

# Constructivism +

Adding to our kete of methods for teaching writing

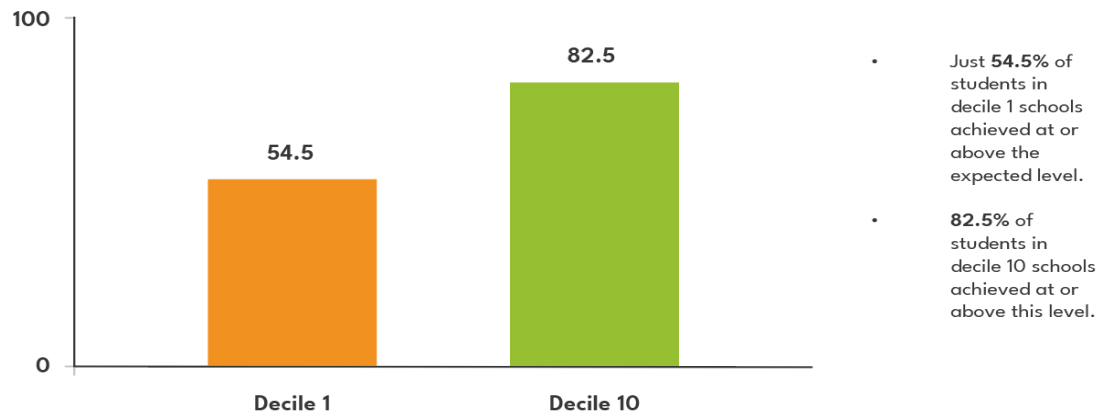
## **Most New Zealand students are not meeting curriculum expectations:**

According to The National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement in 2019, just 35% of Year 8 students were meeting curriculum expectations for writing.

# National standards data for writing, for 2017: Percentages of students achieving at or above the expected level, in decile 1 and decile 10 schools.

Figure 3

Comparison of percentages of students in decile 1 and decile 10 schools, achieving at or above the expected level for writing.



**And for this final graph, a note:**

Māori and Pasific Island students made up 49% and 42% of the proportion of students at decile 1 schools, respectively.

Try this exercise...



"Where am I?"  
WATUM IYHM 2810 HAC ✓ Nick ✓  
AP SOCU DAC SADY SAID HAC  
WTATH 2ECY SAID HAC  
THE HEADS TO TO WAS  
2AIDHALI TAT IS A EXIT  
TOCU THE EXIT I MAD  
PHON SAID

roger and fast cater. In the  
night time there was a horrible sto  
Then Stried <sup>one</sup> ~~be~~ of  
the wooden houses.  
Then the <sup>!</sup>matting + wooden  
Came from 2.1 meter log.  
The wooden <sup>people</sup> ~~spot~~ were screaming  
So I aged they code it.  
Stop  
Screaming Then all of

I am having trouble in the  
class in autumn Oh I had  
~~at a bad day.~~  
in autumn I go to the  
park we will play  
we play on the sled.

Dear Diary, 385 (12) a  
I am having trouble with maths  
and I would like some help and  
some help with reading, writing  
I don't good, gon going to  
collage next year because  
I don't have good grades  
Don't worry [redacted]  
I can help you - that's my job.  
We are going to have a great,  
year and you will learn lots! @ KB

Is constructivism the problem?

# Defining Constructivism

Writing is defined as,

‘A natural, joyful, human activity’ which takes place on ‘a non-sequenced, whole-task basis.’ (Lucy Calkins)

The constructivist classroom,

‘puts learners in control of what they read and write about [...] it re-values the classroom as a democratic learning community where teachers and pupils learn together and learn to live peacefully together.’ (Kenneth Goodman, 1992).



# Constructivism is unscientific, and 'anti-science' too:

Goodman (1992) refers to the '**struggle**' against '**the illusion of science**' and describes standardized tests as '**dehumanising**'.

Clay (1998) rejects science and the (now indisputable) fact of sequential stages for literacy learning:

'Controlled experimental studies of groups have tended to report that alphabetic, phonological, and orthographic stages in letter learning seem to occur sequentially. Average scores give rise to stagewise descriptions of progress; the design of the research determines the outcome description.' (1998, p. 134).

# Consider age, stage, and learning goal:

‘These approaches ignore both the structures that constitute human cognitive architecture and evidence from empirical studies over the past half-century that consistently indicate that minimally guided instruction is less effective and less efficient than instructional approaches that place a strong emphasis on guidance of the student learning process.’

‘The advantage of guidance begins to recede only when learners have sufficiently high prior knowledge to provide *internal* guidance’

(Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006)



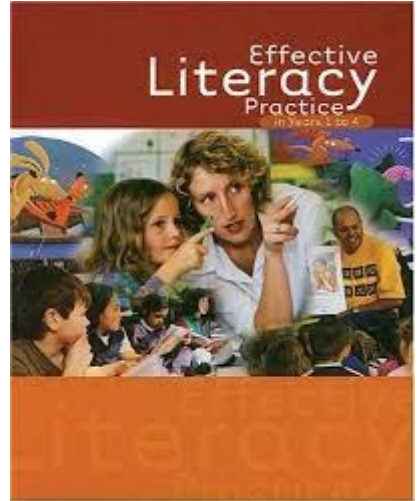
# Constructivism has been wholeheartedly embraced by the Ministry of Education :

Literacy is defined as ‘multi-literacies [...] a dynamic, shifting set of practices that shape young learners, and indeed all people, as social beings’.

‘Writing is a creative act, not a set of quantifiable skills to be taught in sequence.’

‘Students’ handwriting develops in the course of their experiences of writing... Initially, the teacher needs to accept some irregularities, especially when an undue emphasis on letter forms could interrupt a young writer’s flow of thought.’

‘The writer’s main aim is to convey meaning. Too much concentration on accurate spelling, especially during draft writing, can reduce the focus on conveying a meaningful message.’



Why has the Ministry remained committed to constructivism, in the face of such worrying data?

# The rhetoric of 'child-centredness' makes debate difficult:

'At first glance, to argue against child-centred education is like taking aim at puppies or happiness. Of course, children should be at the centre of an education system. Of course, they should be the focus of our schools.' (Lipson, 2020)

*Te kotahitanga* researchers have associated their own approaches with 'spirit' and 'life', and other (explicit) methods with disease and mechanisation, describing such methods as:

'**Transmission** teaching'

'**Pathologizing** classroom practice'

'The [...] **imposition** of the teacher displaying cultural iconography of their own choice'

## The problem of false oppositions:

‘Writing is a creative act, **not** a set of quantifiable skills to be taught in sequence’ (MOE, 2003)

‘There is **no place** for programmes with prescriptive methods or recipe-style activities which claim to meet the needs of all learners’ (MOE, 2003)

Children should be: ‘assessed as individuals, **not** a one size fits all checklist.’ (Jan Tinetti, Question Time, 29/3/22)

# Impacts on teachers:

- Confusion
- Inconsistency of practice

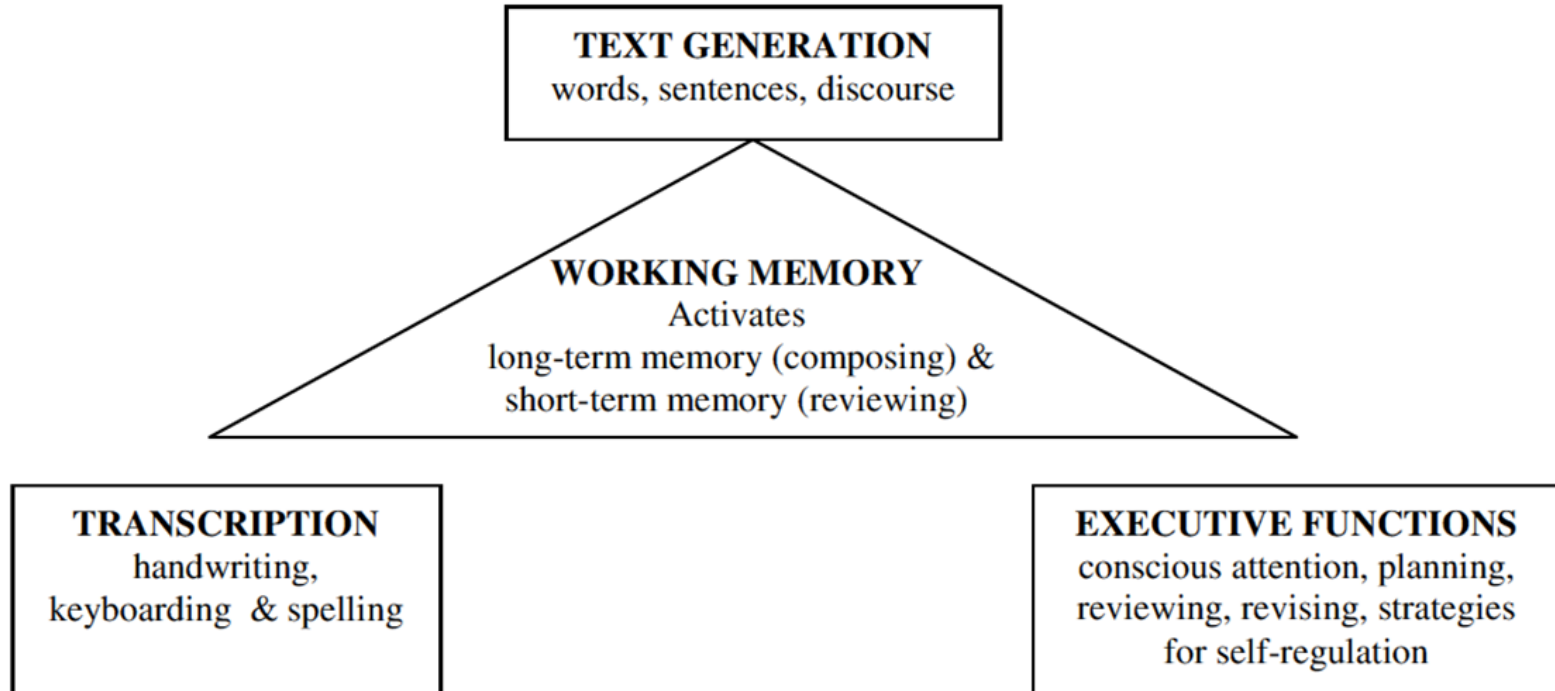
Problems with initial teacher education programmes are a confounding factor (Parr & Jesson, 2015; McNeil & Kirk, 2013).



What are the solutions?



# The Simple View of Writing



"Where am I?"  
WATUM IYHM 2SID HAC ✓ Nick ✓  
AP 5OCU DAC SADY SAID HAC  
WTATH 2ECY SAID HAC  
THE HEA WDTs ta to was  
2AIDHALI TAF IS A EXIT  
TOCU THE EXIT I MAD  
PHON SAID

168d  
one day my mum  
was driving and we  
stopt because we were  
Hogrey. we were looking  
for a shop. we were  
looking hard and  
we find a  
pazza Shop. 20000

my Act

eof

+201

✓  
I can see a

• T-Rex. ✓

✓  
• The T-Rex has

• sharp teeth. ✓

Elephants

Elephants are not  
New Zealand animals.  
They are not native  
to New Zealand.

Elephants are mammals.  
They are native to  
a different country  
on earth.


Elephants have big  
ears. They have  
a long trunk. Elephants  
have a big feet.  
They have brown  
skin. When they go  
in the water their  
skin turns black.

Elephants live in  
the Zoo.

They use its trunk  
to fight the other  
elephants. Elephants eat  
grass, leaves, roots, bark,  
flowers and fruit.



looking ed. factory  
I was in the  
abandoned factory. I was  
looking at a Toy  
machine. It was  
making a doll.  
It looked like me.

Dad and brother was sitting  
on the tropical sand. They were telling  
secrets. The sand was moving. something  
devastating was going to happen.  
Dad said "what's that noise?" brother said "it's an  
earthquake near the ocean so that means  
it is a tsunami!" Run for your lives  
so they did.  
They went up the biggest  
hill so they can survive.  
They were happy, they didn't  
get killed. 

Where to from here?



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