

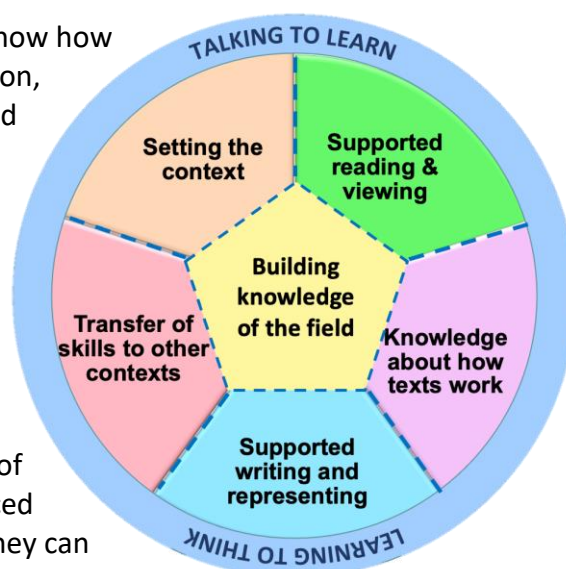
# A TEACHING AND LEARNING CYCLE

Beverly Derewianka  
University of Wollongong

The teaching and learning cycle below:

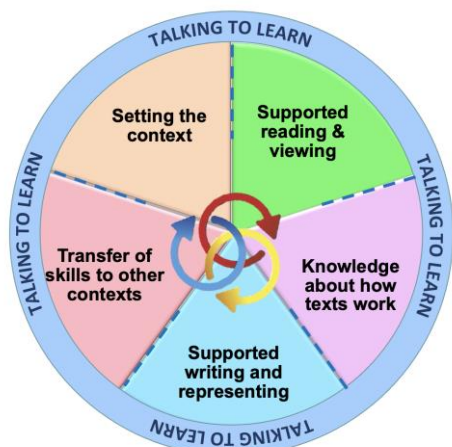
- is concerned with deep learning of content (knowledge of the field);
- recognises that curriculum knowledge is learnt primarily through reading, writing and class discussions – language and content are inseparable.
- identifies the language and literacy demands of curriculum tasks.
- explicitly teaches students the literacy and language skills needed to achieve the task outcomes.
- does not make the assumption that students know how to read the complex texts of secondary education, but explicitly teaches them how to interpret and compose such texts.
- uses the 'gradual release of responsibility' approach.

The teaching-learning cycle is based on the notion of having **high expectations** supported by **strong scaffolding** and **explicit teaching**. It is based on Vygotskian principles of learning through interaction with more proficient others in the context of shared experience. The activities are carefully sequenced to build up students' knowledge and abilities so that they can experience success.



Differentiation is provided through adjusting the level of scaffolding depending on the identified needs of students in a particular task. High achieving students can be provided with extension tasks.

The stages of the cycle can include multiple ways of accessing the content, including such activities as class discussions, examining images, online materials, hands-on tasks, videos, computer apps, field experience, and guest interviews. Importantly, the activities are interactive so that students have opportunities to use, hear, and see the language associated with the topic.



The stages of the cycle are not a lock-step sequence but can be included at any point in a task as necessary.

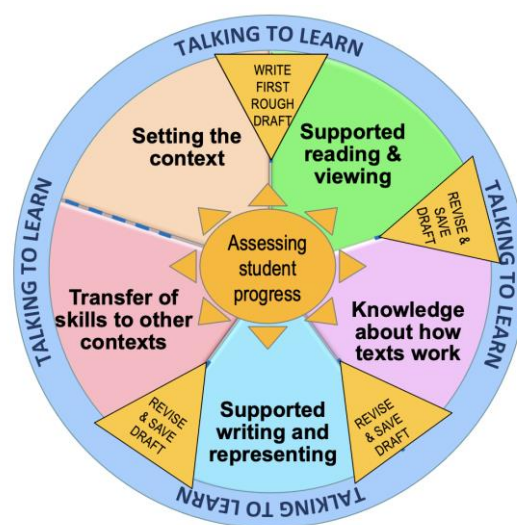
## A. SETTING THE CONTEXT

The teaching and learning cycle focuses on teaching the literacy skills needed to build knowledge of the topic in the context of curriculum tasks.

In the first stage, *Setting the Context*, the teaching and learning cycle generally involves a focus on engaging students, arousing their curiosity, finding out what they know of the topic under focus, and beginning to build shared understandings. This field building continues throughout the other stages of the teaching learning cycle so that students' understanding of the field accumulates and becomes increasingly sophisticated.

### Start writing

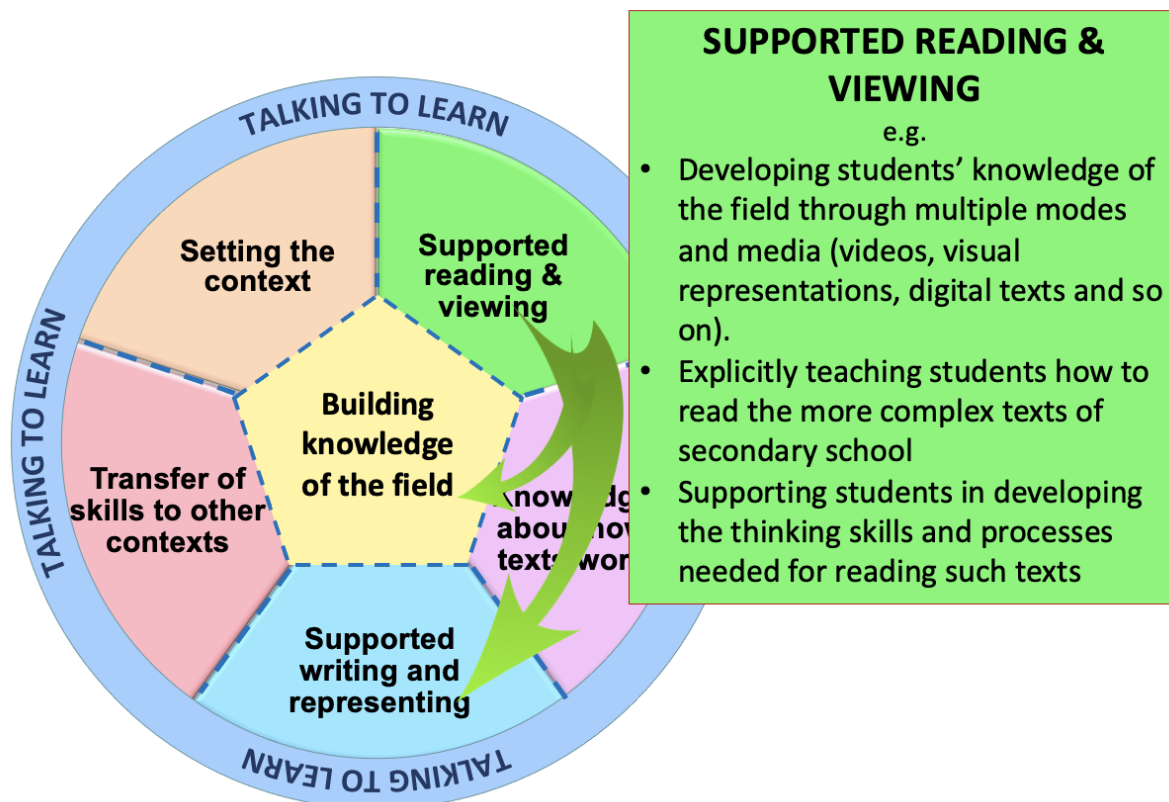
Drawing on any prior knowledge and the preliminary understandings built through the initial field-building, students could be asked to write a first rough draft early in the cycle (notes, dot points, images). This is the raw material that they will continue revising and crafting as they work through the unit, incorporating content and language points from focus lessons along the way. This rough draft (and subsequent drafts) also provides the teacher with insights into student strengths and weaknesses and potential teaching points (e.g. during guided reading/writing sessions). By starting the writing process early and revisiting the evolving text often, with input and guidance, the writing task is not as daunting as when the writing is all left to the end.



Revisions to their drafts are not concerned with surface-level features at this stage (e.g. spelling, sentence structure, punctuation) but with substantial field knowledge and task outcomes.

Whenever a lesson explicitly teaches new understandings (e.g. through supported reading or learning about the genre/the language needed for the task), the students are asked to return to their current draft and incorporate these understandings. They might highlight the amendments to their draft so progress will be easier to discuss during conferencing sessions. Each draft is then saved and dated.

## B. SUPPORTED READING



*Supported reading* is concerned with helping students to comprehend, analyse and interpret carefully selected texts that contribute to building knowledge of the field/topic. It recognises that even secondary students need to be taught how to read texts that are becoming more challenging, dense and abstract.

The teacher will typically orient the students to the content and purpose of the text and will guide the class to skim the text to get an idea of how it will unfold by looking at headings, sub-headings, images, captions, and so on. The teacher might then focus on key paragraphs, helping the students to gain meaning from the text, particularly in relation to the task at hand. The teacher can support the students in vocabulary development, scanning for specific information, practising research skills, taking notes using graphic organisers, annotating the text with questions and comments, and answering text-dependent questions. While students work in groups or individually on close reading activities, others can be provided with assistance with decoding skills or comprehension strategies relevant to their needs.

While any number of proven activities can be used to support students' reading, commonly used practices include read-alouds, modelled, shared, guided, collaborative and independent reading.

## READ-ALOUDS

This is where the teacher simply reads a text or extract aloud to the class or a group either for enjoyment and interest or to support understanding through the use of expression (e.g. intonation, pausing, volume, gestures and facial expressions, reference to images) – especially for EAL/D students.

## MODELLED READING

The teacher models the strategies he/she would use when making sense of a relevant text, using a ‘think-aloud’ technique:

When I start reading, I usually skim the text first to get an idea of what it's about.

I wonder why they needed wood.

How could I work out the meaning of this word?

Which one would be the patoo-patoo?

## SHARED READING

We can't assume that students can read independently the kinds of texts they will encounter across the learning areas, particularly complex texts, digital/online and multimodal texts. They need to be guided to read key texts strategically and with purpose (e.g. in relation to the task). In shared reading sessions, the teacher reads the text with the class, engaging the students by asking questions, dealing with vocabulary in context, explaining the relationship between written text and images, interpreting key messages, demonstrating comprehension strategies (e.g. skimming to get an overview of the text; consulting index), drawing attention to relevant language features (e.g. simple sentence for effect, tightly crafted sentence to express complex ideas, unusual structures, nominalization), and so on. A reading session might integrate elements of read-aloud by the teacher, some modelled reading, and some shared reading.

## GUIDED READING (e.g. DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT)

Students will generally have different levels of reading proficiency. By grouping students according to need, teachers are able to work with students with similar needs and proficiency to extend their reading capacity. While various groups work collaboratively on reading activities associated with the current task, the teacher is free to work with a particular group on guided reading activities to address specific aspects of reading texts related to the curriculum task.

If a teacher has identified, for example, that certain students are having problems taking notes from the text, reading the images, unpacking the density of the sentences, or finding evidence for an argument, the group might be guided to analyse the text.

## COLLABORATIVE/INDEPENDENT READING

Students benefit from analysing a text in pairs, groups or individually. The teacher provides structured reading activities related to the current curriculum task, e.g.:

### Close reading

Close reading is an activity that typically follows the following stages when developing a deep understanding of challenging texts. It is useful to base the close reading activity on skills and strategies that have been introduced previously in the unit (e.g. how to skim and scan, how to infer, how to locate the main idea and supporting details, how to summarise a paragraph).

*First reading:*

- Read text for main gist (skimming)
- Identify text purpose and how the text is structured to meet its purpose

*Second reading – comprehending the text, e.g.:*

- Highlight sections/words **hard to understand**
- Use **comprehension strategies** to make meaning of the text (e.g. predict, infer, read on, read back)
- **Summarise** paragraphs and/or key ideas; underline topic sentences
- Ask **questions** of the text (how? why? when?)
- Identify main points and supporting details

*Third reading – text-dependent questions:*

Individually, in pairs or groups make deeper sense of the text, e.g.:

- **Scan** text for specific information (e.g. related to the content of the written task)
- Make structured **notes** relevant to the task
- Represent the text **visually** (e.g. transfer information from the text to a graphic organizer)
- Discern **patterns** in the text relevant to the curriculum task (e.g. part-whole, class-subclass, problem-solution, character description)
- Identify **relationship** between written text and accompanying images
- **Interpret** diagrams
- **Critically evaluate** (e.g. the trustworthiness of the information)
- Make **connections** to self, the text, other texts and the world beyond the text

The activities should involve multiple readings and physical annotation of the text, drawing on skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, evaluating, summarizing, synthesizing, note-making, and so on. Students should cite evidence from the text.

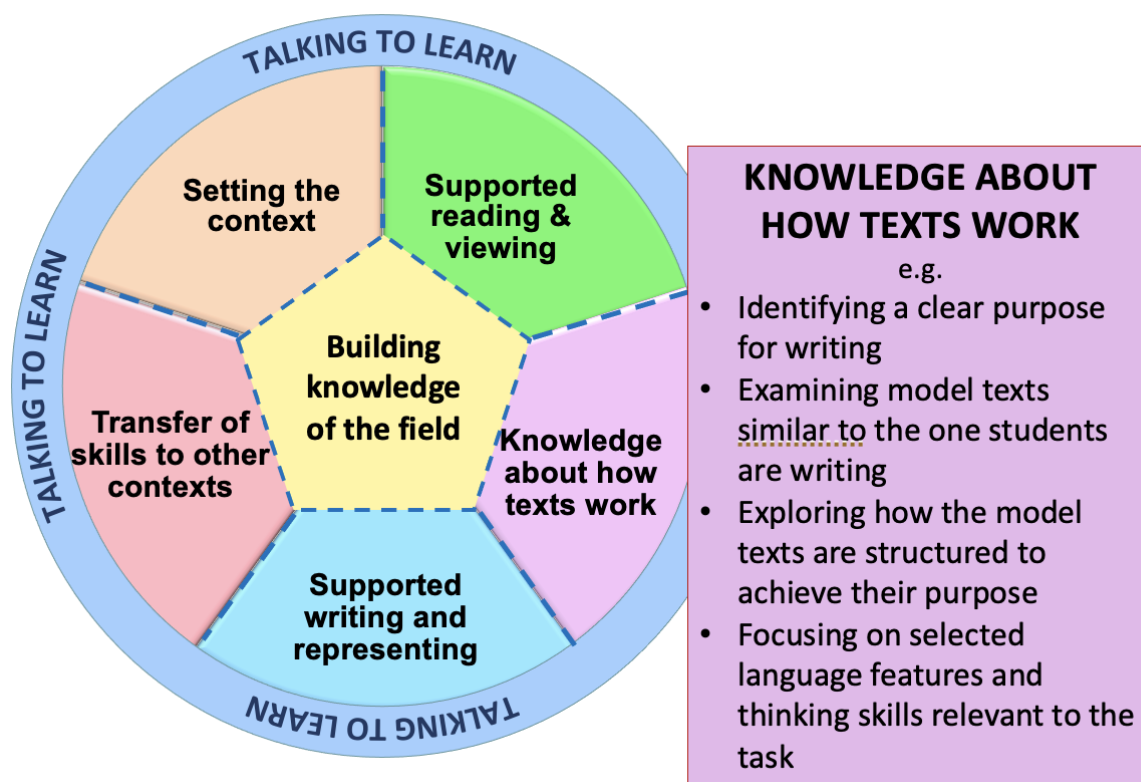
### Information transfer activities

- demonstrating understanding by converting information from one source/mode to another, e.g.:

- from image to oral
- from image to written text
- from oral to image
- from oral to written text
- from written text to oral
- from written text to image
- from oral to dramatization

***As students extend their understanding of the topic through reading and other field-building activities, they can integrate their new knowledge into their evolving draft.***

## C. LEARNING ABOUT THE GENRE



Now that students have started to generate ideas for their writing, the emphasis at this point turns more to the composition and crafting of the students' written texts. Again, a variety of activities can be used to familiarise students with the characteristics of the genre (e.g. comparing genres, sorting and sequencing). It is common, however, to begin by reinforcing the purpose for writing, followed by identifying the typical stages that the text goes through in achieving its purpose, and selected language features.

### HOW IS THE TEXT ORGANIZED?

Each genre is organized differently. A genre will unfold in characteristic stages depending on its purpose. During this phase of the cycle, we deconstruct a model/mentor text similar to the one being written by the students. The model text might be written by the teacher (at the level of a high-achieving student) but could also be a published text, a high quality text written by a student from a previous year (or an amalgam of student texts), or a modified text. (If you have written the model text, share with your students your drafts and the process you went through in composing the text.)

At this stage, the teacher would typically project a text that he/she has carefully selected in relation to the task. Students are provided with their own copy to annotate. The teacher would guide the students to observe how the text is typically structured into relatively predictable stages. Within each major stage of the genre, students might be guided to identify minor phases (e.g. development of setting or characters in a narrative; foreshadowing of arguments in a persuasive text).

***Students can be asked to revise their evolving draft, now focusing on how they are organizing their text into coherent stages.***

## **KEY LANGUAGE FEATURES**

Now that the text has developed to a point where the content/field has been more fully developed and the overall structure of the text is in hand, it is time to start crafting the text in terms of language choices. At this stage, it would be appropriate to focus on selected language features that are characteristic:

- of the genre (or of a particular stage of the genre)
- of the topic/task
- of observed whole-class needs.

Such features might include effective sentence structure, multimodal elements, attention to reader needs and interests, citing of references, expression of attitudes, resources for rich description, the language of cause and effect, and the use of cohesive devices.

It often takes more than one encounter with models of the genre for learners to internalise the focus genre and its distinctive patterns of language. They learn about language at the levels of text, clause, group or phrase, and word, and about different kinds of images in order to answer such questions as *Why that choice in that text? What is the effect of that choice?* The class is developing a shared metalanguage to refer to various aspects of texts (the purpose and name of the genre, the labeling of stages and phases, the terminology used for the various language features).

## **PREPARATION FOR MODELLING THE GENRE**

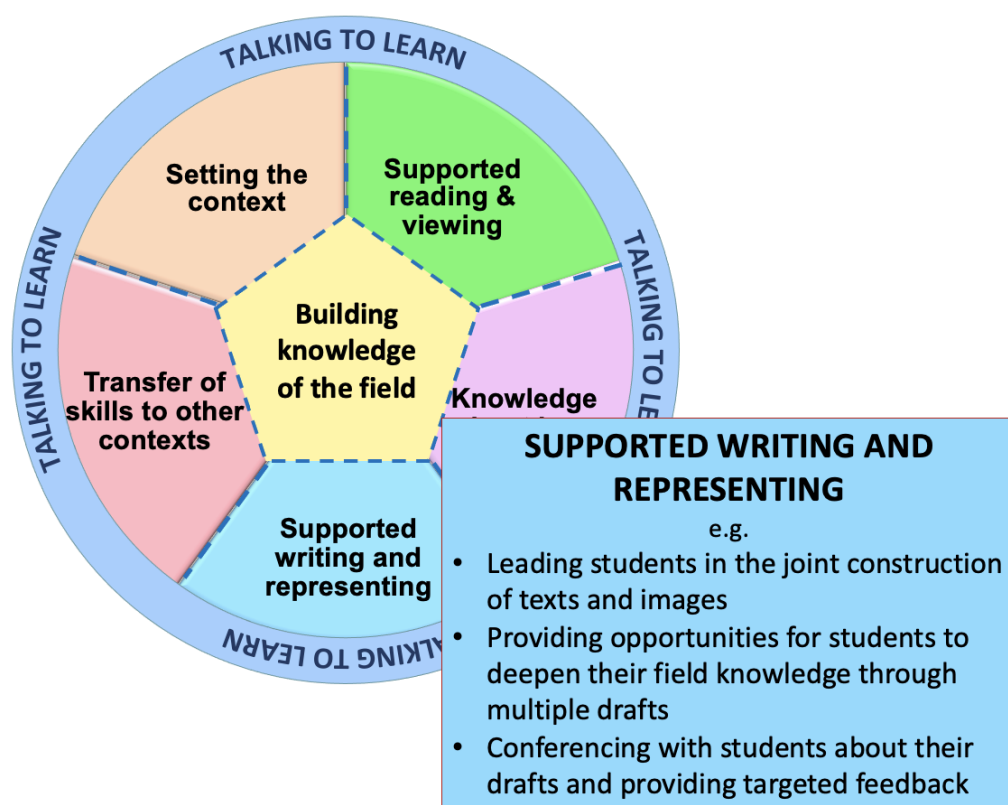
- Write a model text for the selected task.
- Write it at a level equivalent to a high standard student text.
- As you write it, reflect on what it revealed.
- In light of this experience, do you need to rethink your language/literacy focus?
- How are you going to use your model text?
- What might you model from your model text in relation to the task and assessment criteria?

The model text will generally be similar to the one the students will be writing, using the same genre, but with a slight shift in the field to avoid straight copying. e.g.

- you might model how to write an explanation of an earthquake as a model for how students would write an explanation of another natural disaster;
- you might model how to describe the characters and/or setting from a story different to the one/s the students will be writing about;
- you might model how to write an historical recount of an event similar to but different from the one your students will be writing about.

***At this point, the class can be guided to again revise their draft, highlighting changes they have made in relation to the target language feature/s of the unit. This allows for efficient conferencing with teacher and/or peers, as the focus features are easily identified, allowing the student to explain why certain choices have been made and their effect.***

## D. SUPPORTED WRITING



As with supported reading, a range of activities can be used to support students' writing. Here we will focus on such familiar practices as modelled, shared, guided, collaborative and independent writing.

### MODELLED WRITING

As with modelled reading, in **modelled** writing, use a 'think-aloud' technique to demonstrate the choices you would make when composing a text similar to the one students are writing. This might last for only a brief time, might target only selected strategies, might blend with shared writing (below), and might involve the whole class or a smaller group.

e.g. As you compose your text (or part of a text) in front of the class/group, you might make comments such as:

'I haven't written a text like this before so I might need to look for a good model.'

'I'm not sure how to begin. How does the model start off?'

'I've sorted my notes into main points, so I can now insert them into my text.'

'How could I start this paragraph. I need a good topic sentence.'

'I'll need to go back and find more information for this point.'

### SHARED WRITING/JOINT CONSTRUCTION

While some students will be ready to get on with their own texts at this point, many students will benefit from participating in jointly composing a text similar to the one they



are writing. The students come to the activity with some preparation so that they have something to contribute (e.g. notes from previous field-building activities).

The teacher guides the shared writing of the text, eliciting contributions from the students and demonstrating how to shape these into coherent, interesting written text, e.g.

- developing an overview/ skeleton/ graphic organizer of the text;
- focusing on a particular stage of the text;
- developing a paragraph around a topic sentence;
- demonstrating how to change their spontaneous oral offerings into more 'written' language;
- extending their suggestions by asking 'how?', 'why?', 'which one?', etc;
- sharing poorly written sentences with students and asking for suggestions for improvement;
- explaining why a certain choice might be preferable over another;
- extending students' vocabulary repertoires;
- asking students to decide whether to use a simple, compound or complex sentence;
- engaging the reader.

The students are thus given an opportunity to experience what is involved in composing such a text.

During a joint construction, the teacher takes a dominant role, leading by shaping the text as it unfolds (*Could we say that in fewer words?*), asking questions to solicit student responses (*What's a more technical term for that?*), making suggestions (*How about we move this sentence to here?*), recasting as necessary (*You mean ...*) and reminding students of the stages, phases, and features of the deconstructed text (*What do we need in the opening stage of the text? Let's build some description into that noun group*). The focus for the joint construction will include choices about whole text, paragraph or sentence structure.

Although spelling and punctuation can be attended to as necessary, the emphasis is on the process of composing rather than creating a polished text.

### **Differentiation of support**

- For less proficient students, you could jointly reconstruct (in students' own words) a model text that has been shared with the class e.g.
  - using a graphic organizer of the text as a scaffold
  - or drawing on students' notes/summaries from a previous shared reading of the model text
  - or modifying the model text by omitting 'chunks' for the students to fill in
  - or providing key sentence starters as prompts for students.

This might be particularly useful for students learning English as an additional language.

- For more proficient students, you might jointly construct the beginning of the text and then ask groups to collaboratively develop other stages/ phases/ episodes/ paragraphs, guided by the overview of the text (see above). Groups/pairs can then share their draft for discussion/feedback by the class or other groups. Group contributions can be compiled to form a class publication.

## GUIDED WRITING

Guided writing is an opportunity to provide feedback to groups of students with similar needs on such matters as sentence structure, vocabulary development, cohesion, punctuation and spelling. Sitting together in a small group, the teacher observes and discusses language choices as students compose their texts.

## COLLABORATIVE WRITING

In collaborative writing, design pair/group activities related to reviewing students' drafts, drawing on understandings developed in previous lessons, e.g.:

- discussion of choices in composing sentences;
- combining simple sentences into compound and complex sentences where appropriate;
- expanding sentences (e.g. by extending descriptive elements, by inserting details such as *when, where, how, why*);
- pruning rambling sentences;
- providing students with possible alternatives for sentences and asking them to justify their choice;
- discussing relationships between images and written text;
- improving a poorly designed diagram;
- encouraging peer feedback on engaging the audience;
- justifying choices made in the revision of their previous drafts.

## INDEPENDENT WRITING

At this point, students are in a position to take full control of their own texts. They have developed their knowledge of the field, they have shaped their text into stages that achieve the purpose, and they have incorporated key language/multimodal features. They are now at a stage where they can edit the text to flow smoothly, to improve vocabulary choices and to attend to the needs of the reader.

Finally, students can proofread their texts to ensure spelling, punctuation and grammatical accuracy. Provide guidelines for students to revise, edit and proofread their texts (e.g. desk mats/handouts illustrating punctuation rules & examples of different types of sentences). They can also polish up the presentation of the text (e.g. font selection, headings, images, layout).

***Having experienced clear guidance and scaffolding in developing their texts, students are now in a strong position to compose a similar text using the target genre in future tasks or when choosing a purpose for writing during free writing sessions.***

## **DEVELOPING SUCCESS CRITERIA**

At each point in the teaching and learning cycle, share with the students the learning intention for the particular lesson/set of lessons along with the success criteria related to the mini-task.

- Success criteria relate directly to the learning objective/intention of a particular mini-task within a unit of work. They relate to a learning episode of only 1-3 lessons or so.
- The learning intention and related success criteria are made explicit to/ negotiated with students and are regularly referred to.
- They do not describe the topic ('we are learning about marsupials') – they make visible the thinking strategies involved in carrying out a particular aspect of the task ('we are learning to classify different types of animals').
- They relate to a broader 'big idea' that the task is developing within the unit of work.
- They are written in language readily accessible to the student.
- They are couched in terms such as 'I can ...'.
- They are quite focused and limited in number (e.g. 2-4).
- They are manageable, not overwhelming.
- They are quite specific, not vague.
- They should be teachable.
- They should preferably be demonstrable.
- They are not graded in terms of levels of achievement.

## **IN SUMMARY ...**

- Supporting students to achieve goals they could not achieve by themselves.
- Engaging students with substantial content and authentic texts across all areas of the curriculum.
- Rich tasks that involve analysis, synthesis, evaluation, decision-making, etc.
- Explicit teaching of language in context: the stages of the genre; relevant language features.
- Varying the degree of difficulty by text selection and level of support.
- Integration of language modes (oral interaction, listening, reading, writing, visual information).
- Assessment linked to outcomes that have been shared with the students and explicitly taught.