

Decolonising Literacy Development through Reading to Learn Pedagogy: A Case of a Secondary School in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Literacy development has been stifled through teaching approaches that suffocate learners in the classroom. This has been a trend the world over because of overreliance on traditional approaches to teaching literacy. The lack of progress in literacy development is manifested in the high failure and attrition rates in schools and universities. Against this background, there is a need to decolonize the way literacy development is promoted in the classroom. This research intervention employed learners' written work, Department of Basic Education's (DBE) curriculum documents such as textbooks, and semi structured interviews, Action Research and Reading to Learn (RtL) pedagogy to generate data. The paper illuminates the gains achieved through a teaching approach that is informed by Reading to Learn principles. As a decolonising pedagogy, the paper argues that RtL improved literacy development in a cohort of learners for three years leading up to Grade 12 in a township school in South Africa. Significant to the study is the extent to which RtL contributes significantly to the decolonisation of the formal education project. It exposes how the approved and traditional literacy practices continue to reproduce, and thus perpetuate, unequal relations in the classroom.

The findings reinforce the argument that Reading to learn pedagogy accelerates literacy development towards improved epistemological access. The pedagogy is informed by scaffolding principles birthed by Brunner and Vygotsky, genre theory (Martin, 1985; Christie, 1990) and on the functional model of language developed by Halliday (1985). Importantly, a Systemic Functional Linguistics tool designed by (Rose, 2018) as an analytical framework is used in the paper. The study employs the mixed research approach. The emerging findings demonstrate the extent to which RtL pedagogy could be said to be contributing to the decolonisation project.

Orientation and Problem Statement

There seem to be less reading development in South Africa despite massive investment into the education system. Despite this, low reading levels remain an outcry in South Africa. This is despite multiple skills development workshops for educators by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). According to (Spaull, Pretorius, & Mohohlwane, 2020), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), an international reading comprehension assessment conducted at Grade 4 levels in which South Africa has participated for a number of years (2006, 2011 and 2016), consistently reveals that “Grade 4 children in South Africa perform very poorly in reading comprehension..[this finding is consistent] even when tested in their African home language” (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019, p.1). The 2016 PIRLS results affirmed that by Grade 4, 78% of South African learners have not learnt to read for meaning in any language (Howie et al. 2017). This highlights the failure in the learning and teaching approaches embedded in the curriculum. This is despite non-governmental organisations joining hands with the DBE to intervene in the crisis (Ribbens, 2008).

This is in addition to SA’s development of its home-grown assessment tools called Annual National Assessments (ANA). This tool is comparable to international standards. However, the findings reveal that both ANA and Matric Examinations are feeble and not so positively impactful in a wide educational outcome sense (Westaway, 2015). Although the ANAs were introduced by the South African Department of Basic Education in 2011 for the purposes of yearly summative evaluation of all the learners from grades 1, 3, 6 and 9, they did not yield valid results because teachers in schools were assisting the learners to achieve good grades which did not necessarily reveal their true numeracy and literacy competencies (Spaull, 2015). Both are the building blocks towards a successful education and to be functional in life. The addition of ANAs seem to have brought more harm than good because it was more of a competition among schools and teachers, hence the high rate of malpractice. Resultantly, the DBE continues to rely more on international assessment instruments such as SACMEQ, TIMMS and PIRLS.

The continual decline in literacy development as established through SACMEQ, TIMMS and PIRLS point to an educational system in crisis (Bloch, 2009). Admittedly, there are no significant gains registered since the 1999 utilisation of SACMEQ, TIMMS and PIRLS in South Africa. In my view the retarded literacy development may be a result of colonial epistemic injustices which are a source of the inequalities at play. For this reason, a shift in the way literacy is developed is urgently required. The complication of the literacy problem seems to be beyond the capabilities of the gatekeepers in the DBE, hence transformation in teaching approaches is recommended. For this reason, literacy development calls for “epistemic plurality, which allows for representation of African ways of being knowing, and embodied in the African learners who are the majority in South African schools” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Instead of relying on colonially prescribed teaching approaches, the new curricula should strive to “generate a social order that is just and based on principles of egalitarianism, inclusivity, and cultural awareness” (Angu, Boakye & Eybers, 2020). Despite, the current curriculum being written in South Africa, “the post colony has yet to disentangle itself as an uncircumcised appendage of the West” (Angu, 2018). Similarly, (Welply, 2022) argues that “calls for decolonising the curriculum have been met with scepticism in some circles branded as ‘anti-white’ or threatening the idea of ‘valuable knowledge’ (p.11). The content, the pedagogical approaches, the assumed type of learner, the pace setter, the time set for content coverage seemingly is set according to Western standards. The research findings that seem to guide the design of the curriculum and pacesetter are Western generated.

In this regard Pedagogy such as Reading to Learn has been proven to align itself to the African Literacy development agenda (Mataka & Mgqwashu, 2022, Mataka et al., 2021; 2020; Mataka, 2019; Millin, 2015 & Rose & Martin, 2012) appear to be a better alternative towards finding a lasting solution to the challenges of illiteracy in South African classrooms. Some sceptics may argue that the pedagogy was developed in Australia, which is in the global North, but the guiding principles of RtL are similar to Ubuntu principles in Africa. Further RtL targeted the emancipation of the marginalised

Pitjantjantjara rural population group in Australia which is like our African societies. Reading to learn pedagogy should be considered to ameliorate the literacy challenges because the number of learners with acceptable reading abilities is not comparable to the expected especially after 29 years of democracy and several curriculum reviews. The worst scenario is established in literacy levels for grade 9 which are not anything to go by because they are not acceptable, especially considering that this is a critical grade that is moving towards Further Education Band where content is highly abstract and are expected to read to learn. They will find it difficult to manage the workload and complexities of content. In the province where the study was carried the Matric results manifest the challenges established. More, the Matric results report within the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa where the study was conducted shows the province as the most threatened because there is minimal progress in the pass rate perennially. It is illustrated that the learners in the Eastern Cape are 1.8years behind in the grade 3 benchmark and by the time they are in grade 9 they are 2,8years behind (Spaull, 2015). Eastern Cape Province tops among the most impoverished provinces in South Africa (Kavese, 2017). Against this background the teaching approaches needed must align to the context. The one size fits all approach seem to be making the education system in the Eastern Cape dysfunctional. For that reason, Taylor (2011) argues that “the system is dysfunctional and unable to equip students with the necessary numeracy and literacy skills they should be acquiring” (p.11). It must then follow that the approaches to teaching literacy must be decolonised. It appears that the curriculum practices are tailored to favour the middle class and upper class who enter the class with the expected cultural capital. The teacher and the curriculum must create space and provide resources that will foster engagement in class. For this reason, decolonial teaching approaches must thrive for reparation of the marginalised learners in South Africa. Supporting is (Welply, 2022a) who argues that “reparation is central to the transformation of educational systems inscribed within processes of othering, discrimination and the domination of a single language and culture” (p.239). The learning system should be designed to consider the learners prior knowledge, knowledge systems and dialogue on how they want to be taught.

The remnants of apartheid appear to be the reason behind all the chaos towards having a literate learner in South African schools (Hart, 2015). In my view, the curriculum designers are aware of what ought to be included in the content and all other aspects, but they see African knowledgies as inferior despite preaching the African agenda. It is argued that “despite epistemological diversity in the world, proponents of their own colonised curricular argue that Africans are incomplete without the West, and therefore they have agency of their own. African learners and students are forced to continue imagining Europe as the centre of gravity and to promote Western epistemic hegemony” (Anga, Boakye & Eybers, 2020, p.4.). It is in that regard that the teaching approaches forced upon the learners are inferior and do not help them to be literate instead they make them more fearful of trying to be literate. Against such malpractices that are continuously depriving the South African child and other children in similar circumstances epistemological access, (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) assert that “the decolonial project is therefore an attempt to deprovincialise Africa and “build understandings [about Africa] that both cross geopolitical locations and colonial differences and contest the totalising claims and political epistemic violence of modernity” (p.1). Although there are growing clarion calls for such developments it seems those who have the political and financial power are pulling back from behind the scenes because they have a neo-colonialism agenda to maintain the status quo.

Despite the mammoth agenda of decolonising literacy development, the process must be done to “rectify centuries of cognitive injustices that has allowed Eurocentric strategies to dominate teaching in Africa hence distorting and misrepresenting the global experiences of the people of the global South. Here to decolonise is to create spaces for discursive and autonomous debates “that will no longer be a far-flung appendix to European debates, but which will directly pit African philosophies against one another” (Hountondji, 2002, p.104). The decolonial RtL pedagogy promoted inclusivity through is responses to the urgent needs particularly of indigenous and other marginalised learners to rapidly improve reading and writing for educational success” (Rose, 2005, p.131). The main thrust was “the teaching of reading and writing to democratise the classroom, that is, enable learning for,

and ensuring meaningful classroom participation of, children who come from less advantaged backgrounds and frequently experience a gap between home and school literacy practices” (Mataka & Mgqwashu, 2022, p. 65). The RtL pedagogy decolonise the current ways literacy is taught because of its capacity to breach the literacy gaps that are a result of the Eurocentric approaches.

Some of the approaches applied to teach reading such as ‘look and say’ seem to promote barking at print. According to (Macdonald, 1990) many learners resort to “barking at print” with accurate pronunciation but minimal comprehension of what is read. It seems that the teachers are following a script with instructions on what to do regardless of the outcomes. The children who suffer more are those from marginalised backgrounds because they have no access to print and other sources that can promote literacy development unlike their peers from the middle class and upper-class families. In line with the background presented the research looks at the literacy intervention applying RtL principles to a cohort of learners for 3 years starting from grade 10 to 12. Considering these multiple challenges RtL was adopted to decolonise the Eurocentric traditional approaches that are not in sync with the situation in the Eastern Cape province.

Theoretical underpinnings.

This paper is underpinned by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory that posit that learning is a social process as opposed to a solitary journey of independent discoveries. In the same vein, to (Daniels, 2001) learning informed by sociocultural theory principles direct the teacher to guide and support the novice learner and it is a dialogical process placed in a social context. This implies that knowledge is a social construct and learning is the product of shared contexts, which plays a vital role in mediating learning. In the same vein, Vygotsky (1978) propounds that the twin processes of teaching and learning are social activities that manifest themselves among social actors in socially constructed scenes like schools and other learning institutes. It is on the premise of Vygotsky (1978)’s arguments that this research is informed by social interaction and continuous scaffolding. In continuous scaffolding no child is left behind because all the individual differences are factored in and epistemic violence is neutralised. Further, the unique epistemologies learners bring to the class are harnessed in the learning process. The practices adopted at the instigation of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory align with decolonising principles of teaching that are imbedded in the curriculum.

In line, (Angu, 2018, Mamdani, 1996) argue that proponents of a decolonised curriculum in South Africa point to the fact that Africans have their own ways of being, knowing, and doing that emerge from indigenous repertoires, histories and social experiences. However, this is something far from being practiced by the educational practitioners in South Africa and other African countries because of fear of rejection of their products and downgrading of their institutions. It has to be noted that one of the key outcomes of colonial curriculum was (Boaventura de Souza Santos, 2016) “linguicides” or the eradication of indigenous languages (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In that regard English has dominated all academic spaces and even thinking has to be forcibly done in English which is a mammoth task to English Second language speakers. On the contrary sociocultural theory principles attempt to address such discrepancies because the culture and indigenous knowledge of the learner are key ingredients towards successful learning. Again, Reading to Learn principles promote the same decolonial agenda so that there are minimal linguicides. The literacy teacher or practitioner is encouraged to teach in ways that precede colonialism and forms of discourses outside those designed to perpetuate the colonial agenda or the status quo. In a class there must be situations that promote thinking and writing in ways that connect to histories, cultures, and social experiences whilst they are writing in English (Angu, Boakye & Eybers, 2020).

Considering, differentiated learning and assessment, practices come into effect, because learners may be having different challenges. For this reason, the teacher has to invest a significant portion of their learning time scaffolding a particular writing or reading skill (Millin & Millin, 2018). This process ensures that all learners experience the same type of learning and content. Further, the needs of the learners should be known through continuous conversations that are relaxed and friendly.

In that regard, (Vygotsky, 1978) reiterates that it is the responsibility of the teacher to create a favourable atmosphere or conditions to facilitate learning. The teacher is not there to dictate how the targeted task should be done but to “facilitate the learner’s sense of agency and processes relating to implementation, reflection, restructuring and constructing modes of actions” (Zaretskii, 2016, p. 156). The learner is viewed as the teacher’s co-partner in the learning process, hence, “the actual lesson is a result of their co-creative activity” (p. 156). Therefore, it is argued that the teacher must be present to guide the learning process so that the partnership is fulfilled. Most importantly, the teacher is neither dominant nor passive, but in interaction with the learners as they seek direction through asking questions. More, Ellis (2000) concurs that sociocultural theory assumes that learning takes place “not through interaction but in interaction” (p. 13). Again, Vygotsky says, “a single step in learning can represent a hundred steps in development” (p. 230). These various steps are witnessed in learners whose learning is informed by RtL principles. In line, the decolonial principles the teacher should not simply tell their students to see a tutor or go to the writing center or read a handbook or consult a particular website. These (writing centre, handbooks and websites) are not common features in the marginalised communities in South Africa, but they are only presented for illustration. Instead teachers should ensure the resources to which they are sending their students are appropriate and of good quality, prepare students to use those resources effectively by suggesting to the specific issues to learn about or get help with; and work cooperatively with tutors. (Ferris, 2011, p.224). More importantly, feedback should be discussed in person or a follow up to the written feedback must be done. In line RtL does little of outsourcing resources, but it makes use of locally available resources to accelerate literacy development.

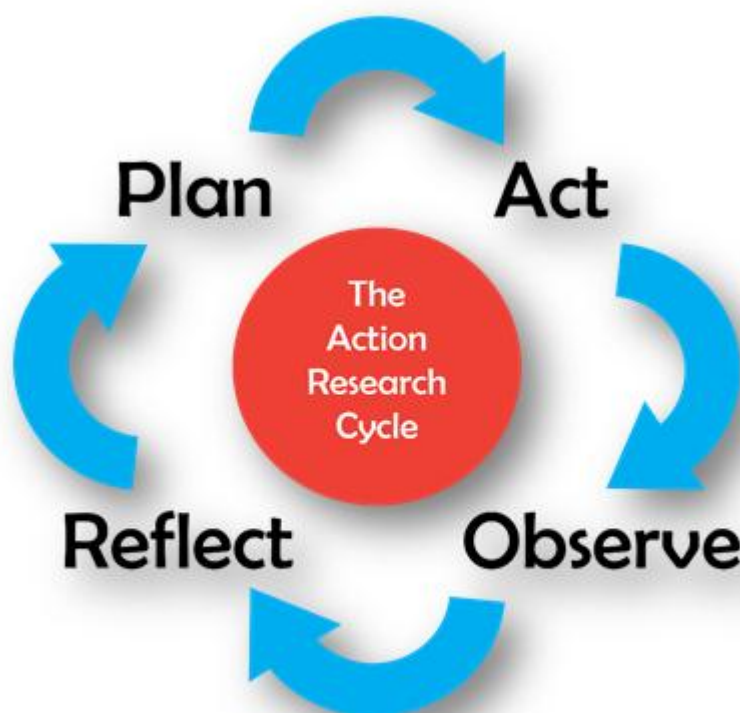
Engaging the phenomenon.

This study sought to demonstrate the decolonial effect of RtL as an intervention pedagogy to a cohort of learners followed from grade 10 to 12. The participants in the study were recipients of under-resourced, falling apart and poverty-stricken institutions which are reflection of the cruelty of the apartheid regime despite 26 years of democracy. The participants came from the township slums where the primary focus is survival. Most of them are sustained through a daily economy. Mixed method research informed the generation, collection, presentation and analysis of the findings. Learners written essays, marks and interviews were primary sources of data and the caps document as a secondary source. The CAPs curriculum document was a consultative guide so that I remained within the confines of the Department of Basic Education requirements. In addition, convenience sampling was used to generate representative data through the selection of learners who were disadvantaged, available and to whom I had easy access. More, Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2015) explain that convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study. The sample for this longitudinal study had 135 participants all in grade 12 of which 12 became focal learners. However, for this paper because of space I picked three learners’ work as representative because of the number of illustrations involved. This was done to illustrate the progression of learners whose intervention was informed by RtL principles.

These learners operated at basic literacy levels where they could not read for meaning a grade 10 prescribed passage at the inception of the research and nor could they write as expected at grade 10. The learners’ behaviour and backgrounds had the same characteristics with the learners Rose (2005) identified in rural Australia who were dejected and frustrated and had lost hope. The consideration of written work as evidence of mastery of reading for meaning was appropriate because it translated their abilities to read with comprehension and put their thoughts on paper. The selected work was testimony of the development from basic readers to able writers as a result of the intervention of RtL which was crucial to this study. The use of written work that was assessed using Rose 2018 assessment tool makes this study unique. Reading to Learn intervention was implemented using action research strategy outlined below.

RtL Intervention procedure through action research.

[Figure 1] Design Based research.



To explain the process outlined above, guidance is sought from Gill and Johnson (2010) who confirm that during the planning stage, an action plan is developed to achieve the set goals. For example, the research settled to implement RtL as a decolonial intervention pedagogy to resolve the complexity of literacy and academic challenges in a cohort of learners who were in Grade 11 until they got to Grade 12. Secondly, the action stage involved the implementing of RtL as an intervention strategy to improve literacy development. Thirdly, the actioning of RtL was monitored whilst data was being generated through documents such as learners' written work, curriculum documents, marks and interviews. The fourth stage was reflection, in which the researcher analysed, synthesized, interpreted, explained and drew conclusions (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This process was aided by interviews which gave the research participants the opportunity to highlight their thoughts concerning the whole intervention. Thereafter, data was presented and analysed as illustrated below.

The research approach placed the learners at the centre because the agenda was democracy and decolonising teaching of English as a First Additional language in a marginalised community.

In applying the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle, illustrated in Figure 1, each activity during the lesson sequence draws on the discourse pattern of the text to provide the degree of support learners require to understand and recognise patterns of meaning in the text at several levels: the genre of the text and the way meaning unfolds, the sentences and wording of the text, and the sound/letter or spelling patterns in the text.

Scaffolding Interaction Cycle [Figure 2]

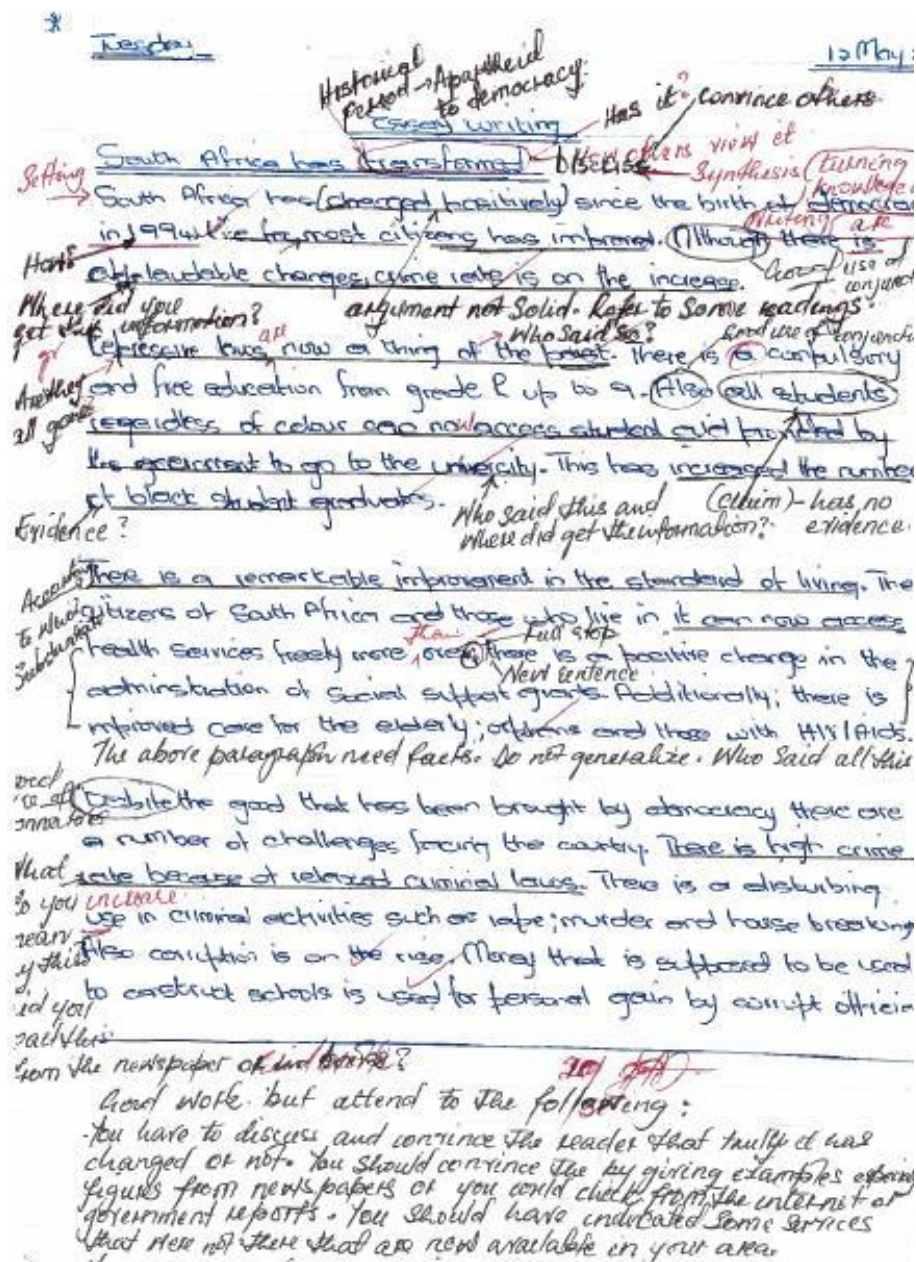


In the Prepare before reading stage, the teacher reads the text out loud and summarises it. The learners listen and get the idea of the passage. They then read the passage, sentence-by-sentence, which is the Detailed reading stage. It is also in this stage that the teacher gives meanings of words in each sentence. At this point, all the learners can read after the teacher and develop confidence in reading that passage. During the Preparing before writing, the learners manipulate sentences on cardboard strips to practise spelling (Primary School) or make notes from the passage to practise spelling in that exercise of taking notes (High School). This sets the stage for Joint reconstruction. At this stage, the whole class writes a new story, passage on the chalkboard. Here the class uses the same words in the passage read, to create a new story, new events, new characters, new setting. In factual texts, the passage read is re-written via the notes that the learners wrote. However, the language used is that of the learner, not of the text. This is also a whole class activity or a group activity. Individual reconstruction, a crucial stage, sees the learner writing a new story, as an individual, using the same words to create his/her story. In factual texts, the passage is re-written via the notes, but this time the learner writes alone. It is the final stage, the Independent writing, where the learners are given a task. Here they write as individuals and the task is assessed.

As the word 'Cycle' implies, these teaching strategies are on-going, allowing learners to improve over time, and have been proven to enable weak readers within rural and township contexts to learn to read rapidly and write at grade appropriate levels. They have also advanced as learners to develop language understanding well beyond their independent competence (Mataka & Mgqwashu, 2022; Mgqwashu, 2011). They draw on principles of scaffolded learning (Wells, 1999), functional linguistics (Halliday, 1993) and genre approaches to writing (Martin, 1993, 1999, 2001), in a form that is accessible, practical and meets the needs of teachers and learners (Martin & Rose, 2005; Rose, 2005). The cycle's six stages are inclusive because all learners despite ability levels are included. Having discussed the history, the section below illuminates how the research was carried out and what informed the research design choice.

Data presentation and analysis.

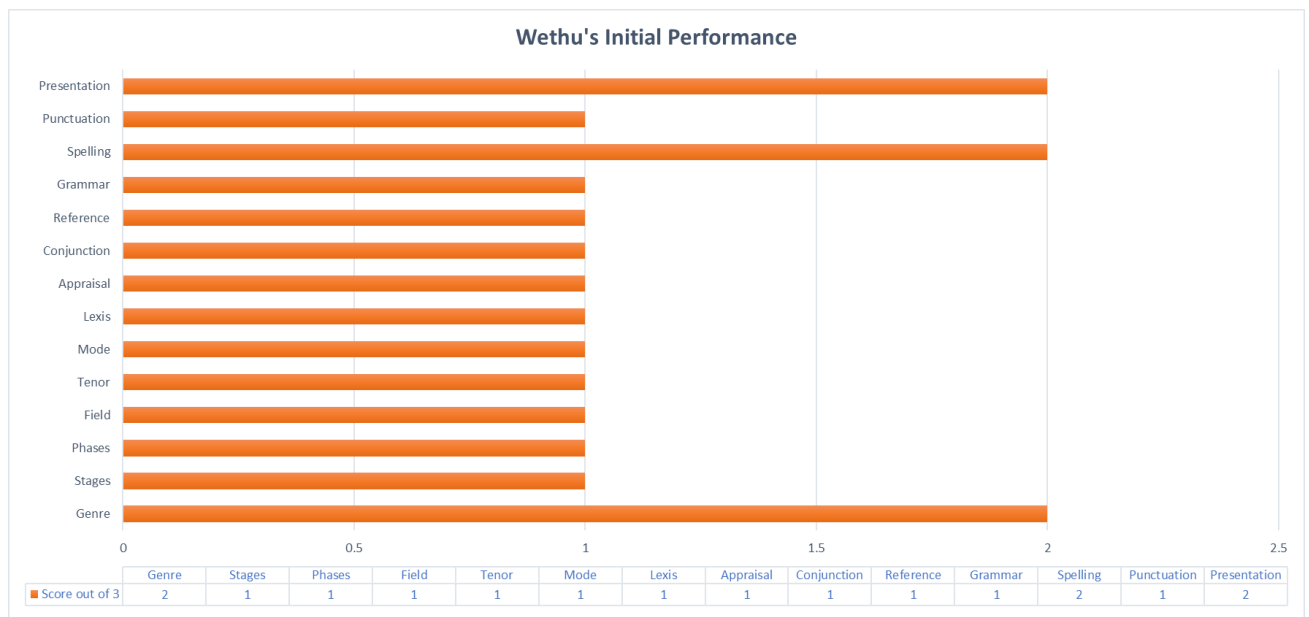
Having completed the cycle and other activities, below are illustrations of individually constructed essays before and after intervention. The essays are reflecting the progress made by the learners from the inception of the intervention. Basing on Rose, (2018)'s analytical tool the essay in [Figure 1] below fell short of requirements of the expectations of age and grade appropriateness hence the call for intervention. Despite some knowledge of genre, the writing is weak according to expectations of age and grade. According to Rose (2018) an age and grade appropriate factual essay for upper secondary school must have "appropriate genre for task and adequately developed. More it must expose detailed knowledge of the topic built from independent research. Further, it must be highly technical with no spoken elements. Again, there must be evidence of good control of technical lexis and nominalisation. The essays are further associated with a wide use of objective appraisal independently. Importantly, there must be quality management of technical grammar, and use of metaphor independently" (p.49). The characteristics presented above are nowhere near this essay. Against this backdrop, the repeated cycles of RtL were implemented to accelerate learning and closing the gap between the privileged and the marginalised learners.



Picture 1

Analysis of Wethu’s work before intervention. [Figure 3]

	R2L Descriptor	Score out of 3
Genre	Fair interpretation of genre with theme illustrated.	2
Stages	Background not clear despite mentioning the improvements.	1
Phases	Themes are not clearly identified.	1
Field	Some discussion of ideas but not clearly defined.	1
Tenor	Limited range of resources.	1
Mode	Weak range of written language.	1
Lexis	Weak range of lexis.	1
Appraisal	Limited range of lexis	1
Conjunction	Limited knowledge of the use of conjunctions.	1
Reference	Lack of knowledge of multiple entities to enable coherence.	1
Grammar	Weak range of written grammar.	1
Spelling	Very few non-frequent words used.	2
Punctuation	Weak punctuation with less use of punctuation conventions.	1
Presentation	Uses paragraphs for stages and phases of the text.	2
Total		17/42



This essay labelled [figure 1] is one among a number that were written by the learners before the inception of repeated RtL cycles. According to Rose, (2018) the work as reflected by the scores is below expected level. There were no comments regarding punctuation, because in this essay, content was key. It is against this background that this learner needed repeated intervention using RtL pedagogy. As a result of continuous RtL intervention, the essay below is an evaluation of the 33 months of work.

Question 1

1.1 Be encouraged

perseverance
persistence

1.1 My beautiful dream

Believe in yourself

Dreams can be true

Be able to face obstacles

I was sleeping on a cold black winter ^{day} in my bedroom when a dream approached. It was not a bad dream nor a scary one; but it was a beautiful; sweet and encouraging dream that kept ~~myself~~ me ~~and~~ wearing a smile the following day I woke up.

Well in my dream I was sitting ~~sitted~~ ⁱⁿ on the chair studying Geography. As ~~I~~ ^{while} was studying, I started crying silently. The reason I was crying was because the chapter I was reading was not understandable. I ^{had} tried ^{many} study strategies but still I don't understand it. With frustration I gave up and closed my textbook and went to my friends. As I was hanging out with my friends I saw a young boy playing a puzzle game outside his home. I watched him as he was struggling to connect the pieces correctly. That young boy ^{had been} ~~was~~ ^{playing} the game ~~I~~ ^{for} think ^{for} numerous hours but he was failing; he did not make any progress. Suddenly I heard him screaming with joy calling his mother to show her his ~~prog~~ success in connecting all the pieces. As my sleep was approached by the dream; the dream was interrupted by my mother's

loud voice calling my name. ~~and~~ I woke up smiling. Well my mother was puzzled by the smile I was ~~awaking~~ on my face. ~~and~~ she asked me why I was smiling. I just answered her with a simple phrase "I'm encouraged." "I am encouraged."

The dream then taught me so much in such a way that I started believing in myself. I started applying to the terms of perseverance and persistence especially towards my academics. As a person you must never give up no matter what obstacles you are facing but try to find a solution to overcome it. There are times when I decide to give up on something, especially when I'm studying Geography, and my results always bring show ~~fail~~ written in big bold words.

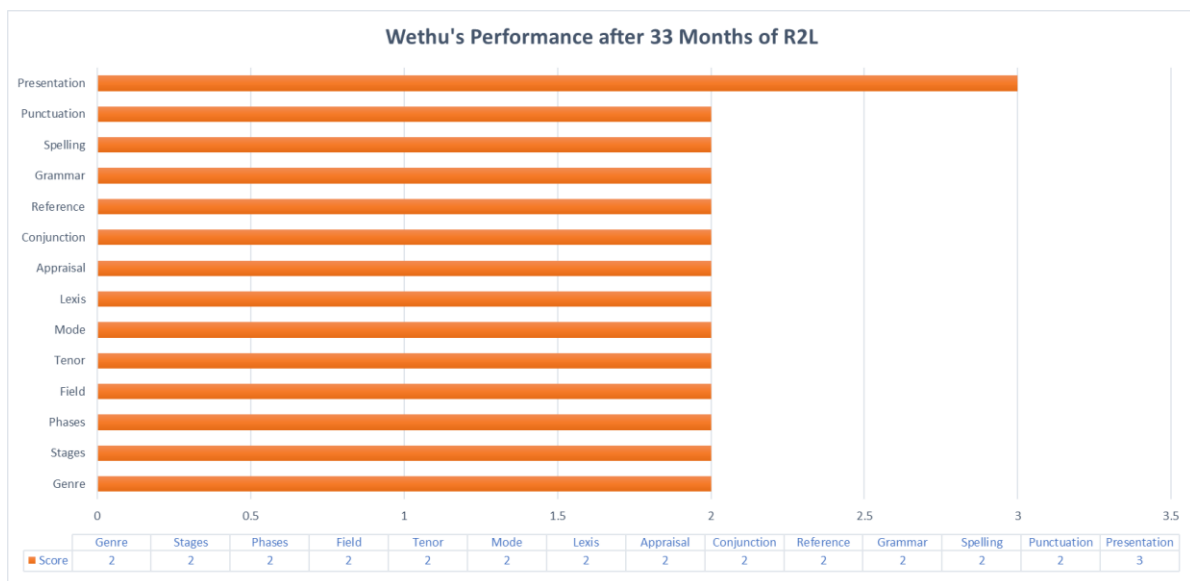
As time went on I started making Geography textbook my friend. My classmates would always discourage me saying "Ohh Oluwethu you would never pass that; because you know it is the hardest subject." I would just ignore them and carry on with what I'm doing; when June exams were over I ~~saw improve~~ and I went to collect my ²³ report and I saw improvement in my Geography marks. ¹¹ That made me proud and it also encouraged me to ⁴ carry on on doing what I am doing.

^{38/4/22} ⁵⁹ Indeed it was my beautiful dream because ever since I dreamt it ~~and~~ I was able to overcome problems. With that dream I ^{was able to} use it as my weapon and encouragement in whatever hardship I faced, ~~and~~ with it I feel like I can conquer the world, applying to the words of perseverance and persistence. [~~use~~] *A good improvin*

Picture 2

Analysis of one of Wethu’s evaluative essays after 33 months of R2L intervention. [Figure 3]

	R2L Descriptor	Score
Genre	Satisfactorily developed narrative with an imaginative resolution.	2
Stages	Summary of narrative as complication, satisfactorily developed resolution.	2
Phases	Setting and events of the narrative of the dream, resolution constructed through a chain of events with the final resolution being the ability to overcome problems.	2
Field	Satisfactory summary of the tale, imaginative plot, resolution in a dream, overcoming problems.	2
Tenor	Readers are captured through the imaginative description of the events building tension and resolution in the end of the dream.	2
Mode	Good range of written language resources, some spoken.	2
Lexis	Wide range of lexis, constructing setting and events.	2
Appraisal	Satisfactory range of appraisal.	2
Conjunction	Clear range of conjunction ordering activities in the plot.	2
Reference	Clear reference to characters and text reference to situations.	2
Grammar	Wide range of written grammar features, some spoken.	2
Spelling	Many frequent words, minor spellings, some spoken.	2
Punctuation	Simple sentence punctuation.	2
Presentation	Uses paragraphs for stages and phases of text, writing legible and letters well shaped.	3
Total		29/42



The work represented by the descriptor is reflective of the benefits of RtL intervention. The RtL descriptor has summarised the positives achieved through the intervention. This reflects that if RtL fits into the decolonial agenda where learning become localised and all content accessible (Angu, Boakye & Eybers, 2020). In that regard RtL should be considered to become part of the secondary curriculum pedagogies. In the same vein teachers get trained in practicing it and levels of literacy can be improved in secondary school. In doing so, the curriculum will to a greater extend become decolonised to the benefit of the marginalised learners.

Besides the marks, upon interviewing Wethu about the effect of the intervention this is what she had to say: *I gained a lot. You were patient guiding us through and on the other side I felt motivated. There were times when I would be frustrated to do the work you would encourage me requesting, I do the work until I do it. So, the experience was enjoyable and productive. I have benefitted a lot because my spelling and pronunciation was weak. And your comments in my work were helping. Now*

it has improved. This approach of teaching fit into decolonial lens because it “unearths the deeply entrenched forms of Othering and oppression that shape understandings of language and education” in countries that are dominated by colonial education systems such as South Africa and other similar countries (Welply, 2022, p. 4). The argument presented aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural principles that allow the culture of the learner and indigenous knowledge to be included in the learning process towards successful learning. The teaching that is influenced through RtL precede colonialist tendencies of Othering the learner in the class because the pedagogy eliminates tendencies that promote the status quo. In a class there must be situations that promote thinking and writing in ways that connect to histories, cultures, and social experiences whilst they are writing in English (Angu, Boakye & Eybers, 2020)

The work illustrated below is for Lee at the commencement of RtL. The essay was written at the beginning of the intervention.

Modern Technology is a Blessing and a Curse
in our lives

Modern technology is the use of knowledge and skills and equipments within factories, devices and computers. ~~which~~ ^{which} can be operated by an individual. The world ~~has~~ ^{has} ~~massively~~ changed since ~~a~~ technology was ~~a~~ introduced. However technology can bring about a blessing and a curse in our lives. ~~there~~ ^I argue that regardless of ~~a~~ facts mentioned, ~~I~~ argue that technology brings ~~a~~ blessings in humanity. ~~humankind~~.

We can communicate with people who are far from home, quick and easy, thanks to technology. Modern technology has transformed our lives for better. We can access information easily. ~~It~~ ^{It} ~~creates~~ ^{creates} benefits like, applying for a job, school and ~~var~~ ^{var} ~~varieties~~ ^{varieties} and getting informed about the state of our countries ~~in~~ ^{through} television news. This shows that technology has taken over such that ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~modern technology~~ has made our lives easier.

In spite of facts mentioned, ~~the~~ ^{modern} technology is a curse in our lives. We are no longer ~~safe~~ ^{safe} in our homes. ~~Our~~ ^{Our} ~~Mobile~~ ^{Mobile} ~~Privacy~~ ^{Privacy} is invaded as we have stalkers hacking our mobiles. ~~Life span~~ ^{Life span} ~~expectancy~~ ^{expectancy} rate decreases as ~~we~~ ^{we} ~~see~~ ^{see} many ~~citizens~~ ^{citizens} die younger. Families are separating as there is a ~~to~~ ^{to} lack of respect ~~at~~ ^{at} ~~the~~ ^{within} the members. Students spend more time on social networks than

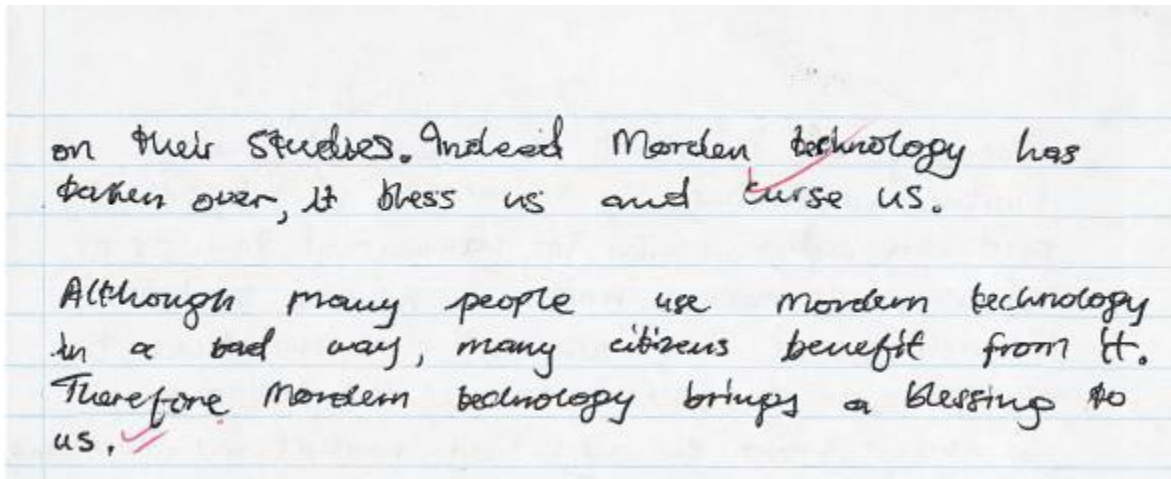
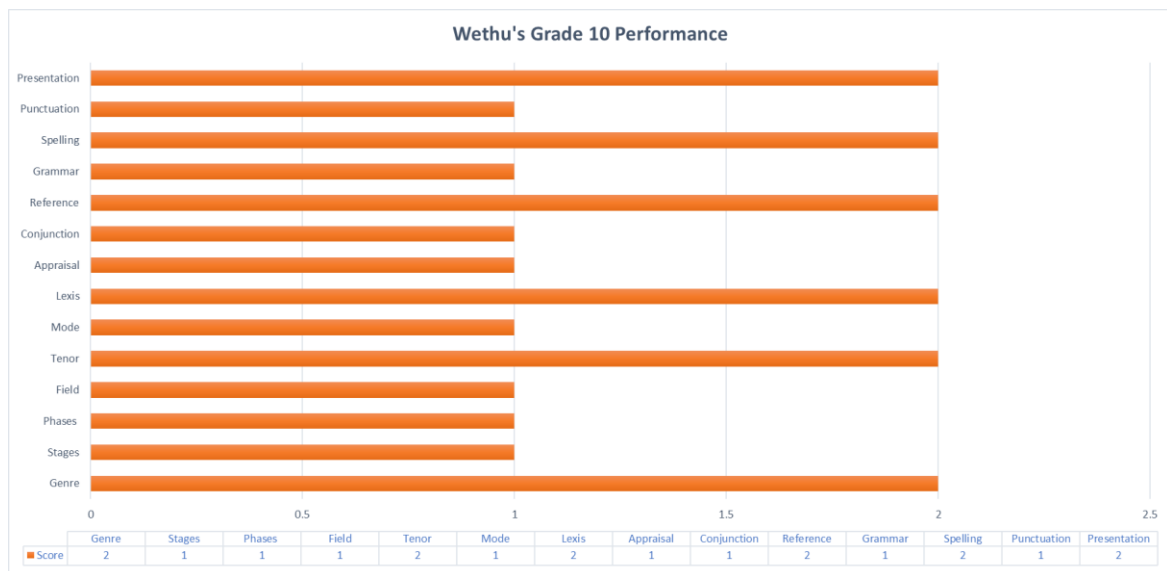


Figure 4. RtL Analysis

	R2 Descriptor	Score
Genre	Argues for position - satisfactory discussion	2
Stages	Fairly developed, thesis, argument and restatement	1
Phases	Position statement developed but weakly discussed.	1
Field	Everyday topic, authentic ideas, but not well explained.	1
Tenor	Daily examples used, subjectively discussed	2
Mode	Fairly written, many spoken elements.	1
Lexis	Daily lexis applied	2
Appraisal	Minimal complex judgments, hacking, stocker, mobiles.	1
Conjunction	Minimum use of conjunctions to connect and organise arguments.	1
Reference	Fair use of reference.	2
Grammar	Satisfactory use of grammar, many errors, minimal grammatical metaphor.	1
Spelling	Minimal spelling errors.	2
Punctuation	Simple punctuation used in sentences.	1
Presentation	Well-developed handwriting, paragraphs used for each phase, well-shaped letters.	2
Total		20/42

The work in (Figure 4) with the analysis above was presented in grade 10 before the commencement RtL intervention. The writing as reflected with the various scores was weak.



14 The New South Africa offers a better life for a few people

Some are those days, when South Africa offered a better life for few. South Africa has changed to a better nation for all, since the birth of Democracy. Therefore, I oppose the topic, with regards to the fact that everyone has access to social services and they have rights. ✓✓

Nevertheless, there may be factors to backup my argument. Regardless of the ~~the~~ Apartheid legacy that is still observable in this country, citizens have rights to access any service that is needed in their lives. One of those services is Education. Schools are built yearly to grant study opportunities to every young person, including the old aged, to promote skills and advance the level of knowledge. In addition, Universities or tertiary provide ~~and~~ ^{we} advanced studies that prepares every student for a workplace. Universities also strengthen every student's reasoning, ~~and~~ innovativeness and research skills.

Other than Education, Health-care is another service that has improved. At local areas, Clinics are built and Hospitals are available around Central Business Districts with

Adding up, since the birth of Democracy, Trade unions were implemented to ensure ~~the~~ safety equity in employment, To also make sure that the employer and employees obey the rights of employment.

Transport has heavily improved too, for everyone. However, the improvement in ^{only} taxi industry has resulted in violent taxi strikes, ~~this~~ implies that crime ~~is~~ has also increased, as a negative factor. Corruption is ~~at~~ maximized, we experience poor service deliveries ~~at~~ local areas due to this corruption. Undoubtedly, the government officials try by all means to decrease the corruption rate. Even those who are found guilty, they are provided with legal representation. Therefore, what ^{person} can ^{ask} for? ~~more~~ When everyone is provided with goods and services. ✓

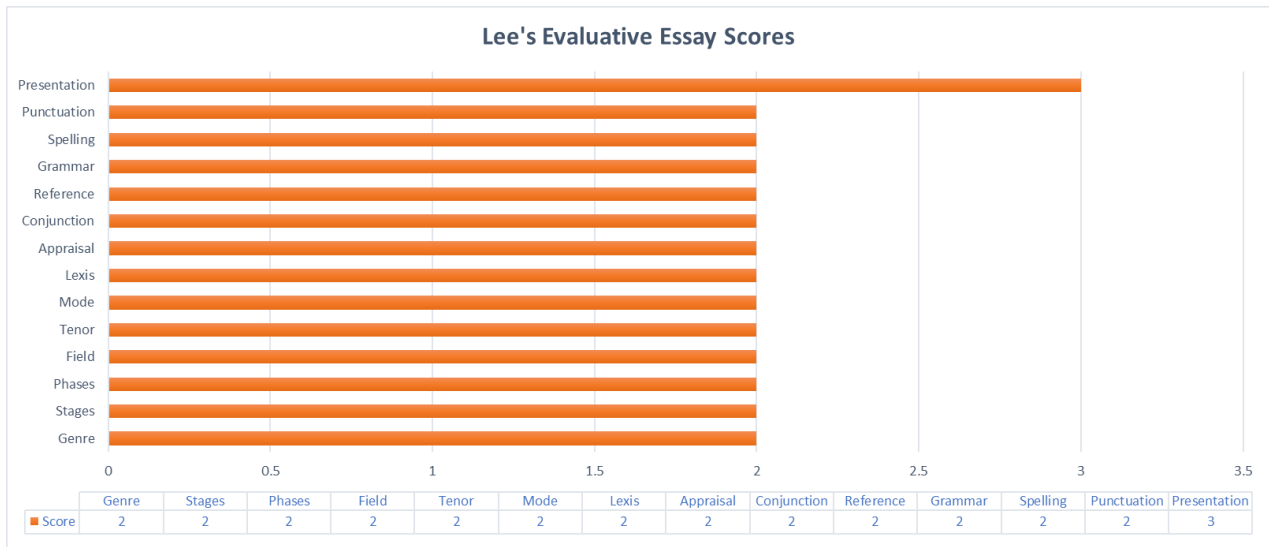
To our grandparents, disabled, Uneducated with poor jobs and children in poor families, the government provides a social grants. Unquestionably, everyone has access to social services. Therefore, South offer ^{only} a better life for all, not ^{only} for few people. ✓

Well done. Connectives well used to link ideas.

RtL Evaluative analysis of figure 5

	R2 Descriptor	Score
Genre	Well-developed thematic argument	2
Stages	Fairly developed Thesis argument and restatement	2
Phases	Position statement well-presented and supporting arguments in line with topic.	2
Field	Satisfactory synopsis of discussion, arguments well-reasoned.	2
Tenor	Readers engaged through writer's discussion of facts	2
Mode	Highly written, some spoken elements.	2
Lexis	Satisfactory range of lexis used to construct arguments.	2
Appraisal	Fair range of appraisal.	2
Conjunction	Successful use of conjunctions to structure argument and connect ideas.	2
Reference	Good control of reference.	2

Grammar	Good range of written grammar, some spoken.	2
Spelling	A balance of non-frequent words and frequent words in the discussion, few spelling errors.	2
Punctuation	Simple punctuation used in sentences.	2
Presentation	Paragraphs have been presented for each phase, legible and well-developed handwriting.	3
Total		<u>29/42</u>



Lee’s Evaluative Essay: Figure 5

The sample above is Lee’s evaluative essay after 33 months of RtL intervention. It is reflective of gains as a result of RtL intervention. In addition to the essay, below is a summary of how Lee performed and the scores for final evaluation. Judging from the quality of the work presented and the scores for different segments, RtL has proven to be a pedagogy that can help upgrading literacy standards of learners in disadvantaged situations such as these. In addition to the marks, Lee highlighted that, Sir! (*Smiling*). *I have improved a lot. I enjoyed the lessons, I have also gained a lot in English as it was my challenge. I can attempt any essay and answer comprehension questions confidently. Therefore, this was the journey that helped me raise my literacy knowledge. Thanks to you sir.* The comments and the marks point towards (Zaretskii, 2016)’s in argument that the teacher is not there to dictate how the targeted task should be done but to “facilitate the learner’s sense of agency and process relating to implementation, reflection, restructuring and constructing modes of actions” (p.156). The learner is viewed as the teacher’s co-partner in the learning process, hence, “the actual lesson is a result of their co-creative activity” (p.156). Reading to Learn eliminates the oppressive colonial practices of leaving the learner alone instead, the teacher guides the learning process till the learner can fulfil task requirements on his own. In my view the environment created through the continuous scaffolding process enhanced this accelerated literacy development.

The new South Africa offers a better life for a few people. Discuss.

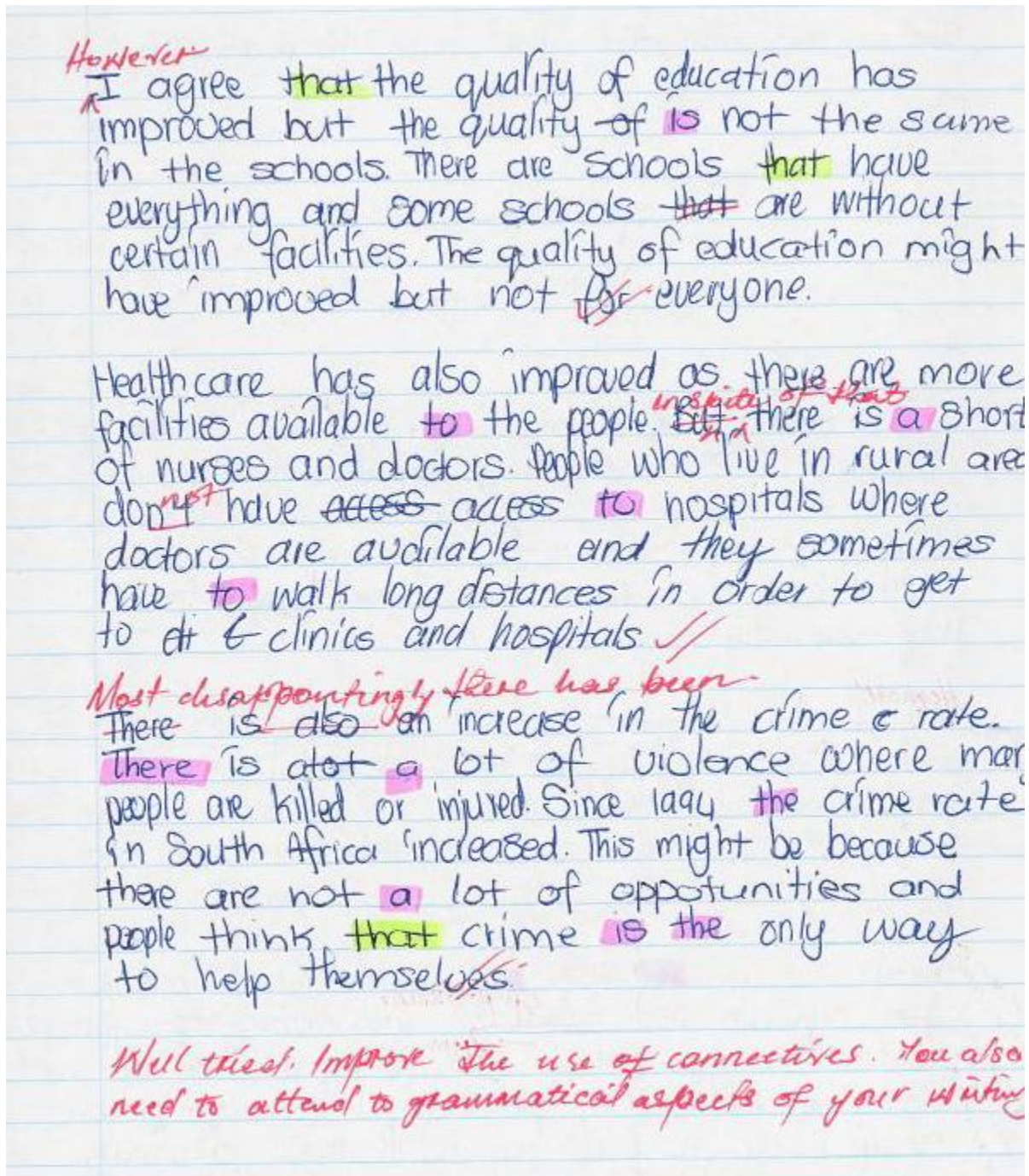
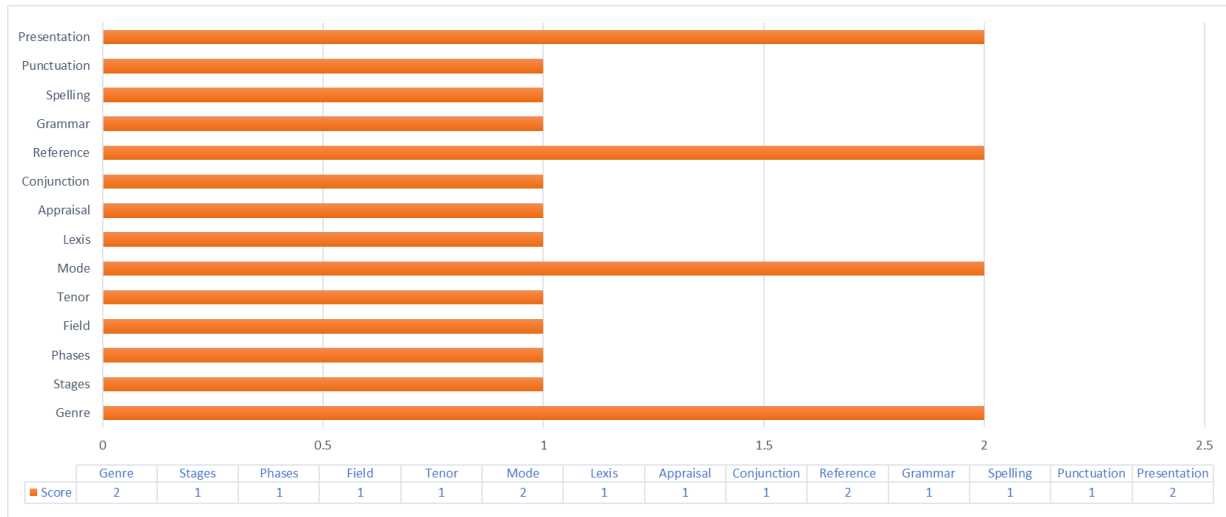


Figure 5 Sethu’s Essay during intervention.

Analysis of Figure 6

	R2L Descriptor	Score
Genre	The essay meets the main criteria for an argumentative essay.	2
Stages	Fairly developed thesis arguments and restatement.	1
Phases	Position statement weakly framed, supporting arguments loosely stated.	1
Field	Everyday topic lacks quality in the imaginative ideas raised.	1
Tenor	Subjective arguments raised to engage the reader.	1
Mode	Fairly written, some spoken elements.	2
Lexis	Mainly everyday lexis.	1
Appraisal	Lacks in sophisticated judgments- full of corrupt, there is a lot of	1

	violence.	
Conjunction	Moderately used conjunctions to allow for coherence and sequencing of ideas.	1
Reference	Clear reference for people and things.	2
Grammar	Many grammatical errors, less grammatical metaphor.	1
Spelling	Some spelling errors.	1
Punctuation	Simple sentence punctuation.	1
Presentation	Paragraphs for the different phases, legible handwriting.	2
Total		18/42



The marks and the language dominant in the written essay are reflective of deficits that are dominant in most learners despite the department of basic education implementing measures to mitigate the challenges of literacy. This may imply that the interventions implemented are not in line with the context because the curriculum is designed following the Western and colonial principles of education. Despite the curriculum being printed and designed in South Africa the curriculum ideologies that underpin the curriculum directives are largely colonial. According to (Angu, 2018, Mamdani, 1996) proponents of a decolonised curriculum in South Africa point to the fact that Africans have their own ways of being, knowing, and doing that emerge from indigenous repertoires, histories and social experiences. However, this is something far from being practiced by the educational practitioners in South Africa and other African countries because of fear of rejection of their products and downgrading of their institutions.

The essay below is indicative of gains of RtL after 33 months of intervention. The style of writing and the marks are testimony.

Reducing speed is the answer to reducing fatal road accidents. Discuss.

Although reducing the speed limits on all roads could ~~to~~ reduce fatal road accidents, it has to be considered that there are other factors that cause road accidents. These factors should be evaluated and ~~some~~ solutions should be found.

Besides speeding, fatal road accidents can be caused by drunken drivers, people who do not concentrate while they drive or people who simply ignore the speed limits that are on the road. Also there are people who drive while they are stressed or fatigued. This hinders their concentration and they either cause or are in an ~~accidents~~.

Reducing speed limits on the roads may reduce accidents but not by much. People in this modern age simply choose to ignore the speed limits and in addition the government seems to not be doing anything to help reduce the number of road accidents. The government should make laws that will force people to not ignore the speed limits. They should also increase the number of traffic officers on the ~~road~~.

Also car manufactures should work together to ensure that cars have some sort of software that allows the car to drive itself when a ~~per~~ person is ~~to~~ either tired, drunk or stressed. Furthermore they should also programme cars to stop after every 200km when traveling long distances. They should also programme sensors on cars so that when they sense loose animals, they slow down.

In conclusion, I think that the government should work together with the people to try and establish ways to help reduce the number of road ~~accident~~ accidents. Reducing speed limits ~~alone~~ will not help anyone because people will carry on ignoring them. Reducing speed limit limits will not help the drunken driving issue or the animals on the roads.

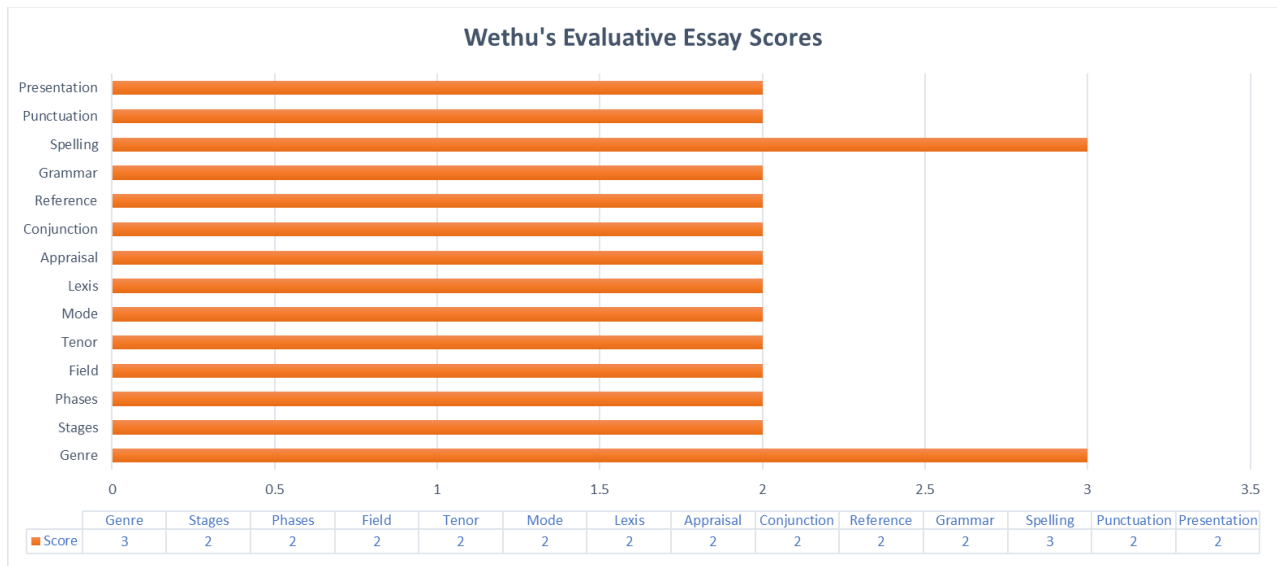
(2815 words) *Excellent work. Keep it up.*

Figure 7: Sethu's evaluative essay

Figure 7 RtL analysis

	R2L Descriptor	Score
Genre	The essay meets the dictates of the genre, argues for position, sound exposition.	3
Stages	Thesis well stated, supported by various arguments and restatement of	2

	the theme.	
Phases	Position statement, supporting argument, supporting argument with topics and reasons satisfactorily stated.	2
Field	Factual ideas well stated for arguments and reasoning.	2
Tenor	A good combination of various facts and persuasion.	2
Mode	Mostly written features, internal conjunction and some spoken lexis and grammatical structure.	2
Lexis	Frequent lexis used daily.	2
Appraisal	Fair range of appraisal arguing on road accidents.	2
Conjunction	Satisfactory range of conjunctions sequencing facts in the plot and construction of reasoning.	2
Reference	Clear reference made to the few characters.	2
Grammar	Good range of grammar, some errors.	
Spelling	Frequent words, no spelling errors.	3
Punctuation	Clear simple punctuation.	2
Presentation	Uses paragraphs for stages and phases, legible handwriting.	2
Total		30/42



There is a significant shift in the work presented in the evaluative essay compared to the first essay. This is evident through the summary of the different sections and the scores presented. As highlighted earlier in Lee’s work, Sethu has displayed considerable improvements in her work. In summary this implies that the use of RtL in our classrooms can be the solution improving literacy especially in the marginalised communities where these learners are learning. Sethu was general in her comments about her experience of RtL pedagogy in class.

Below are some of her comments, *Sir! I have enjoyed the year with you. Your suggestions after marking and discussions helped. I applied the tips that you taught me in class to deal with more exercises. Learning in groups helped because I could find out other people’s perspectives. I loved it most when you brought the audio book and the video because I prefer to listen and watch. That way I understand better.*

Sethu presented an equally unique learner in the cohort. During our discussions in class, she brought in the idea of audio books and presentations. I agreed to the idea because I took it as a mediation tool to enable effective learning in addition to my voice and knowledge. Sethu’s proposition resonates with the decolonising educational principles where spaces for discursive and autonomous debates are created, and suggestions are presented without fear of ridicule or being Othered by the teacher (Hountondji, 2002). The spaces of conversations created by the teacher through RtL pedagogy

decolonised the way literacy was being taught. Despite, Sethu requesting for audios in the process of learning, this differentiated approach may have assisted others too, because my assumption is that some learners may have wanted to learn through audios (Millin & Millin, 2018).

Overview of findings

The evidence accumulated reflected a positive shift in the reading abilities of learners compared to the period before intervention. The standard of specificity that was informed through RtL principles contributed to the improvements of reading and writing abilities of learners. Lawrence and White (2000) encourage learners to pronounce, spell and write about words. It is through speech sounds that differences in meanings of words are established. These differences were manifested in how the learners presented their work. The ability to write, as manifested in the sampled work, was because of the abundant opportunities for learning in interaction that were promoted through the application of RtL principles, whereby contact learning plays a pivotal role. The process availed opportunities for learners to overlearn concepts, which resulted in near perfection of writing skills. Correspondingly, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) posit that “scaffolding may result eventually in the development of task competence by the learner at a pace that would far outstrip his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). This appears to be the reason for the registered improvement by all 12 learners. As a way of evaluating the RtL intervention process, interviews were established with the cohort of 12 learners, and these covered the whole of 2016 and 2017. The 12 learners expressed that RtL was beneficial to them in several ways as illustrated below. The decolonial RtL pedagogy promoted inclusivity through its responses to the urgent needs particularly of Indigenous and other marginalised learners to rapidly improve reading and writing for educational success” (Rose, 2005, p.131). The main thrust was “the teaching of reading and writing to democratise the classroom i.e., enable learning for, and ensuring meaningful classroom participation of, children who come from less advantaged backgrounds and frequently experience a gap between home and school literacy practices” (Mataka & Mgqwashu, 2022, p. 65). The RtL pedagogy decolonise the current ways literacy is taught because of its capacity to breach the literacy gaps that are a result of the Eurocentric approaches. Furthermore, the results encourage the literacy teacher or practitioner to teach in ways that precede colonial practices and forms of discourses outside those designed to perpetuate the colonial agenda or the status quo. In a class there must be situations that promote thinking and writing in ways that connect to histories, cultures, and social experiences whilst they are writing in English (Angu, Boakye & Eybers, 2020).

The teacher and the curriculum must create space and provide resources that will foster engagement in class. For this reason, decolonial teaching approaches must thrive for reparation of the marginalised learners in South Africa. Supporting is (Welply, 2022a) who argues that “reparation is central to the transformation of educational systems inscribed within processes of othering, discrimination and the domination of a single language and culture” (p.239). The learning system should be designed to consider the learners’ prior knowledge, knowledge systems and dialogue on how they want to be taught. In my view and in line with the research findings Reading to Learn pedagogy must be considered to provide solutions to the highly colonised curriculum of English First Additional Language and other forms of literacy because of its decolonial principles.

Conclusion

RtL pedagogy can achieve commendable results if transformation of mindsets is considered. It is a pedagogy that can play an important role in decolonising the current practices in teaching English as a second language. It may bring about the desired improvements in language and literacy skills which are the basics as pronounced in the CAPS curriculum. Rose’s RtL has been proved to possess the capacity to bridge the gap between the disadvantaged and the privileged learners by providing them with the same skills that will enable them to read at grade and age-appropriate levels. The teaching informed by RtL may usher in a new democratic and decolonial dispensation in the classroom where learners are afforded with equitable opportunities towards access to attainment of literacy. RtL has proved to have comprehensive interventions that assist the marginalised learners.

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