

A brief history of genre pedagogy in Australian curriculum and practice

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Introduction

This paper outlines developments in genre theory and pedagogy from an Australian perspective although we are very much aware of the significant work done elsewhere in the world in recent years. Our experience lies predominantly with English language and literacy education in Australian schools and in teacher education settings. In this paper, we describe the provenance and development of genre theory and the functional view of language as relevant to our context. We outline the current state of Australian curriculum after more than 30 years of genre research and application, identifying a number of significant achievements made possible by the earlier work of linguists and educationists. Then, we discuss the pedagogic approach to language and literacy associated with genre, with particular emphasis on characteristics such as the dialogic basis of learning and the notion of ‘handover’. We conclude by identifying issues for teacher professional learning and curriculum resources.



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Developments in Genre Theory (the ‘What’)

Genre theory emerged from research into writing in primary school classrooms in inner city Sydney in the 1980s (Martin 1999). At the time, ‘process’ writing – an approach that emphasised writing processes such as drafting, revising, and editing – was dominant. As a reaction to traditional forms of writing instruction, the process approach advocated freedom of choice in terms of what students could write about, with the teacher adopting the role of benevolent facilitator.

It was unashamedly a child-centred approach with roots in the psychology of learning. As a result of the emphasis on self-expression and creativity, the texts collected by the research team were overwhelmingly personal recounts and observation/comments, all of which tended to be referred to by teachers and students alike as ‘stories’ regardless of their purposes (Rose & Martin 2012).

In contrast to process-writing, genre theory had its roots in linguistics, in particular Michael Halliday’s functional linguistics which describes how language is used in social contexts. Concerned for the literacy outcomes of the many minority language students in disadvantaged schools, the researchers extended Halliday’s functional model to describe the variety of purposes for which language is used in the curriculum. Martin and others analysed curriculum, tasks, textbooks and students’ texts and identified major purposes for writing such as instructing, entertaining, informing and describing, explaining and arguing – describing the texts through which these various purposes are realised as genres and identifying some key genres for the primary school years (procedures, narratives, information reports, explanations and expositions). Each genre unfolds in a relatively predictable way or as ‘recurrent configurations of meaning’ (Rose & Martin 2012: 53), moving through a series of stages to achieve its purpose (see Table 1). For example, if the purpose was to argue a point of view through an exposition, the typical stages would include: a statement of position in which the writer’s position or thesis with respect to an issue is stated; a series of arguments, each of which is elaborated; and finally a restatement of the position which includes a summary of the arguments and a reinforcement of the thesis. Similarly, the stages for other texts realising different purposes are relatively predictable, as are many of the language features associated with them. Teachers quickly became confident with teaching these elemental genres, the associated staging and typical grammatical features. The work on genre has been taken up widely in Australian school syllabuses and curriculum materials since that early research.

TABLE 1. Prototypical genres of primary school

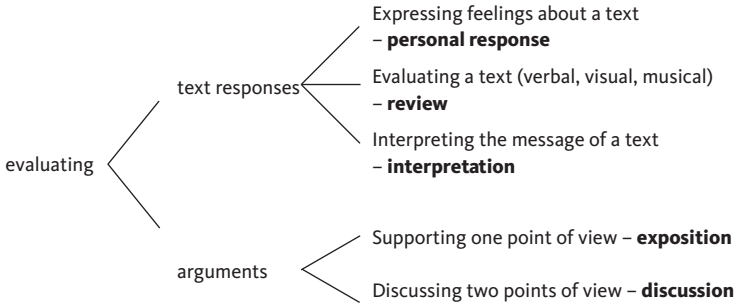
Purpose	Genre	Stages
To tell what happened	recount	Orientation \wedge Record of events
To entertain	narrative	Orientation \wedge Complication \wedge Series of events \wedge Resolution
To instruct someone how to do something	procedure	Purpose \wedge Equipment \wedge Steps
To provide information about a topic	information report	Classification \wedge Description
To explain how things work or why things happen	explanation	Phenomenon identification \wedge Explanation sequence
To persuade/argue for a point of view	exposition/arguments	Statement of Position \wedge Arguments \wedge Reiteration of position
To consider two or more sides of an issue	discussion	Issue \wedge Sides \wedge Resolution

\wedge = followed by

Genre theory has continued to evolve as theory has interacted with practice through numerous research collaborations between linguists and teachers. Martin and colleagues continued their work in subsequent projects (e.g. *Write it Right*) to describe the genres of secondary schooling and the workplace so that the original description of the prototypical genres has been extended into a taxonomy of *genre families* (Rose & Martin 2012: 128). Genres can be described in terms of their primary purposes – to evaluate, to inform or to engage – all of which were categorised further so that teachers can be clear about the focus for their planning. For example, evaluative texts either evaluate another text (as in text responses) or issues and points of view (as in arguments) see Figure 1. More recent work has mapped the genre demands of the current Australian curriculum across a range of subject areas (Department for Education & Child Development 2014).

FIGURE 1. Evaluating genres in school (from Rose & Martin 2012: 128)

Genre family



Research into students’ writing across the years of schooling identified increasing complexities in the texts students were expected to write so that development within how texts function in their specific contexts of situation could be described (Christie & Derewianka 2008). This enabled further description by subgenres that captured the increasingly complex language patterns of specialised subject areas. Table 2 illustrates the typical sub-genres identifiable across the curriculum.

TABLE 2. Major genres of primary and lower secondary school curriculum (Derewianka & Jones, in press)

Genre	Social Purpose	Sub-genres
Procedures	To tell someone how to do something	Simple procedures Directions Conditional procedures
Stories	To explore the human condition through entertainment	Narrative Anecdote Fables
Recounts	To tell what happened	Personal recount Autobiography Empathetic autobiography Memoir Biography Historical recount Historical account Literary recount
Information reports	To observe and describe a general class of things	Descriptive reports Classifying reports Compositional reports Contrastive reports Historical reports

Explanations	To explain how or why, including reasons and consequences	Sequential explanations Cyclical explanations Causal explanations System explanations Factorial explanations Consequential explanations
Arguments	To argue a case or to discuss an issue	Hortatory exposition Analytical exposition Discussion
Analysis and response	To analyse a text or a topic	Personal response Review Interpretation Critical response
Inquiry	To investigate, create and evaluate	Macrogenres • Fair tests • Lab reports • Design reports • Investigation reports • Problem-solution reports

One further development observed that the obligatory stages of a genre frequently incorporated more variable phases (Martin & Rose 2007). For example, in the opening stage of an exposition or Statement of Position, we expect to find minor or more delicate phases that identify the issue, with perhaps some background and indication as to its importance as well as a preview of how the remainder of the text will unfold. Phases are particularly useful when examining narratives, a genre with considerable variation. It is the phases that capture the flexibility of genres as many are optional and can be combined in different ways. For example, an Orientation to a narrative may begin with a reflection before the setting and the characters are introduced. Or, the author may begin with phases that introduce the setting and characters before beginning several phases of events that lead toward the Complication. Table 3 presents some of the phases commonly found in narratives.

TABLE 3. Common phases in narratives (from Martin & Rose 2008)

Phase types	Functions	Language features
setting	Presenting context At the beginning of a stage	Present and describe identities, activities and locations
description	Evoking context, events paused	May be static (relational processes) or dynamic (material/causative processes)
events	Succeeding events	Successive events using temporal conjunctions eg 'then'
effect	Material outcome	Material outcome of preceding events with consequence eg 'so'

reaction	Behavioural/attitudinal outcome (character's feelings)	Participants' behaviour or attitudes in response to preceding events
problem	Counterexpectant creating tension	Use of 'but' to create tension by countering positive expectancy
solution	Counterexpectant releasing tension	Release tension by countering the negative expectancy from problem
comment	Intruding narrator's comments	Projections from narrator
reflection	Intruding participant's thoughts	Projections from participants – s/he thought/said ...
interaction	relationships between characters	Dialogue between participants – sayings and responses

The concept of phases is very useful for classroom practice. As we have indicated, teachers quickly became comfortable with recognising instances of major text types and a number of typical language features associated with these. However, they were not so confident with lengthier texts or instances of genres that didn't appear to 'fit' the prototypical descriptions. Several research projects reveal the extent to which students, when guided by well informed teachers, are able to draw on understandings of phases to enhance their interpretation and construction of a range of texts (for example, see Humphrey 2013). Teachers have also expressed anxiety with teaching grammar. As table 3 indicates, the phases help predict the grammatical features of a text. In an interaction phase of a narrative, we expect to find direct and indirect speech and verbal processes, proper nouns referring to specific people and places and probably some evaluative language.

In another important development, *macrogenres* were identified that include more than one purpose. These are characteristic of textbooks and assignment tasks of upper primary and secondary classrooms. Table 4 presents an instance of an investigation report (sometimes referred to as a 'rich task') – an extended task comprising a number of smaller activities. Such tasks are designed to foster a sustained engagement with and deep learning in a particular curriculum area, often incorporating digital literacy skills and intercultural perspectives in preparation for the future world of work and study. Hence an investigation usually takes place over time; each smaller activity requires students to engage with and construct a particular genre (such as an historical account or a factorial explanation) that contributes to the overall purpose of the task or macrogenre. In the example presented here, students documented their work by

compiling the various genres into multimodal texts that included photographs, maps, letters, diaries, newspaper articles and timelines alongside written language. Macrogenres are also increasingly evident in the blended media texts that combine still image, language, animation, sound and graphics that students are increasingly asked to represent their learning in a range of curriculum areas through these texts. Work is currently underway to describe their organisation and characteristics. (O’Halloran et al. 2014; Macken-Horarik & Adoniou 2007; Nielsen, Hoban & Jones 2016).

TABLE 4. The macrogenre in upper primary school: An investigation report in Australian History

Overarching question: How did migration contribute to Australian culture following Federation?	
Sub-topic focus	Embedded genres
Waves of migration over time	historical recount (incl. timelines and maps)
Reasons why people migrated to Australia	factorial explanation
Stories of migrant groups	interviews
Understanding different points of view – understanding the world from the perspective of different cultures and different historical periods	empathetic autobiography
Stories of individuals who have made a significant contribution to the development of Australian society	biography
The benefits of migration to Australian society	argument

Thus genre theory has enabled teachers to predict the kinds of texts that students are likely to encounter in different curriculum areas as well as to identify some of the most salient language features of the particular genre. What began as a social justice project to intervene in the literacy education of disadvantaged students has become embedded in mainstream classrooms across a range of curriculum areas.

Development in Genre Pedagogy (the ‘How’)

In an effort to avoid the dichotomising of progressivist versus traditional tensions that often characterise curriculum change, genre theorists set out to design a pedagogy for teaching writing that applied research into early spoken language development (Painter

1986) and scaffolding theory (Applebee & Langer 1983 cited in Martin 1999). Painter noted that as children learnt the discourse patterns or genres of their culture, they:

- tended to construct texts jointly with conversation partners
- internalised genres through repeated conversational encounters
- often copied the language patterns heard in subsequent monologues and conversations (1986: 81).

For their part, adults were observed to: respond to the child's meanings on the basis of shared experience, to 'scaffold' the child's utterances by prompting, recasting and extending; and to point out salient characteristics of a genre (initially implicitly, later explicitly). Genre-based pedagogy also draws on the socio-cultural notion of scaffolding as 'the gradual release of responsibility' (Pearson and Gallagher 1983) which describes how a learner is provided with support from a more experienced 'other' in order to acquire skills or understandings not achievable on their own. In the early stages of the activity, the expert takes a more direct role with the learner in an 'apprentice' role. As the learner acquires greater control, the expert withdraws support until learner can act independently. These understandings were built into the teaching learning cycle as the key principle of 'guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience' (Rose & Martin 2012).

The teaching learning cycle is a pedagogic framework that aims to enable all learners to access the genres of schooling described above. Taking the curriculum context as its starting point, explicit attention is paid to the relevant genre/s and to the development of students' control of curriculum related language. While a number of different models of the teaching learning cycle have evolved, the key stages include:

Building the field: this stage engages learners with the curriculum field or topic, finding out what they know and beginning to build a shared context in preparation for working with the genre. Importantly, building field knowledge continues throughout the teaching learning cycle as students' language is developed from that reflecting everyday, commonsense experience of the topic toward language that is more specialised, technical and academic.

Modelling or deconstruction of the genre: this stage introduces students to the focus genre through carefully selected models which are deconstructed with explicit attention to the function of the genre, its staging and phasing and some of the relevant language features.

Joint construction: the teacher leads the students in collaboratively writing a text in the focus genre and related to the curriculum topic. Students contribute their ideas orally while the teacher shapes these into written language, incorporating key ideas from the deconstruction activities. This stage is sometimes extended to provide additional support for students with similar needs in a particular area of writing (differentiated writing) and/or by small groups of students working to collaboratively write a text (collaborative writing).

Independent construction: the students research a related curriculum topic and write their own texts using the focus genre, paying attention to processes of drafting, editing and publishing. Small groups of students may also work collaboratively to provide feedback to each other on their drafts.

While genre theory describes how texts are structured according to the use in the broad context of culture, at the more specific context of situation, our language choices and patterns of meaning change depending on the *register*. Halliday identifies three key factors (or register variables) in the immediate context of situation that impact on language choices: field, tenor or mode. Field refers to the subject matter developed in a particular context (eg a history topic, science, geography). Over the course of the teaching learning cycle, the field will be built from more particular familiar, everyday, concrete experience toward the more generalised, unfamiliar, technical, abstract language associated with academic literacy. The tenor of a particular context refers to the roles and relationships available to participants. At various points in the teaching learning cycle, the teacher will act as expert, guide, collaborator and facilitator, while students will take up roles such as apprentices, active participants and independent learners. Mode refers to the channel of communication; spoken, written or multimodal – each of which plays an important role in the pedagogic cycle. Oral language is useful for exploring topics, for trying out and exchanging ideas in spontaneous activities. Written language such as that valued for academic success allows for more reflection, for deep engagement with ideas and the connections among them. The teaching learning cycle is designed to support students to develop the necessary language and literacy skills to meet the increasingly complex register demands of a particular curriculum topic and of schooling in general. Table 5 captures the nature of language development from early years of primary to secondary school.

TABLE 5. The Register Continuum (adapted from Derewianka & Jones in press)

Developments in field related language (Ideational function)

EARLY CHILDHOOD	LATER CHILDHOOD	ADOLESCENCE
Uses language related to familiar, everyday, personal, concrete, non-specialised subject matter. Ideas are linked in a simple, spoken-like manner using connectors such as <i>and</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>so</i> and <i>when</i> .	Uses language to comprehend, interpret, and construct increasingly complex worlds. Ideas are connected in sentences using a variety of conjunctions reflecting more complex logical relationships such as cause-and-effect.	Uses language involving more abstract and technical subject matter relating to specific disciplines. Connects ideas in more sophisticated ways such as making concessions (<i>although</i> , <i>however</i>) and hypothesising (<i>if</i> , <i>then</i>).

Developments in tenor-related language (Interpersonal function)

EARLY CHILDHOOD	LATER CHILDHOOD	ADOLESCENCE
Uses language to adopt a limited range of roles, interacting with family and friends in relatively informal ways. Feelings and opinions are expressed directly, with little self-regulation.	Uses language to construct a number of different roles and relationships drawing on a wider repertoire of interpersonal resources. Can deploy these resources to seek information, make requests, give opinions, persuade, deny, and so on, in increasingly subtle and indirect ways.	Uses language to negotiate relationships with familiar and unfamiliar adults and peers in a range of contexts, consciously attending to language choices depending on context. Employs more nuanced expression of emotion, more detached evaluation supported by evidence, an awareness of alternative perspectives and of how language can be used to position self and others.

Developments in mode-related language (Textual function)

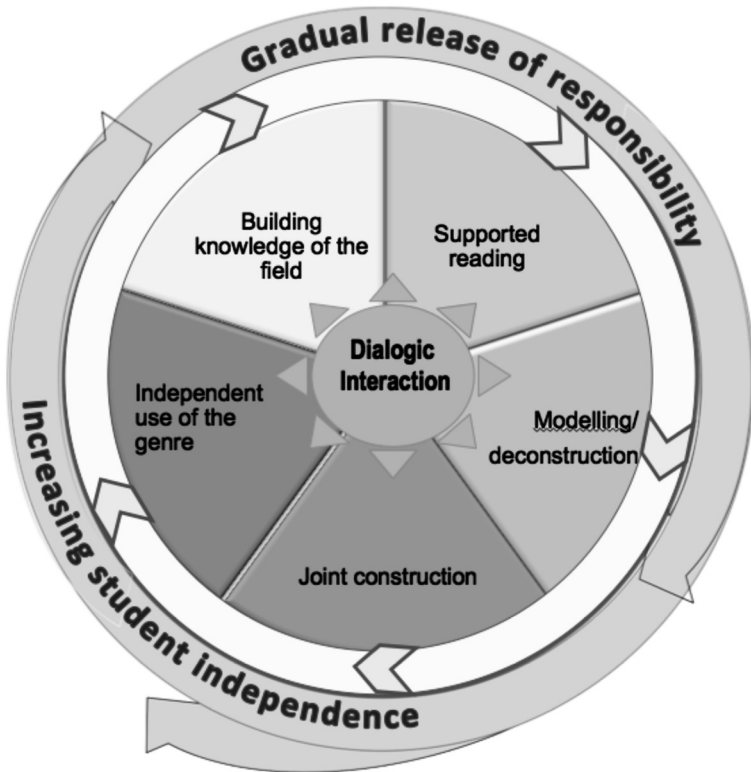
EARLY CHILDHOOD	LATER CHILDHOOD	ADOLESCENCE
Uses oral language that is spontaneous, exploratory, free-flowing, and closely tied to what's going on. Engages with relatively brief written and multimodal texts using a variety of media.	Moves into the more planned language of the written mode, comprehending and creating texts that are not dependent on the immediate context. Becoming more conscious of how different modes are combined in multimodal texts.	Interprets and crafts longer written and multimodal texts that are denser, compact, more tightly organised, attending to a range of cohesive devices that make written texts flow coherently.

Further developments in genre theory and systemic functional linguistics have seen a greater emphasis placed on reading. A recent report into Australian schooling outcomes (Dept of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2011) noted an unacceptable gap between highest and lowest performing students with ‘an unacceptable link between low levels of achievement and educational disadvantage, particularly among students from low socio-economic and indigenous backgrounds’. In an effort to address this inequity, Reading to Learn (Rose 2010) is a major genre-informed project to improve reading teaching across the years of schooling and beyond. Reading to Learn pedagogy takes reading as its starting point and adds two additional levels of support to the original teaching learning cycle – detailed comprehension processes and foundation skills of sentence construction and spelling. Each level involves a number of strategies for teaching reading and writing that aim to redesign classroom routines and common activities into more powerful pedagogic tasks with the goal of engaging students and supporting them to success (Rose & Martin 2012). Reading to Learn has drawn attention to the importance of the relationship between reading and writing and reaffirms the place of pedagogy informed by linguistic theory.

We have incorporated the increased emphasis on reading in the model of the teaching learning cycle used in pre-service teacher education (see Figure 2). The *supported reading* stage bridges the field building and modelling or deconstruction stages of the teaching learning cycle. It involves the students reading topic-related texts carefully selected by the teacher in order to build comprehension and fluency skills as well as to further foster further engagement with the topic. Suitable reading activities include teacher-led reading, shared and guided reading as well as collaborative and independent reading, with the teacher selecting and sequencing such practices according to their students’ needs and the topic at hand. Reading texts and activities reflect the genre family under focus as well as more specific reading skills. For example, if the focus is on imaginative texts in mid-primary schools, then teacher-led modelling may focus on how experienced writers introduce characters and settings in the orientation stage of narratives. At the same time, the teacher may draw attention to text processing strategies such as monitoring meaning, predicting and self-correcting through ‘thinking aloud’. Similarly, in guided reading, the teacher might work with a small group of students to foster comprehension skills by encouraging them to make inferences about a character’s feelings as the students read the complication stage of another narrative. Thus the supported reading

stage enables teachers to align writing instruction in different curriculum areas with the teaching of specific reading skills and understandings. Supported reading strategies such as these prepare the students for the more explicit modelling or deconstruction stage of the teaching learning cycle in which the focus shifts to students' knowledge about language.

FIGURE 2. A teaching learning cycle



In recognition of its socio-cultural underpinnings, we emphasise the place of dialogic interaction throughout the teaching learning cycle; that is, interaction that engages students and teacher in collective activity involving language, building cumulative knowledge with particular curriculum goals in mind. While we have pointed out the general aim of 'gradual handover', the roles of teacher and students vary across the different stages and hence different interaction patterns occur. For example, during modelling and joint construction activities, the teacher takes on an authoritative role with respect to the purpose and structure of texts, thus students are likely to have fewer opportunities to initiate dialogue. In contrast, when students have

more control over the selection and organisation of information in their texts in the independent construction stage, they will be more proactive in interaction. Nevertheless, each stage of the teaching learning cycle offers opportunities for productive dialogue between teacher and students and among students. Activities suited to building the field include those that foster student talk including brainstorming, excursions, jigsaw tasks, bundling or categorising activities. Supported reading also enables a range of opportunities for talk about texts and meanings, sometimes teacher-led though at other times, student-led. Modelling or deconstruction activities similarly offer a range of participation structures but should include those that enable students to apply their metalinguistic understandings through whole class and small group discussions in which they, for example: reassemble and compare texts, challenge analyses and speculate about the relationship between language choice and meaning (see for example, Cochrane et al. 2012; Rossbridge & Rushton 2015; Klingelhofer & Schleppegrell 2016). When students have a shared understanding of what constitutes a successful instance of the genre through participation in the range of activities described above, they are able to provide feedback to each other on independently written texts. Such dialogic potential of the teaching learning cycle is important in fostering and monitoring students' metalinguistic awareness as well as their uptake of genre and curriculum knowledge.

Current Issues

Genre theory has shaped Australian curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for several decades, offering much to literacy researchers and teachers alike. Genre theory has enabled researchers to describe learners' development and to analyse curriculum texts in considerable detail. Genre pedagogy offers teachers a principled means of planning for literacy instruction in curriculum fields, for teaching reading and writing, for assessing students and supporting them to meet the literacy demands of schooling. The current Australian national curriculum (ACARA 2015) foregrounds 'knowledge about language' – evidence of the impact of genre theory and the functional model of language. There are, however, issues that have arisen in recent years. Here, we discuss two closely related ideas: teachers' knowledge about language and the availability of curriculum resources.

The issue of teachers' knowledge about language is well documented (Hammond & Macken-Horarik 2001; Harper & Rennie 2008; Jones & Chen 2012) and particularly salient in countries like Australia where systematic teaching of grammar has been absent from the

curriculum for several decades. Interventions such as genre pedagogy and the more recent curriculum renewal require extensive teacher professional learning and yet education systems have increasingly retreated from providing system-wide, sustained programs to support their implementation. Many teachers have not had opportunities to keep up with developments in genre theory such as macrogenres, the identification of phases and subgenres, and its application to multimodal and digital contexts. One outcome of this has been the reification of the prototypical genres as ‘text types’ that drive the pedagogy (rather than purpose and curriculum context) and where genre stages are taught as structures to be rigidly reproduced. Such practices have also generally been uncoupled from the notion of register so that the more complex developments in language that realise shifts in field, tenor and mode are either ignored or addressed in ad hoc ways. There is much scope for well informed professional development programs such as Reading to Learn and Literacy for Learning (Polias & Dare).

In lieu of large-scale professional development programs, we have seen a proliferation of school-based efforts, independent consultancies and commercial resource materials, not all of which align with genre-based theory or with the Australian curriculum. While some are collections of slogan-based tips for teaching literacy, others are elaborately constructed frameworks devoid of any identifiable theory of language or literacy. There is an urgent need for theoretically coherent, well designed materials (Weekes 2016) that put genre and register theory in the hands of teachers and students.

Conclusion

We have briefly outlined the history of genre theory and pedagogy in Australian schools, describing its substantial impact on curriculum and pedagogy. This history is a reminder that genre theory continues to evolve as we identify major developments which contribute to its power and potential. The enduring strength of a genre approach lies in its grounding in sound theory interacting with practical application in classrooms. It emphasises the relationship between context, meaning and language choices. It makes visible the language demands as students progress through the school years. It penetrates all areas of the curriculum, identifying the linguistic challenges of the different disciplines. It connects reading and writing, woven together through dialogic interaction. It provides teachers and students with a shared metalanguage for analysing, appreciating and evaluating language from the level of the whole text down to the

word. We have underscored the importance of well-informed, system-wide professional learning such as that possible in partnerships between literacy researchers and teachers. We have also indicated the urgent need for resource materials that have a high degree of theoretical fidelity for use by teachers and students.

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