to effectively teach literacy. The report makes clear, however, that these factors interact in complex ways. Following the reform process set in motion by this review, AL was adopted by the NT

government as the mainstay of reforms intended to improve literacy teaching outcomes in the NT. It directly aimed to improve the capacity of schools to teach literacy to Indigenous (and other) students, and it did so in the face of concerns about the ability to sustain a high quality workforce in remote areas of the NT, the effects of high teacher turnover and student attendance on the effectiveness of teaching, and a range of other factors that affect outcomes.

In terms of distinctiveness of the NT student population, there has been a tendency for teachers, principals, departments and other educational experts to cite factors of “cultural difference” as underlying the shortcomings in Indigenous education. Some, like Nakata (2003: 9–10), have noted the danger of appealing to the “cultural difference schema” as a “convenient explanation of student failure that exonerates teacher practice” while detracting from the basic responsibility to deliberately and explicitly teach skills and understandings needed for understanding the world beyond Indigenous communities. He writes:

It is one thing to say that the lowering of eyes and not making eye contact is a cultural behaviour and should be accepted in classrooms... But it is another matter to neglect to teach that child that in other contexts it is important and appropriate that they do make eye contact... It is one thing to accept that children are different from others and prefer to learn collaboratively in groups, or not be spotlighted. But it is another matter to neglect to build the skills and confidence needed to stand in the spotlight and work independently... And so with language: it is one thing to say children prefer visual and aural modes of learning but it is another matter to use this as a rationale for neglecting the written word when we know this is exactly what they need. (2003: 10)

Nakata’s observations highlight a tension between educational policy goals of inclusiveness based on cultural validation and maintenance, and improved “core” educational outcomes in text-based literacy and numeracy on the other. This tension is clearly felt by teachers, Nakata suggests, many of whom “feel constrained and guilty if they focus on English literacies and neglect cultural factors” (2003: 10). The AL approach teaches literacy in Standard Australian English with minimal reference to cultural content. Its founders have argued strongly that “culture” should not be used to justify reducing expectations within the curriculum, and have structured the program around the use of advanced, age-appropriate texts.

NALP aims to improve educational outcomes for students, particularly for Indigenous students, by raising English literacy levels using the Accelerated Literacy methodology. The expansion of AL in the NT under NALP commenced in late 2004, when the NT government and the Australian government, through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), agreed to jointly fund the project, committing funding of over \$16 million over four years. DET committed to implementing the program in 100 schools, training 700 teachers and reaching 10,000 students in predominantly remote locations by the end of 2008.

Before the decision to expand implementation in the NT, the program had been trialled in approximately 30 schools in Western Australia, South Australia and

Queensland and later in six schools in the NT. Until its adoption by the NT government and the commencement of the implementation of NALP in the NT, AL or “scaffolding literacy”, as it had until then been known, had been based on the work of a small team of experts who had worked closely with participating schools to support the development of classroom practice. Participating schools in other states were linked to the program through separate contracts with DEEWR.

In the Northern Territory, NT DET committed to making AL the mainstream program within policy, program and operational management tiers of the department in order to roll out the program on a large scale. This involved simultaneously increasing the number of schools involved and training a large number of new teachers and teacher trainers (coordinators) in the key aspects of the AL approach. The aim was to create a critical mass of expertise sufficient to overcome the impact of turnover in the workforce that is a feature of NT schools. During Phase 1, 2004 to 2006, the implementation focused on intensive capacity-building to increase the number of teachers and ESL practitioners trained in AL (2006: 4). This entailed a combination of professional development packages (PDs) delivered by a specialist team at key locations, and a longer-term strategy to embed AL in the teacher-training curriculum at CDU. However, as described in more detail in the following section, by the second half of Phase 2 (April 2007–December 2008), the focus had shifted somewhat to local delivery of PD (NT DEET 2006a: 4), to support expanded uptake by schools and embed AL within the system of participating schools (NT DEET 2007, NT DET 2008a: 3).

### **Charles Darwin University: Implementation and Evaluation**

From 2004, CDU was contracted by NT DET to undertake a range of ongoing activities to support the aims of the project. The NALP Project Framework stated that “CDU will assist in building the capacity of teachers and bringing about sustained change through the development of professional development and assessment packages and teaching materials as well as influencing teacher training programs” (NT DEET 2005: 7). This collaboration falls within the Partnership Agreement between the NT government and CDU.

Specific duties undertaken by CDU as part of NALP included: codifying the methodology and providing published material to inform teaching practice; developing support resources; developing and delivering AL training through practitioner PD workshops; developing a database, progress reports and developing and maintaining the NALP website; and contributing to longer-term workforce development through graduate teacher training at CDU. The implementation program was overseen by the Director of the School for Social and Policy Research (SSPR), who was the Sponsor of NALP at CDU, with a Program Manager responsible for NALP as a whole.

CDU was also chartered to undertake a program of evaluative research to strengthen the evidence base for the implementation, and provide feedback on the effectiveness of management and professional practice to NT DET.

The evaluation project was established as an independent process within SSPR, involving researchers not directly associated with the NALP implementation team. The team was led by a senior researcher in SSPR and included eminent consultants at

the University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University, with an SSPR research fellow responsible for coordinating instrument development for field research and training of project officers recruited for data-gathering. Data analysis was conducted at SSPR. The NALP Sponsor at CDU, as a member of the evaluation team, provided high-level contact between the evaluation team and NT DET at the policy level. The NALP Program Manager coordinated the evaluators' contact with CDU and NT DET implementation teams, and managed resources and budgets overall.

To define key elements of AL practice for designing the observational protocol and survey, the evaluators extensively consulted expert members of the NALP and DET implementation teams. This contact was formal and structured, by way of facilitated workshops followed by circulated material requesting comment. Literature on AL, its precursor program and their theoretical antecedents was extensively reviewed to establish key components of research design. Independent experts reviewed the design itself and elements of implementation. Overall, the evaluation team operated entirely independently of implementation processes, with the Program Manager coordinating activity regarding schedules and commitments of parties. The final version of this report incorporates responses to feedback from personnel in NT DET and other experts.

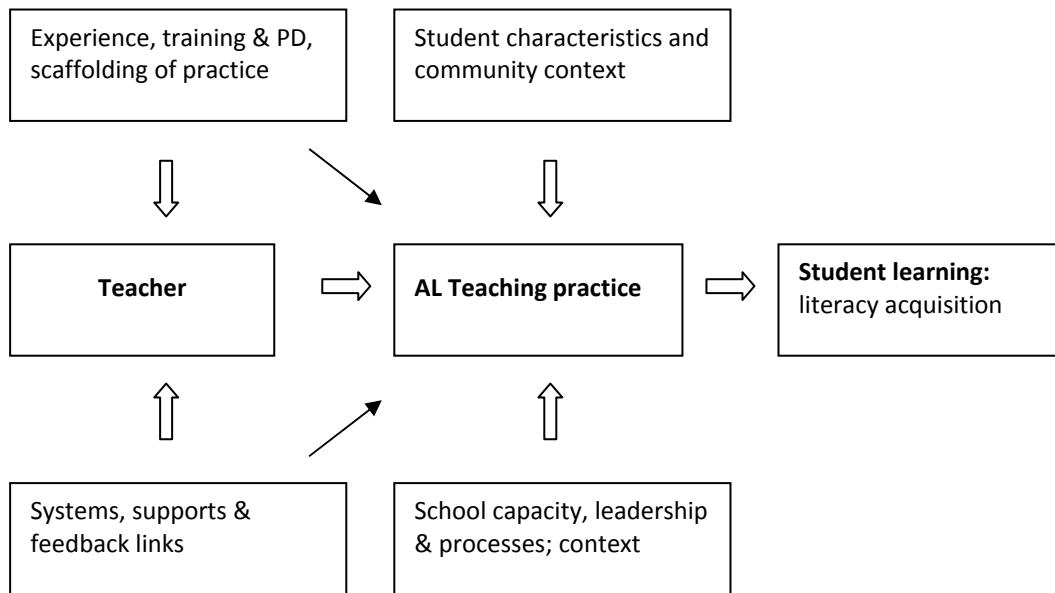
## **Evaluation Framework**

This is the final report of the evaluation of NALP by the School for Social and Policy Research evaluation team. The report encompasses a number of major components: a survey of teacher and coordinator views of the adequacy of implementation, resources, training and supports; an observational study of AL as taught in a sample of classrooms, supplemented by focus groups and interviews with practitioners; and a quantitative analysis of student outcomes using the main outcome measures adopted for the program. The appendices in Volume 2 of this report outline the development of methodology for this evaluation, copies of instruments and resources, and other supplementary material on NALP and its implementation.

The scale of NALP and the challenge it presents for any evaluation are significant. Rarely does an education department seek to implement a new teaching system or pedagogy with the explicit aim of achieving population level changes in educational outcomes, and even more rarely among the most educationally disadvantaged populations. This is what the NT government and its chief partner, the Australian government, have attempted by implementing AL as its main literacy teaching program. Some brief reflections on the nature of this challenge introduce the evaluation framework and plan.

At the outset, it should be noted that the NALP implementation program is complex and multi-layered. NALP is not a single intervention or treatment. Rather, many components of the intervention program contribute to a range of effects which may together result in a desired outcome. From an evaluative standpoint, we initially proceed from the hypothesis of a simple chain of effects, as set out in the middle level of Figure 1: AL training and support lead to quality AL teaching practice in the classroom and in turn to accelerated student learning.

Figure 1: Change mechanisms in the implementation of AL



However, this direct line of causation acting through the practices of the AL teacher to student learning simplifies a complex interaction between many determinants of the effectiveness teaching practice in a given school and community context (Pawson & Tilley 2000). These complexities are inherent in the characteristics of the key elements: the *teacher*, which includes prior training and experience, including experience in a given context or with a specific population group, AL-specific training and experience, and the teacher's retention in a given school; *systemic* factors, including provision of training and support and managerial requirements; the *school*, in terms of leadership, capacity, location and organisational-contextual influences on its operation; *teaching practice*, which is multi-dimensional, consisting of various interacting elements, skills and strategies which are no doubt variably deployed by individual teachers and not all of which are known in terms of their relationship to teaching outcomes; and finally, the *context*, including community-contextual influences and characteristics of students which shape students' readiness to engage with academic learning or with the teaching as provided.

In summary, because the chain of effects from professional development through teaching practice to student learning is likely to be shaped by multiple determinants acting both from outside and within the classroom setting, the evaluation needs to be able to test the significance of the effect of these various contextual factors on the achievement of the hypothesised direct outcome, accelerated student learning.

### Achieving and Measuring Population Outcomes

The aim of achieving outcomes at the population level by making AL the mainstay of the NT's strategy for literacy improvement is a significant commitment. It involves

creating the resources to meet the needs of teachers across a sizable sector of the NT schools system; implementing training that allows teachers to become effective exponents of the teaching methodology; creating ongoing systems of support, supervision, measurement, reporting and feedback and, finally, sustaining these elements of the system both at the school level and within the frameworks of the department.

We have taken the view that, to understand implementation success, the evaluation must develop measures to assess the degree to which implementation of AL across the system flows through to the classroom. These measures should not be solely based on testimonials from the relatively small number of committed practitioners and developers in the Scaffolding Literacy pilot program, or on the qualitative sampling of teacher opinions which were the focus of Stage 1 of the evaluation program. To make an assessment of program impacts and its possible influence on student learning, it is necessary to more systematically gauge teacher opinion and confidence in the system, and to measure the degree of flow-through to teaching practice in the classroom.

The scale of the implementation also presents a challenge for measuring outcomes. We can not be satisfied with identifying patches of implementation success and literacy improvement school by school or with finding pockets of literacy improvement and assuming that ongoing implementation will cumulatively lead to a population outcome. We have taken the view that we must, first, assess the degree and quality of implementation of AL across the intended target schools and ask to what degree the implementation program can be considered successful. Second, we must then ask to what extent learning outcomes have shown improvement for all students in the program, whether that improvement is attributable to the implementation of AL and what factors appear to explain different learning outcomes for different subgroups of students within the population as a whole.

During the program's implementation, there has been persistent questioning by many involved as to when the impacts of NALP would be seen in aggregate student performance against national benchmarks as measured by the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). There is a common assumption that a whole school program must soon lead to whole school improvement in NAPLAN results. This assumption is not supportable.

Given the many challenges and influences which can work against the achievement of high levels of implementation success or weaken exposure of students to the pedagogy, it would be misleading to simply quantify NAPLAN scores for students in participating schools over a period in which a school has participated in NALP. Whole school NAPLAN scores are likely to be the least accurate way of measuring outcomes of AL in those schools, without estimation of the degree of students' exposure to a given standard of NALP teaching during the testing period. To estimate population outcomes through system-wide or part system-wide AL implementation, it would be necessary to systematically apply appropriate measures of student performance in contexts in which the quality and time of exposure of each student to the pedagogy is known. This is difficult for NAPLAN results which are generated in Years 3, 5 and 7 only. Too little is known about the effectiveness of AL over the course of a student's schooling to assume that short or inconsistent periods of exposure to AL along the way between NAPLAN testing periods will lead to a

cumulative improvement in scores for individuals much less in outcomes at school or population level.

In summary, while some will continue to expect aggregate NAPLAN scores for participating schools or Indigenous students in NALP schools would begin to improve, it must be understood that this may not necessarily be the case. Many determinants of literacy outcomes are outside the school. Even though the most important determinants of improvement in academic learning may be shown to be effective teaching, there is likely to be sufficient ongoing turbulence within the education system (limits on capacity, staff turnover, gaps in program delivery, etc.) to mitigate the effects of implementation. For the time being, a broad testing regime like NAPLAN should not be used to estimate specific teaching effects unless it can be linked to individual students in classrooms in which AL is taught. This is out of the scope of the current evaluation. It is suggested that the priority must be on developing appropriate forms of assessment to better measure student progress at all reading ages, and to apply these in contexts where the degree of exposure to AL can be accurately assessed.

### **Evaluation Design and Limitations**

Evaluation of NALP took place in two stages: Stage 1, the formative stage loosely defined as the period 2004 to 2005; and Stage 2, the expansion stage from 2006 to 2008. Stage 1 initially focused on identifying key issues within the implementation of the program in the NT. Through interviews and participant observation, this phase of the evaluation documented areas of concern, overall perceptions of teachers, coordinators and managers and actions that had been undertaken during that period, with the intention of informing future program refinement, including development of teaching resources and PD materials. The Interim Evaluation Report also commented on the development of system-wide data, drawing on descriptive reports of student progress within the limits of reliability of data gathered by mid 2006.

By the expansion stage of implementation (2006–2008), it was anticipated that key processes would have been substantially clarified and NALP extended to remaining schools targeted for system-wide expansion. The aims of Stage 2 were to evaluate the implementation in terms of evident changes in teaching practice, to identify factors responsible for effective AL teaching based on teachers' reports of adequacy of resources and supports, and to identify evidence of improvement in student outcomes using the main measures of literacy attainment that had been adopted by the program.

The limitations of qualitative investigations in the first stage of the evaluation brought home the need to develop a valuable and reliable method for assessing actual teaching practice in the classroom, as a measure of the effectiveness of the NALP program of PD and support. Did teaching practice take place as one expected to see it in teachers trained in the AL methodology? What factors reported by teachers, principals and coordinators – such as amount of training received, presence of supports and characteristics of school contexts – might account for the degree of adherence to the AL teaching method that could be observed in the classroom? Further, (to be established by survey and focus group) what were teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of implementation and what factors appeared to influence these?

The second component of this evaluation sought to investigate whether there is evidence of improvement in literacy outcomes that can be attributed to NALP, and to identify those contextual factors – characteristics of students, schools, regions or locations – which account for variance in measured outcomes. For the purposes of this evaluation the main measures of outcome were those that had been adopted for the AL assessment program. Evidence of accelerated learning relies on the validity of national benchmarks of year level reading accomplishment for assessment texts used with these assessment instruments.

Limitations of the evaluation research design include the lack of control or comparison groups assessed using comparable outcome measures during the evaluation period. These methods would give more reliable estimates of the effectiveness of AL, and should be considered in the future. It was hoped that assessment scores would be available for students in observed schools and classrooms. However, on consideration of sample size and quality and timing of assessment data available, investigation of the direct link between observed teaching practice and measured outcome was not attempted for the purposes of the present report.

### **Primary Research Questions**

The evaluation of NALP focused on two major inquiries: first, the effectiveness of the implementation of AL, and second, the impact of the program on measured outcomes for students in all participating schools.

The primary hypothesis was described above, namely that “The implementation of the National Accelerated Literacy Program would result in teaching according to the AL method in classrooms and would lead to accelerated learning outcomes by participating students”. This hypothesis was operationalised by investigating the following primary research questions.

#### *Question 1*

What are the key theoretical principles of Accelerated Literacy and what are the strategies used by teachers at each stage of the teaching sequence?

#### *Method*

Review of AL policy documents, professional development materials, literature, consultation with AL program developers and the DET AL team. This component of the evaluation was undertaken as part of the development of the field methodology, in particular the observational protocol and survey, as reported in Volume 2.

#### *Question 2*

Has the NALP implementation led to the teaching of Accelerated Literacy in participating schools? That is: do observed classroom teaching strategies accord with AL teaching strategies described in the AL professional development and

program literature and can variations in observed practice be explained in terms of levels of training and support received?

*Method*

Direct observation by trained observers, applying formal protocol to three AL lessons in two classrooms in all AL schools with significant student assessment sequences for 2005–2006 (target approximately 30–40 schools).

*Question 3*

What are teachers', AL school-based coordinators', principals' and DET AL coordinators' opinions of the effectiveness of the Accelerated Literacy teaching method, professional development, resources and support?

*Method*

Teachers, AL school-based coordinators, principals and DET AL coordinators participate in focus group interviews and complete survey questionnaire.

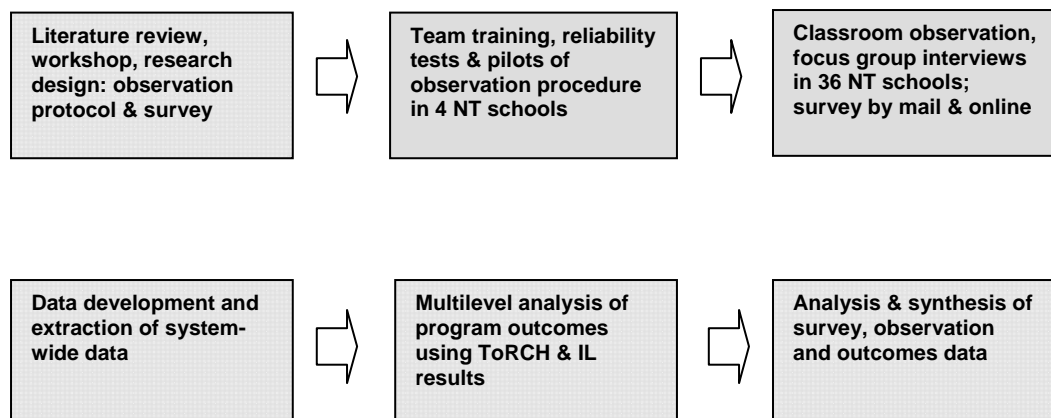
*Question 4*

What degree of literacy improvement is shown by students taught in schools participating in the National Accelerated Literacy Program and what are the predictors of those outcomes?

*Method*

Multilevel analysis of outcomes of all participating students for whom validated student assessment sequences using either IL or ToRCH assessments are available, along with relevant information on student characteristics, records of attendance, enrolment and school and teacher characteristics.

**Figure 2: The evaluation process**



## **Accelerated Literacy in the NT**

The remainder of this chapter describes the main theoretical elements of AL methodology and the design and implementation of the AL teaching sequence, to illuminate the rationale for the design of observation instruments for evaluating AL practice (as detailed in Volume 2 of this report). Then follows an outline of the key elements of the implementation of NALP in the NT. Two phases of implementation (2004–2006 and 2006–2008) are described, with an emphasis on approaches used in Phase 2.

### **Theoretical Foundations and Approach to Practice**

Accelerated Literacy is described as an “inclusive and academically focused” teaching methodology (Gray & Cowey 2005: 5), based on the understanding that “learning to be a literate member of a society requires a student to learn the discourse or tacit ground-rules that apply to literacy lessons in schools” (Cowey 2005: 3). It employs a strongly scaffolded and purposive teaching cycle, largely grounded in the social learning theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Jerome Bruner (1986). Cowey (2005: 6) summarises the educational and socially empowering purposes of AL:

The Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies are designed to teach students both how to enjoy and interpret books, particularly narrative, in an educational context, as well as how a literate person thinks and acts to be successful in school. The NALP aims to give each student access to the literate discourse that identifies a student as a successful member of a literate society.

The focus on scaffolding students to successfully participate in academic discourse is a distinctive aspect of AL. AL specifically seeks to remedy the dysfunctional reading strategies developed by students who have been forced to cope with lessons centred on texts that are not suited to their age or interests, and the “cognitive overload” arising from a lack of any shared understanding of the implicit educational purpose of set tasks and teacher questioning (Gray & Cowey 2005). By equipping students to succeed at an age-appropriate level, and by promoting a shared understanding of the educational task, AL purports to offer an effective sequence of teaching strategies for accelerating the literacy gains of educationally marginalised students.

Three concepts are theoretically central to the AL approach: the objective of participation in literate discourse, the idea of teaching within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and the principle of scaffolding student learning.

In AL theory, the foundational notion of academic or literate discourse draws on the work of Gee (1990, 1991), who describes discourse as “a socio-culturally distinctive and integrated way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking and valuing connected with a particular social identity or role” (1991: 33). In educational settings, Gee’s notion of discourse connects with what Mercer and Edwards (1987: 47) call “educational ground-rules”, or “the implicit rules of education talk and practice” necessary for “successful participation in educational discourse”.

AL developers draw on a range of literature (Bernstein 1996, Christie 1993, Olson 1994) to support the claim that literate discourses encourage students “to develop orientations to meanings that are abstracted from familiar local contexts” (Rose, Gray & Cowey 1998: 63). Further, they urge that a vital preparation for participating in such academic discourse in school settings is the typical home experience of middle class children, through spoken interactions and joint book readings with parents (1998: 64). By contrast, “the discourse understandings Indigenous students bring to the classroom are generally not those that are required for effective participation within the academic/literate discourses needed for educational success” (1998: 7).

According to Cowey (2005: 4), the orientation to literate discourse is the most fundamental principle of the AL approach because of the way it “highlights the unique nature of school classrooms and the interactions that occur between students and teachers in those contexts”. Choices about what to teach and how to do so within the AL teaching sequence flow directly from the perceived need to make explicit and so support students in engaging with the implicit purposes and ground-rules of the teaching-learning task.

A second and equally fundamental principle underpinning AL is the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (or ZPD), defined by Vygotsky as:

... the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1978: 86)

Assessment in AL aims to operationalise the idea of working within the ZPD, by testing and monitoring of the level at which a student can read with support (their Working Level or WL) for regular comparison with their reading level without support (their Individual Level or IL).

For AL developers, the ZPD indicates a way to “break out of the constraints imposed by finding a student’s reading ‘level’, then working on from there, or ‘starting again with the basics’ when a student is found to be falling behind” (Cowey 2005: 7–8). Such remedial or “additive” approaches (Freebody 2004) fail to take advantage of the student’s potential learning development as indicated by the ZPD, and do little to address the dysfunctional “coping strategies” developed by low or non-achieving students (Cowey 2005: 7).

According to Cowey (2005: 8), the notion of the ZPD “allows a teacher to work quickly towards teaching at an age-appropriate level for a whole class as opposed to working at the range of different individual levels found across a class”. The idea of the ZPD therefore underpins the AL approach of assigning study texts and learning goals well above a student’s current level of achievement, and of supporting them to work at a higher level through strongly guided or “scaffolded” teaching strategies. Such an approach is believed to affirm Vygotsky’s claim that “the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky, 1978: 89). As such the AL teaching method can support learning for students at varying levels or starting points relative to age-appropriate reading tasks (2005).

AL advocates using “literate texts” which “are more like written texts or ‘book language’ than oral or spoken texts” (Cowey 2005: 7). These are thought to be most effective for teaching the grammatical structures, abstract reasoning and interpretive thought processes needed to engage in literate/academic discourse across a range of text types. Gray highlights the work of Halliday and colleagues (Halliday 1985a, 1985b, 1993, 2004), whose Systemic Functional Grammar illustrates “the manner in which written text of the kind that is usually referred to as literate or academic differs in highly functional and systematic ways from texts that Halliday defines as ‘oral’” (Gray 2007: 9). The academic/literate discourses pursued in education, Gray points out, “require a specific orientation to both the written and oral texts that are encountered in teaching and learning” (2007: 9). Narratives, it is maintained, are an effective means of orientating students to such discourses because they generally have built into them the “abstraction of concepts and images... through the careful manipulation of word and grammar choices” (2007: 8).

In AL the principle of scaffolding involves making available to students the conceptual resources by which to understand the intent and purpose of the learning task, as well as the literate mindset of the successful reader. Scaffolding draws on Bruner’s description of the teacher as providing a “loan of consciousness” (Bruner 1986: 76), as Cowey (2005: 9) explains:

The consciousness teachers “loan” is in the form of their understanding of the discourse implicit in the text. They loan a literate interpretation of the meaning of a text. They loan their experience with reading as well as their understanding of the educational ground rules for operating with such texts in the social context of the classroom.

AL scaffolding strategies may include explicitly outlining the purpose of a lesson, modelling the meta-cognitive processes of a literate person engaging with a text, and directing students’ attention to the physical and literary aspects of a text that enable readers to form a meaningful interpretation. Through such strategies AL teachers seek to provide students with a “foothold” by which to enter into the academic or literate discourse of literacy-based learning in school. By actively and positively inviting students to draw on such “loaned” resources, the AL teacher helps them to jointly construct a shared “knowledge base” from which to progress to higher levels of interaction and understanding, where students take on greater responsibility for educationally productive discussion, or “reflective dialogue” (Gray 2007: 18).

From a socio-cultural educational perspective (Wells 1999), scaffolding strategies aim to take advantage of the social dynamic of the class group as a means of jointly constructing a shared understanding of the learning task and the study text. According to Wertsch’s description of the social learning context of the classroom:

... when interlocutors enter into a communicative context, they may have different perspectives or only a vague interpretation of what is taken for granted and what the utterances are intended to convey. Through semiotically mediated “negotiation”, however, they create a temporarily shared social world, a state of intersubjectivity. (1985: 161)

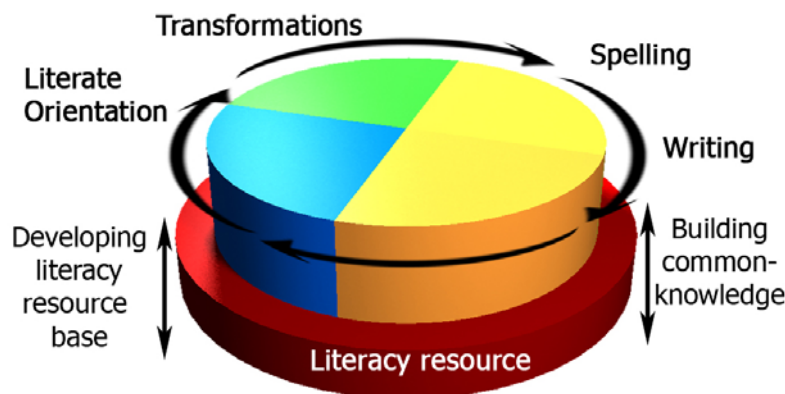
AL methodology assumes that students who would otherwise not be able to read a given text independently can, with teacher support, build a literate understanding of the text and acquire the skills that underpin fluent reading. The hope is that, “Students, in taking on the role of a literate reader with the support of their teacher and other class members, [will] actually become that literate person” (Covey 2005: 10).

These theoretical principles are integral to the design of the AL teaching sequence (Walsh & Barnett 2005: 14).

### The Accelerated Literacy Teaching Sequence

The AL teaching sequence consists of five key elements: text selection, literate orientation, the transformations strategy, spelling, and writing. The teaching sequence centres on a single text (and/or passages from a text), which is studied intensively over time. As shown in Figure 3, the study text constitutes the literacy resource upon which all other teaching strategies in the sequence are centred.

Figure 3: The AL teaching sequence



#### *Text Selection*

Ideally, the text selected for a class should reflect a level of complexity that places it somewhere in advance of each student’s Zone of Actual Development (ZAD, as indicated by IL assessment), but not above what the least advanced student could successfully engage in with teacher support. In classes where the range of abilities is too great to allow selection of a text that is challenging yet achievable for all students, classes may need to be streamed.

Texts that are age-appropriate or close to age-appropriate for the student group are selected. The aim of AL is to advance or accelerate students’ literacy learning, and Covey (2005) points out that students who are trapped in a cycle of unproductive strategies such as sounding out and relying on picture cues will fail to advance in their reading beyond the level of basic or early reader texts where such strategies are initially appropriate. Engaging with age-appropriate texts is therefore necessary for

situating learning experiences within the ZPD where the student's learning potential can be tapped and developed. Age-appropriate texts are also seen as helpful for generating student interest in discussion around the text.

### *Literate Orientation*

In this stage of the sequence, teachers assist students to recognise the important features of a text with the aim of building “a high level of engagement with the text” (Gray 2007: 22). Successful literate orientation requires teachers to be familiar with the study text and to be able to identify and discuss themes, characters' motivations and authors' intentions as reflected in text structure and word choice, at all levels of the text, including illustrations where relevant (CDU 2008: 5).

Literate orientation is divided into two key parts. *Low order literate orientation* is the starting point for every teaching sequence and is part of every AL lesson (Cowey 2005: 11). The teacher attempts to provide a literate interpretation of the text for students' consideration and future lessons build on the common knowledge established at this phase (2005: 11).

In low order literate orientation (CDU 2008: 15) the teacher should:

- describe the purpose of the lesson
- clearly articulate goals for the whole lesson and for the low order literate orientation part of the teaching sequence
- provide an overview (using illustrations when appropriate) of the text to be studied: point out aspects of the text as a focus
- engage the students in a discussion about the text which builds on common knowledge, is cognitively challenging and pitched at an age-appropriate level

Low order literate orientation concludes with the teacher modelling a fluent and expressive reading of the text or study passage.

*High order literate orientation* shifts the students' focus from the text as a whole to a close examination of the author's wording and how it lets the reader construct one or several meaningful interpretations of the text. Students actively engage in the process of identifying (by underlining) individual words and meaningful text segments that illustrate specific literate features. Cowey (2005: 1–12) summarises this phase:

... teachers make known the resources students need to answer questions by discussing literate features of the wording of the text and the inferences implied... as if the students could already read it. For example, in Low Order Literate Orientation the teacher may have told the students that the author of the text includes characters' reactions in stories to create an atmosphere of suspense and fear. In High Order Literate Orientation the teacher shows how the author made the language choices that create this atmosphere. They find the exact words the author used and underline them.

During high order literate orientation (CDU 2008: 15) the teacher will:

- clearly articulate goals which follow on from the low order literate orientation discussion
- assist students to identify specific language features in the text
- discuss the effect of these language features on readers, and relate this to the lesson goals
- link the passage to be studied to the context of the whole story
- involve students in a discussion which draws on common knowledge from past lessons and is age-appropriate
- identify or refer to structure of text

Text marking in high order literate orientation is consolidated with a concluding “joint cooperative reading” which “greatly increases the capacity of the students to read the text extracts” fluently and with high order comprehension (Gray 2007: 24).

#### *Transformations*

This element of the sequence “is designed to change the student’s orientation to the text from that of a reader looking for meaning to that of a writer learning how to use a writer’s techniques” (Cowey 2005: 12). Sections of a study passage are written on strips of cardboard that can be cut up and manipulated. For example, “the text can be rearranged, words or clauses can be taken out and discussed or word order can be examined closely” (2005: 12). Gray notes that transformations “follow up on, intensify and focus understandings of [author] intentionality already explored within the Literate Orientation stage” (2007: 25). Also, the transformations strategy “allows a closer look at grammatical features of a text, as well as punctuation” and is used “to teach word recognition skills that lead to spelling activities” (Cowey 2005: 12).

During transformations (CDU 2008: 16) the teacher will:

- clearly articulate the goal of the activity and link this to discussions in low and high order literate orientation
- if pursuing a writing focus, cut text into purposeful segments or chunks and discuss the writing potential
- involve students in a discussion which draws on common knowledge from this and past lessons and is age-appropriate
- clearly articulate the structure of the text and its importance for the story
- if pursuing a spelling focus, shift to word identification activities

### *Spelling Strategies*

These strategies are “devoted to teaching word analysis skills and the system of English spelling” (Cowey 2005: 12). Gray identifies the need for students to make a transition from early learning decoding skills such as basic print concepts, letter-sound correspondence and sounding out words, to “more efficient word identification, deconstruction and construction skills that entail... the use of visual analogy and the recognition of common visual patterns in words” (2007: 26). Strategies employed in the spelling phase of the AL teaching sequence aim to effect this transition.

The key spelling strategy is *chunking*, whereby words are broken down into manageable and/or commonly encountered letter groups or patterns (chunks). The etymology of words, root-words or familiar letter patterns may also be discussed. Students practice saying and writing each chunk, committing the visual pattern to memory, before re-combining the separate chunks to spell the word correctly. Importantly, words that are known to students out of context are employed as they are “easier for students to ‘stabilise’ as they attempt to deconstruct their various constituent patterns of sounds and symbols” (Gray 2007: 26). Hence, spelling typically follows from transformations where word recognition strategies are employed. Spelling activities are carried out on small whiteboards so that letter patterns can be practiced repeatedly with errors being erased easily. Cowey suggests that “word analysis skills gained from the spelling strategy feed back into improved decoding competence in reading and improved spelling in writing” (Cowey 2005: 12).

During spelling (CDU 2008: 16) the AL teacher will:

- clearly articulate the goal of spelling activities
- chunk words appropriately and explain why clearly
- make links to previously taught spelling knowledge and perhaps discuss etymology
- allow adequate time for practice of known words and concepts
- if possible carry out a joint reconstructed writing activity discussing word functions, meanings and effects on readers; with younger students a discussion of letter formation with practice for fluency would be carried out

### *Writing Activities*

These strategies follow from transformations (with the support of spelling knowledge) during which “the teacher will have already made explicit the nature of writing strategies she/he wants the students to explore”, and so “provide a point where the students practice and take these new strategies into their writing” (Gray 2007: 27). Writing workshop activities range in degree of teacher support. Joint reconstructed writing is a highly supported strategy where teacher and students jointly re-write the study passage used for transformations as though they are the authors of it. Joint construction activities involve teachers and students thinking together to adapt known writing strategies to characters and situations of their own devising. Independent

writing represents the end goal of the entire teaching sequence, where students use their knowledge of readers' expectations, writers' intentions and techniques, knowledge of spelling, grammar and vocabulary, and shared imaginative resources to compose their own texts independently.

Throughout the writing workshop strategies (CDU 2008: 16), AL teachers will:

- reiterate previously articulated writing goals
- engage in a discussion related to writing techniques and their effect on readers
- provide support through workshop activities for successful student writing through joint construction, independent or free composition

As Figure 3 indicates, the interrelation of the various strategies with the literacy resource provides a recursive context for developing a literacy resource base of texts, and knowledge about texts and authors, to support future literacy learning. The teaching-learning cycle is directed towards building common knowledge about texts and the skills and understandings of the successful learner. For maximum benefit, 60 to 90 minutes daily is recommended for applying the strategies in sequence (Cowey 2007). Throughout each lesson (CDU 2008: 17), AL developers emphasise the need for positive and affirming interactions with students such that the teacher:

- promotes student engagement, participation and access through cognitively challenging questions, which are pre-formulated when appropriate, and affirms and reconceptualises students' answers
- paces the lesson effectively to maintain students' interest and to achieve lesson goals
- includes students with different levels of understanding in the lesson
- is sure of the goal of the lesson and works to achieve it

The theoretical and practical elements of AL are taught in the professional development program (the PDs), supported by appropriate materials, teaching notes and resources. The implementation program aims to translate these principles into practice through the training of teachers and the support provided for ongoing practice within the NT's public school system.

## **Overview of Program Implementation in the NT**

This section gives a detailed account of NT DET's approach to implementing NALP, and CDU's role in providing support for "DET's capacity to deliver the approach, undertake development and systemisation of NALP" (NT DEET 2007: 19, NT DET 2008a). An effort is made to locate and explicate the key elements of the implementation (2006–2008), and the specific roles and responsibilities of DET and CDU.

The implementation of NALP, its phases, the roles and commitments of DET staff,

the setup of system-level actions and processes and the role of CDU in supporting the implementation are outlined in DET's *Participation and Service Model* (NT DEET 2006a, 2007, NT DET 2008a). The *Northern Territory School Coordinators' Handbook* (NT DEET 2006b) also outlines the roles and responsibilities of DET AL staff in the system-level provision of training and support for AL schools. The strategies, objectives and roles underpinning the implementation of AL in NT schools are outlined below. This includes an overview of the roles and responsibilities of DET AL staff, and a detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of the DET AL coordinators and the ALSBCs during each phase of implementation. A summary of inputs by CDU is provided.

### **Key Features of NALP Implementation**

The key features of the implementation model have largely remained consistent since 2006 (NT DEET 2006a, 2007; NT DET 2008a). These include preparatory work for schools to be included in NALP; ongoing teacher training and support; development of AL Communities of Practice; and increased networking between AL schools (NT DEET 2006a: 4, 2007: 2; NT DET 2008a: 3). NT DET also acknowledged that levels of support and in turn, the implementation timeframe, could be affected by high levels of teacher and leadership turnover (NT DEET 2007: 2; NT DET 2008a: 3).

The 2006 *Participation and Service Model* highlighted a focus on intensive capacity-building. The 2006 implementation model was introduced with an outline of key considerations, including: high levels of teacher and principal turnover in the NT; constraints on access to PD and in-school training; the time taken by teachers to develop solid and consistent AL practice; and the staffing level of schools (NT DEET 2006a: 4). These have remained considerations in all revisions of the *Participation and Service Model* (NT DEET 2006a, 2007; NT DET 2008a). However, the final objective in the 2006 model, "to increase the number of teachers and ESL practitioners trained in the AL approach" (NT DEET 2006a: 4) was no longer a feature of the 2007 and 2008 revisions. Rather, these versions read: "DET had developed a plan for a phased program expansion and for embedding AL across the NT. Through this plan, DET ensures that schools are provided with integrated and ongoing support and that communities of practice are fostered" (NT DEET 2007: 2, NT DET 2008a: 3).

The change of emphasis from capacity-building at the wider workforce level (through centralised PD for coordinators and further training through the Graduate Diploma) to program expansion and embedding, signalled a shift in implementation priorities. Specifically, NT DET now appeared to consider that critical mass had been achieved and that the focus in Phase 2 should therefore be on program consolidation through provision of direct support for ongoing program implementation.

With about 400 teachers involved in AL teaching and training, DET has attained sufficient critical mass to be confident that the methodology can be sustained in the NT, even in the face of significant teacher turnover. The next strategic challenge is to shift ownership of the program to the regions and the schools, so that there is less reliance on the DET AL team and greater capacity for expert support to be provided at the local level.

Strategies include the relocation of some of the DET AL team positions to schools, the allocation of school coordinator positions in Group Schools, the trial of the hub school model, forming of links with the Regional Directors and an IESIP funded linked project. (NT DEET 2006a: 4)

In important respects, this shift in focus by DET warrants critical scrutiny. Does “involvement” of 400 teachers represent not merely a sufficient number of teachers with some training, but a sufficient number of teachers with the level and quality of training and competence to ensure that the program is effectively taught in participating schools? In other words, has there been a transfer of training to teaching practice, and can this be sustained?

### **The Process of Implementation**

To join the program, schools have either self-nominated to participate in NALP or have been “identified for inclusion in the program” (NT DEET 2006a: 4). Schools are assessed along an implementation continuum according to their level of commitment to the program, capacity to meet program requirements and some contextual factors relating to location and enrolments (NT DEET 2006a: 5). At the school level, implementation occurs in phases which are linked to specific expectations of participants, including school principals, coordinators and other staff, as set out in the *DET Participation and Service Model* (NT DEET 2006a, 2007; NT DET 2008a).

According to DET (2007), overarching commitments at the school level include:

- schools commit to the program until the end of 2008
- in primary and remote schools a whole school approach is adopted
- in high schools AL is the sole English literacy program
- a high level of commitment to the NALP project is maintained by the principal and teachers

Further, “Successful implementation of AL requires strong leadership...” (2008: 11). To this end, principals at AL schools are required to facilitate and support AL activities; participate in AL training in order to understand the roles of DET AL coordinator, ALSBCs and AL teachers; provide strong leadership and advocacy for AL implementation and the whole-school approach; enable collaborative planning, networking and feedback for teachers; and secure the provision of resources and allocation of time (2006b, 2007, 2008).

The main function of ALSBCs is to support teachers at the school level in day-to-day program implementation and to manage the program at the school level. They support teachers in conducting regular assessment, maintain student assessment and teacher text folders, train and mentor teachers and offer informal feedback. They are expected to lead AL planning meetings and to work closely with the DET AL coordinator (NT DEET 2007: 1). The duties of ALSBCs change according to their school’s phase of implementation (Table 4).

According to DET, AL teachers “need to be trained in the methodology; it usually takes more than a year to develop solid and consistent AL practice” (2007: 2). This is reflected in the implementation model (2006a, 2007, 2008). Although PD requirements for AL teachers are determined according to the school’s phase of implementation, as outlined in Table 5, according to the NALP AL *Roles and Responsibilities* document (NT DEET 2006b), AL teachers, regardless of the phase of implementation, are expected to:

- attend AL PDs as negotiated with DET AL coordinator
- plan and teach AL daily (1.5 hrs)
- systematically present the teaching sequence and monitor objectives
- build a constructive and inclusive classroom environment so that students can actively engage in academic tasks
- monitor student progress using checklists provided
- at least fortnightly assess WL using Observational Reading Record
- with the ALSBC and AL coordinator, assess students according to schedule using IL
- record and enter student IL assessment data on the NALP database, supported by ALSBC
- document successes and challenges of the AL pedagogy

**Table 2: Phases of implementation and key activities (NT DEET, 2006b, 2007; NT DET 2008)**

Phase	Key activities	Duration	Student progress
Preparatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being made ready to implement AL</li> </ul>	One to four semesters	N/A no student involvement
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preparing to implement the AL program</li> <li>• ALSBC (and key staff in larger schools) intensively trained in two of the three AL PD packages</li> <li>• ALSBC intensively trained in school level program management</li> <li>• students assessed for baseline data</li> <li>• teachers commence teaching AL</li> <li>• whole school undertakes initial PD</li> <li>• link to hub school, Communities of Practice and/or Advanced Practice school for professional support, mentoring and training are established</li> </ul>	One to two semesters	No improvement in student results are expected as the focus is on developing key staff

Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meeting and maintaining requirements of implementing program</li> <li>ALSBC fully trained and assisting in training other teachers (DEET 2006)</li> <li>ALSBC completed at least two of the three AL PD packages (DEET 2007)</li> <li>ALSBC completely trained in Assessment package</li> <li>ALSBC assisting in training other teachers in assessment and practice</li> <li>all AL teaching staff trained/being trained and applying the AL teaching methodology</li> <li>AL being taught by teachers who have completed at least initial training</li> <li>link to hub school, Community of Practice and/or Advanced Practice school for professional support, mentoring and training established in Phase 2 schools</li> </ul>	Two or three semesters	Minor improvements in student outcomes are expected as teachers gain expertise in using the approach
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>managing the program</li> <li>all staff working trained in the AL teaching sequence</li> <li>ALSBC completed all specified NALP PD</li> <li>AL assessment regime is also being fully implemented and assessment results are used to provide feedback to teachers</li> <li>peer review processes and professional support networks are key activities</li> </ul>	Two or more semesters	Significant improvements in student literacy outcomes are expected
Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exemplify best practice in AL teaching and management</li> <li>self managing or exemplary sites which act as a resource site for other schools through activities such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstration of best practice</li> <li>mentoring</li> <li>informal or formal networking and</li> <li>provision of resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>no additional training is delivered to teachers or ALSBC</li> <li>PD is continued through activities related to program enhancement and links to CDU and DET AL teams</li> </ul>	Dependent upon sustained quality AL teaching and management	Significant and sustained improvements in student literacy outcomes; improvement rate may decline, but the percentage of students obtaining benchmark literacy levels will increase and remain at a high level*
Hub schools and professional learning communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>schools demonstrating advanced practice provide PD support to other AL schools through a hub schools model; experienced AL teachers act as mentors to visiting teachers and school coordinators</li> <li>act as lead school for AL Professional Learning Community or Communities of Practice</li> </ul>	Indefinite	Same as for Phase 3 school
Reinitiated (reboot) schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reverted to preparatory or Phase 1 status due to high turnover rate of critical staff</li> <li>key activities same as Phase 1 schools</li> <li>additional planning for sustainability may be involved</li> </ul>	One term to four semesters	Same as preparatory or Phase 1 school

\* These expectations about student outcomes appear to be working assumptions only.

**Table 3: DET AL coordinator roles and responsibilities (NT DEET 2006b, 2007; NT DET 2008)**

DET AL coordinator roles and responsibilities	
Preparatory and Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overview roles / responsibilities with ALSBC</li> <li>• assist literacy team set up</li> <li>• clarify role</li> <li>• handover School Coordinator handbook</li> </ul>
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training and mentoring for teachers for two years</li> <li>• PD workshops</li> <li>• modelling effective practice through demonstration lessons</li> <li>• observation of teaching with lesson analysis and feedback</li> <li>• co-planning</li> <li>• conducting assessment and training in assessment and data analysis</li> <li>• feedback on data analysis</li> <li>• provide ALSBC with intensive training and ongoing support and strategies</li> <li>• provide principal with ongoing mechanism for NALP and support through Asst. GM Literacy and through Communities of Practice</li> </ul>
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support school to maintain program</li> </ul>
Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no additional training delivered</li> <li>• PD through activities related to program enhancement and links to CDU and DET AL team</li> </ul>
Reboot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as for preparatory/Phase 1</li> </ul>
General role regardless of phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advocating to principals and communities</li> <li>• training new school and department coordinators</li> <li>• "...assist remote AL schools to form learning communities. Schools entering the program will be linked to current AL schools that are geographically or historically co-located" (2006a: 2)</li> </ul>

**Table 4: ALSBC roles, responsibilities and expected PD (NT DEET 2006b, 2007; NT DET 2008)**

Phase	ALSBC roles	Professional development expected
Preparatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>assessment schedule planned</li> <li>ALSBC organises resources and timetables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no formal AL training</li> </ul>
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with PLT feedback, teach AL in order to gain expertise</li> <li>collect student consent forms</li> <li>students assessed for base line data and assessment schedule plan implemented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ALSBC intensively trained in methodology: PD1 and 2</li> <li>intensively trained in school level program management</li> </ul>
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with school leaders, oversee management of AL program and in school while working closely with the AL coordinator from the PLT</li> <li>lead frequent AL teacher meetings to jointly plan and prepare teaching</li> <li>train and mentor others, team teach, give informal feedback on lessons</li> <li>lead and support teachers with the AL assessment regime, conduct IL and ToRCH assessment and oversee completion of WL assessments</li> <li>ensure student assessment data managed as required and analyse student assessment data to inform teaching practice</li> <li>coordinate texts, maintain materials and Teacher Boxes</li> <li>maintain Student Assessment and Teacher Text Folders</li> <li>meet CDU (ALIAS) data entry requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fully trained in school level program management</li> <li>completed at least two of the three AL PD packages and the Assessment Workshop</li> </ul>
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with DET AL and school managers, establish internal quality assurance review practices to maintain and enhance program</li> <li>support teachers in exemplary practice by planning, programming, modelling, team teaching, observing and analysing lessons, give constructive feedback</li> <li>arrange attendance of new staff at central AL PD sessions</li> <li>consult with DET AL team on program management, teacher development and issues affecting AL in the school</li> <li>ensure community is provided with quality information and opportunities for high level involvement with the program</li> <li>school AL coordinator increasingly training/mentoring others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as above</li> <li>all staff involved in PD as identified in the Individual Performance Enhancement plan</li> </ul>
Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with DET and school managers implement strategies for demonstrating best practice and acting as a resource for others</li> <li>as for Phase 3</li> <li>as for preparatory or Phase 1, with customised support modifications to meet individual circumstance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PD through activities related to program enhancement and links to CDU and DET AL team</li> </ul>
Reboot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may involve additional planning for sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as for Preparatory or Phase 1</li> </ul>

**Table 5: Expected teacher participation in PD for each phase of implementation**  
(NT DEET 2006b, n.p., 2007; NT DET 2008)

Phase	Professional development expected
Preparatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no formal AL training</li> <li>other PD as determined by readiness assessment</li> </ul>
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>key staff in larger schools intensively trained in methodology – PD1 and 2</li> <li>whole school undertakes initial PD</li> </ul>
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teachers gain expertise in using the approach</li> <li>all AL teaching staff trained/being trained and applying AL teaching methodology</li> <li>AL being taught by teachers who have completed at least initial training (PD1)</li> </ul>
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all AL teaching staff trained in the AL teaching sequence</li> <li>all staff involved in PD as identified in the Individual Performance Enhancement plan</li> </ul>
Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no additional training delivered</li> <li>PD through activities related to program enhancement and links to CDU and DET AL Team</li> </ul>
Reboot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as for preparatory / Phase 1 schools</li> </ul>

## Professional Development

A key element of the implementation strategy is to establish an “articulated and multi-level model of workforce development consisting of professional development, in-school support and training and tertiary programs” (NT DEET 2007: 2, NT DET 2008: 3). During the period of this evaluation (2006–2008) four different models of PD were used by CDU to train the NT DET AL team, AL school-based coordinators and AL teachers to understand, implement and support the AL teaching sequence.

The DET AL team, formerly the Professional Learning Team (PLT)<sup>1</sup>, was established “to provide in-school professional development and training in the AL approach directly to practitioners in the schools” (NT DEET 2006b: 2). All members of the team are expected to have completed all PD workshops.

According to NT DET (2006a, 2007), teacher PD and ongoing professional learning in the NT is largely delivered by the DET AL team. The team is a group of 14 expert AL teachers (AL specialists and coordinators) based in regional centres throughout the NT. The team delivers PD workshops to teachers and AL school-based coordinators either centrally (Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine), in hub schools (see below) or at individual schools. Workshops are timetabled regularly throughout the year and also on a needs basis. The DET AL team also provides ongoing support to teachers during week-long site visits each term. This support varies according to the phase model of implementation, as outlined above.

All training for DET AL coordinators and key teachers is undertaken by CDU (NT

<sup>1</sup> The PLT was superseded by the DET AL team at the beginning of 2007 and is hereafter referred to as the DET AL team. Members of the DET AL team are referred to as DET AL coordinators.

DEET 2007: 9). NT DET is responsible for implementing the AL program in schools: “the AL Team is a system level group providing direct support to AL school coordinators, teachers through professional development activities, conducting assessment, lesson planning, lesson analysis, feedback and demonstration lessons” (2007: 18). Senior AL DET coordinators facilitate versions of the PD workshops for teachers in regional centres and schools.

Professional development is available as:

- four sequential PD workshops
- an intensive workshop/university short course
- the Graduate Certificate in Accelerated Literacy
- targeted workshops

The first professional development model entails four sequential workshops referred to as PD1, PD2 and PD3 and the Assessment Workshop. PD1 is an introduction to AL methodology with an overview of its theoretical underpinnings and the AL teaching sequence, and examines the first two stages of the teaching sequence (low order and high order) in detail. PD2 focuses on the transformations and spelling stages of the teaching sequence. PD3 focuses on the writing stage. The Assessment Workshop focuses on assessment of student reading according to AL assessment protocols.

Until the end of 2007 the predominant approach to training and development was participation in the three formal PD workshops and the additional Assessment Workshop. From the end of 2007, however, an intensive model for PD was designed and implemented as a joint DET and CDU responsibility. This intensive workshop commenced just before the end of the data collection phase of this evaluation. It is a university short course designed to introduce the theoretical knowledge and develop the practical skills AL teachers need to begin implementing the AL teaching sequence. It covers the content of the three formal PD workshops and the Assessment Workshop.. The rationale for this new delivery model was threefold: to assist DET to meet the targets of its contract with DEEWR (700 teachers trained by the end of 2008), to move away from constraints of workshop delivery times and places, and to test the viability of alternative delivery modes as post-2008 (end of current contract) options.

CDU also provides PD through the delivery of the Graduate Certificate in Accelerated Literacy (GCAL). This academic course comprises an externally delivered linguistics unit and three Accelerated Literacy units (LIC501, LIC502 and LIC503). Students who enrol in *LIC501: Introduction to Accelerated Literacy* attend the five-day intensive workshop (above) and complete the unit via online delivery and teaching practice. Students who enrol in *LIC502: Refining Accelerated Literacy Teaching Context* and *LIC503: Issues in Accelerated Literacy Teaching* attend a three-day intensive course, followed up by online delivery and teaching practice. This course also enrolls teachers outside the NT.

In 2006 and 2007 DET provided 20 scholarships, available to AL teachers, to meet

the cost of GCAL tuition fees (NT DEET 2006a: 3, 2007: 17).

CDU has delivered a number of targeted workshops aimed at the DET AL team and AL school-based coordinators. During 2006 these workshops included:

- teaching AL to early childhood students
- evaluation and what we learn from it
- word recognition and spelling
- understanding the AL teaching sequence
- writing teaching notes for AL
- writing techniques

From the beginning of 2007 until the present, tailored workshops have included:

- text analysis for narrative
- text analysis for other genres
- student assessment: reading and writing
- using text analysis for lesson planning
- how to observe lessons and provide lesson feedback to AL teachers
- book selection: criteria for choosing books to teach AL
- teaching sequence workshops

## **Resources**

CDU is contracted to provide teaching notes, DVDs, PD packages, a website and print promotional material as well as academic publications related to AL methodology. To date, CDU has produced this range of resources:

- 48 sets of teaching notes for individual texts
- 16 teaching videos/DVDs
- four information videos/DVDs
- 12 support booklets for practitioners of specific topics
- three PD packages including video footage and presenter and student materials

- website and print promotional material
- academic publications

A full list of resources is included in Appendix 18.

## NALP Assessment Procedures

### Purpose of Assessment

The assessment requirements of NALP allow teachers and schools to use data for:<sup>2</sup>

- diagnostic purposes (formative)
- teaching and planning purposes (formative)
- evaluating the overall effectiveness of their program in bringing about improved student outcomes (summative)

The assessments described below therefore include both measures of student performance (which also provide the main outcome measures for this evaluation), and assessments whose purpose is to guide teaching practice. The assessment schedule below outlines the administration requirements of teachers, school coordinators and the DET AL team regarding specific student assessment data. Entering student assessment data on the NALP database (ALIAS) allows graphs, tables, etcetera, to be generated for use by schools/systems/sectors to effectively report to a variety of stakeholders.

### Reading

There are two measures of a student's oral reading attainment. Both measure independent reading levels, that is, students read a given text free of outside help or control.

Assessment in AL follows from the intention to *work within* the ZPD, as the testing and monitoring of the level at which a student can read with support (their Working Level or WL) is regularly compared with their reading level without support (their Individual Level or IL). NALP (2007a: 9) describes the purpose of IL testing as follows:

The IL observational reading test is a test of a student's reading accuracy on unseen texts, (his/her zone of actual development). IL testing needs to occur shortly after a student enters the NALP. This may be at the beginning of the academic year or at any point during the year. IL testing also

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<sup>2</sup> See NALP (2007a) *How to analyse and use assessment data in NALP* for detailed information about how to use the student assessment procedures outlined above to inform teaching and learning in NALP.

occurs at the end of the academic year or twelve-month period of instruction or when a student exits the program. In this way, data can be collected that shows the student's reading accuracy on unseen texts both at the beginning and at the end of their period of instruction in the NALP program.

Both IL and WL testing take the form of oral reading observation, during which the assessor records the student's reading accuracy and notes the kinds of decoding strategies employed (such as self-correction, use of picture cues, letter-sound correspondence); the assessor may also question the student to gauge comprehension and their ability to identify/read words out of context.

The **Individual Level (IL)** assesses the student's reading accuracy on an unseen text. Texts from the PM Benchmark Kit 2 (Smith & Randell 2002) have been chosen to represent grade-level equivalent reading accuracy. Two additional texts have been added to extend testing beyond Year 6 level. A lexile levelling framework was used when choosing the additional texts. Lexile levelling forms the basis of many commercially produced reading programs. The texts for Years 7 and 8 equivalents come from the opening pages of *Thunderfish* (Higgins 1999) and *Predator's Gold* (Reeve 2003).

Ideally, students' ILs are assessed pre-program or upon entry to the school and then annually, usually in term four. For reporting purposes, students who record a score of less than 90% at transition level are classified as *pre-scale*. Students who score 90% or more on a levelled text are considered *on scale*. IL results are entered on the Accelerated Literacy Information Analysis System (ALIAS).

The **Individual Working Level (WL)** assesses student's reading accuracy on a text taught as part of an AL teaching cycle. The NALP documentation (2007a) suggests that performance on WL can predict improvement in IL scores. However, the regular recording of these scores was not established practice, and they are not officially reported; these assumptions have not been demonstrated.

**ToRCH** (ACER 2003) is an assessment of comprehension designed for students from Years 3 to 10. Each of the 12 graded texts (fiction and non-fiction) comprises a reading passage and an answer sheet. ToRCH provides an estimate of a student's level of reading achievement and descriptions of each level. ToRCH results are entered on the Accelerated Literacy Information Analysis System (ALIAS).

## **Writing**

Assessment of writing in AL, as with reading, is conducted using two main measures. Both measure independent writing ability: that is, students write without outside help or control.

**Free writing** assesses a student's writing level on unsupported writing. A topic or goal for writing with some criteria may be given as a stimulus, but the composition of the piece is completely unsupported. Periodic free writing needs to be carried out to monitor a student's control over writing techniques taught over time.

**Workshop writing** assesses a student's ability to apply writing techniques that have been taught as part of an AL teaching cycle. During this cycle, students and teacher will have read the text, carried out transformations, spelling, joint reconstructed writing and joint construction on parts of it. The student then transfers their understanding about the writing technique to an independent piece of writing. It is independent in that the interpretation of the technique is each student's own work.

A number of writing samples are collected over a period of time and are levelled using rubrics analysed that align with state and territory requirements. Contextual information is gathered, including the conditions under which the writing was generated and whether the writing was generated independently. NALP recommends assessing work samples in moderation groups in order to make consistent judgement (NALP 2007a, 2007b). A rubric produced by Mary Maken-Horarik at Canberra University, which provides teachers with assessment criteria that can be applied to any narrative writing task, is recommended for these purposes (2007a).

### **Early Childhood Assessment**

Note: these assessments may provide a guide to progress of older non-readers.

**The Word Recognition and Spelling Checklist** assesses students' developing control of decoding, including recognition of words by sight. Because students will often read a seen text fluently and accurately, a teacher may assume that the student can read all the words, both in and out of context. If they do not recognise words out of context, however, then spelling activities on these words will be of limited value. If students do not recognise particular words out of context, the teacher then knows that more time needs to be spent on transformations and word recognition activities.

**The Early Reader Checklist** assesses non-readers' early reading development (in and out of context; 1:1 correspondence; self correction; initial sounds). On entry to their first year of schooling, it is often the case that students will be non-readers: that is, they will have an IL of zero. With continuing AL instruction, these students should develop specific phonemic awareness, word attack and comprehension skills that need monitoring. The early reader checklist enables teachers to carefully monitor students' early reading development and so modify the emphasis of AL lessons.

**Marie Clay Letter Identification** assesses students' knowledge of letter-sound relationships (including the means students use to identify letters). This assessment informs teachers of the skill/knowledge, such as letter identification and sound-symbol relationships, to be taught during the AL teaching sequence.

**Marie Clay Concepts About Print** assesses what students know about the way printed language is organised and is commonly presented. It is a sensitive indicator of one group of behaviours which support reading acquisition – behaviours like distinguishing print from pictures, letters from words, first and last letters in words, etcetera. This assessment informs teachers of the skill/knowledge about print to be taught.

**The Letter Identification and Concepts about Print** procedures are to be used in conjunction with Observational Reading Records (ILs and WLs), to assist teachers to form a picture of the literacy development of individual learners.

The **Yopp Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation** (Yopp 1995) assesses the sounds students hear within words which the teacher reads to them (i.e., sound discrimination). Students who struggle to discriminate sounds in words often have difficulty identifying the graphemes (code) which represent those sounds in written language.

**Table 6: Schedule of assessments (NALP 2007a)**

<b>Name of Assessment</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Administered or tracked by</b>	<b>Destination</b>
<b>Oral reading assessment: Individual Level (IL)</b>	Years 1–12 (individually)	Pre-program or on entry to school, then annually (end of year)	School coordinator/ project coordinator	Student record NALP Database: ALIAS
<b>Oral reading assessment: Working level (WL)</b>	All students (individually)	Twice per text minimum	Class teacher/ tutor/assistant teacher	Student record ALIAS
<b>ToRCH</b>	Students with an IL of Year 4 or above. (whole class)	On entry to school, then annually (end of year)	Class teacher/ school coordinator/ NALP coordinator	Student record ALIAS
<b>Word Recognition and Spelling Checklist</b>	All students (individually)	One per text	Class teacher/ tutor/assistant teacher	Student record
<b>Marie Clay Observation Survey Letter Identification</b>	Early readers (individually)	Pre-program or on entry to school then once per semester	Class teacher/assistant teacher	Student record
<b>Marie Clay Survey Observation Concepts about Print</b>	Early readers (individually)	Pre-program or on entry to school then each semester	Class teacher/ assistant teacher	Student record
<b>Assessment of Phonemic Segmentation using words from text studied using Yopp Singer test</b>	Early readers (individually)	Pre-program or on entry to school then each semester	Class teacher/ assistant teacher	Student record
<b>Collection of Writing Samples – annotated using writing context sheet</b>	All students	Pre-program or on entry to school, then one per text	Class teacher, tutor or assistant	Student record