



# LITERACY, LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

## 1

It seems appropriate to begin with a description of the beliefs and understandings that I have drawn upon, and that underpin the content of this book. My thinking is shaped by the work of the following literacy researchers and educators: Fellowes & Oakley (2014), Knapp & Watkins (2005), Winch et al. (2014), Zammit & Downes (2002), Cope & Kalantis eds (2000), Alloway & Gilbert (2002), Freebody & Luke (1990, 2003) and Goodman & Watson (1998).

## DEFINING LITERACY AND MULTILITERACIES

Literacy has to do with having the skills, strategies and knowledge to create, locate, analyse, comprehend and use a variety of written, visual and aural texts for a range of purposes, audiences and social contexts. Literacy requires an understanding that there are different types of texts and the choice of text depends on the context, purpose and audience required for it. It includes the integration of critical thinking, speaking and listening with reading, writing and viewing (DEETYA, 1998). Fellowes & Oakley define literacy as ‘a flexible group of skills and strategies that are closely linked to context and purpose’ (2014, p. 3). The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) offers the following definition:

Literacy conventionally refers to reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening effectively in a range of contexts. In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia. Students need to be able to adjust and modify their use of language to better meet contextual demands in varying situations (2009, p. 6).

The rapid development of technology has impacted the way we communicate and thus the definition of texts has broadened to include digital texts that may include one

ACARA defines ‘texts’ as the way we communicate ‘in written, spoken or multimodal and in print or digital/online forms’ (2015a).



### **multimodal**

**texts:** Texts that combine two or more language modes.

or more of the following communication modes: written language, spoken language, sound, movement, gesture and image. Texts that combine two or more modes are referred to as **multimodal texts**.

Literacy is embedded in the context of our everyday lives and involves more than acquiring literacy skills that apply to every situation and purpose (Winch et al., 2014, p. xxxvi). It is not just about learning to read and write print. It is not the acquisition and use of static skills and knowledge but rather is the employment of a range of dynamic literacy practices, strategies and knowledge to effectively use texts within socially and culturally defined situations for a variety of purposes (Alloway & Gilbert, 2002; Bull & Anstey, 2010).

Literacy involves a range of practices (see pp. 8–12 for further information) that are shaped by culture, society and situation, the language mode, the roles and relationships of the participants, and the sources of knowledge brought to, or gained from, the interaction with texts within a given context.



**multiliteracies:** Multiple kinds of literacies used to effectively communicate within diverse cultural and social settings and the modes of delivery of the communication.

The term '**multiliteracies**' refers to the multiple kinds of literacies used (written, visual, emotional, financial, technological, digital, subject-specific, critical etc.) to effectively communicate within diverse cultural and social settings and the modes of delivery of the communication (Healy, 2008). Fellowes & Oakley define multiliteracies as 'the communicative practices of diverse cultures. The role of technology is foregrounded' (2014 p. 4).

As teachers we need to help students to access and use the many forms of literacy encountered in our society and support them to be literate in multiple ways. We need to provide a range of authentic contexts and communication purposes in which the students employ appropriate literacy practices, texts and communication modes to effectively function in a range of sociocultural settings.

Students need to be able to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct text using the new technologies that are increasingly part of everyday life.

To be multiliterate means understanding, using and critically evaluating multimodal texts that are constantly developing and evolving because of cultural and societal changes and the use of new information and communications technologies. In order to gain meaning from multimodal texts, students need to understand the elements of linguistic, visual, spatial, audio and gestural design that may be used in these texts (Cope & Kalantis eds, 2000; Walsh, 2011). They need to use technology to create, alter/modify and use texts in a variety of ways in a range of situations.

Each subject or discipline has its own specific vocabulary and way of using language for specific purposes and audiences. Subject-specific literacy requires the user to understand the content, language purposes, text types and linguistic features that are commonly used within the subject.

We need to help students 'navigate the specific literacy demands of the subjects they are studying' (Henderson, 2012, p. 21). As teachers we need to identify the literacy

challenges within each subject or task and plan appropriate literacy teaching experiences that address the needs at whole class, small group or individual student level.

## VISUAL LITERACY

**Visual literacy** requires the user to understand the purposes, types and elements of visual texts, both still and moving, and the ways they are constructed and used in order to gain or convey varying levels of information. It is the process of using, reading, interpreting, creating and understanding visual texts (Stafford, 2010). Visually literate people draw upon their knowledge of the semiotic system (meaning-making elements) when using visual text. The elements of the semiotic system associated with visual text include image type (still or moving) and the use of space, as well as framing, placement, shape, line, light, colour, scale, texture, shape, angle, focus, symbols and style. While there are common elements for both still and moving images there are elements that are specific to each.

Researchers and educators, such as Callow (1999, 2013), Moline (2008, 2012), Anstey & Bull (2006, 2009) and Bull & Anstey (2010), provide valuable insights into how multiliteracies and the multimodality of texts impact teaching and learning, both theoretically and practically. Their work emphasises the changing nature of technology and what teachers need to know and do in order to help develop multiliterate students.

Teachers can help students understand and use the elements included in the semiotic system for still images and moving images. Through modelling, discussion and questioning we can draw the students' attention to visual texts, the elements within them, and how they relate to written text.

Students need to understand:

- » that visual texts are not neutral; they represent an interpretation of information and there are many different interpretations
- » the types, composition and design elements of visual texts, as discussed above
- » how visual texts are made—the work (process, knowledge and skills) of the text creator
- » how to gain information from visual text—what is seen, the main message, what is implied, what is missing
- » how and why the text evokes specific feelings, reactions and responses.

## CRITICAL LITERACY

**Critical literacy** requires the understanding that written and visual texts are neither created nor used within a vacuum. The texts are products shaped by a range of influences, for example:

- » the situational context in which the text is created and used (including intended purpose, subject matter, text type, roles of and relationship between text creator and the audience)



**visual literacy:** The ability to interpret and use design elements of visual texts (still and moving) and to understand how they can be used for particular purposes in specific contexts.



**critical literacy:** Understanding representation, reader positioning and ideological practice in texts.

- » the sociocultural context (including the text creator's and user's backgrounds and views of the world, society and culture and the language choices made by the text creator when creating a text that meets the intended purpose)
- » the multiple meanings embedded in or taken from the text.

Texts are not neutral; they are created as a result of the choices the creator makes and these choices can be influenced by the situation in which it is created and the broader sociocultural context that shapes and influences; for example, the text creator's values, beliefs, assumptions and biases.

Students need to explore, think about, respond to, analyse, question and challenge written and visual texts and to understand that there are many factors that impact on the choices the text creator makes. In particular, they need to know that text creators:

- » present views of the world that may prioritise certain views over others
- » represent content (e.g. facts, people, places, events, characters) in ways that may privilege or silence certain views, voices or perspectives, or that may contain falsehoods or misrepresent information
- » use written or visual language (structures and devices) to manipulate the reader in specific ways.

Based on Department of Education and Training of Western Australia, 2004, p. 59.

They need to understand:

- » Representation in texts—how people, places, events etc. are represented or depicted in written and visual texts.
- » Reader/viewer positioning—how texts are constructed to position the user.
- » Ideological practices—how attitudes, values, beliefs, cultural and societal influences shape and are embedded in texts.

They need to question, analyse and critique a range of visual and written texts to detect, for example:

- » the content of the text and the author's intent
- » cultural and societal influences
- » the use of data to support evidence, opinions and hypotheses
- » the possible differences in interpretation and construction of the text according to personal, social and cultural backgrounds and contexts
- » the possible purposes or intent (e.g. social, political and cultural) of different text types and **formats**
- » the perspectives, representations and biases in texts.

As they create or use visual, written and multimodal texts, students can be guided to think critically about texts through teacher questioning. The ultimate goal is that the students will independently and automatically question texts as they read, or question



**formats:** The way the content of text is finally presented or published.

themselves as they create texts. The following examples of questions to ask when reading or viewing a written or visual text are based on the work of Bull & Anstey (2007):

- » Who produced this text?
- » What is the purpose of this text?
- » Who is the intended audience?
- » What is it about? Does it make sense? What are the main messages? Do you agree/disagree? Why?
- » What do you think about this text?
- » How does this text make you feel? Why? Would all people feel this way? Why?
- » What information has been left out? Why?
- » Whose point of view is presented?
- » Who might have a different point of view?
- » What information or points of view have been left out? Why?
- » Have you read other texts like this? What connections can you make?
- » What have you learnt as a result of reading this? What questions do you have?
- » How are (the people or group of people) portrayed in this text? Are all (a particular group of people) like this?
- » If you only knew about (groups of people/events/places etc.) from reading this text, what would you know?
- » What does the author say about (people/events/places/characters etc.) in this text?

Examples of questions, also based on Anstey & Bull (2007), to ask when creating a written or visual text:

- » Why am I creating this text?
- » For what purpose am I creating this text?
- » Who is my audience?
- » What do I want to say/communicate?
- » What is my main message?
- » What do I want my audience to know/feel/do? How will I do this?
- » What influences my point of view?
- » How will I present the information? Why?
- » How will I make it easy for the reader/viewer of my text?
- » What will I include/use to make this text effective?
- » What will I do to make sure my message is clear?
- » How am I representing people, places, events, characters etc.? Is this fair?
- » What will the reader/viewer learn about (people/events/places/characters etc.) from this text? Is this fair/true?
- » Have I left out important perspectives/information etc.?
- » Have I over-emphasised specific information/perspectives etc.?

## LITERACY PRACTICES



### Four Resources

**Model:** The sets of resources or literacy practices that literate people draw upon and use.

Luke & Freebody's work (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999) has influenced how we view literacy teaching and learning. They identified four interrelated dimensions of language use that include the sets of resources or literacy practices that literate people draw on and use. Their model, referred to as the **Four Resources Model** of Literacy or the Four Roles of Literacy Learners, describes the sets of resources and acknowledges the complexity of literacy learning. It is important to note that all four sets of resources or literacy practices are interdependent. Further, they are not hierarchical and they develop concurrently. All are necessary for students to become literate and all need to be taught explicitly so that students integrate them and can independently and effectively use them in a wide range of contexts. Tables 1.1 to 1.4 are based on the work of Harris, Turbill, Fitzsimmons & McKenzie (2001, 2003); Luke & Freebody (1999) and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (2002).

## TEXT ENCODER AND TEXT DECODER PRACTICES

Text encoder and decoder practices involve using the conventions of written and visual language to create or decipher written or visual text. Text encoders/decoders consider the conventions of the written language system such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, handwriting, text layout and directionality. They draw on the concepts of print at letter, word, sentence and whole text level, and on their phonological, alphabetic and visual knowledge. They consider the elements of the visual language system (still and moving) such as image types, the use of space, framing, placement, shape, line, light, colour, scale, texture, shape, angle, focus, symbols and style and so on.

**TABLE 1.1** EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES AND QUESTIONS TEXT ENCODERS/TEXT DECODERS MIGHT USE

WHAT THE TEXT DECODER ASKS WHEN READING OR VIEWING	WHAT THE TEXT DECODER DOES WHEN READING OR VIEWING
How do I crack this code?	Decodes the codes and conventions of written and visual text
How did I/do I work out the word/the group of words?	Draws on the relationship between spoken sounds and written symbols
What elements/words are interesting, difficult or tricky?	Uses knowledge of print
How can I work out the words that I don't know?	Draws on knowledge of grammar (syntax)
Do I know another word that looks/sounds the same?	Understands and applies elements of visual text
Do I know a word that has a similar meaning?	Draws on knowledge of written and visual text structures and conventions
How is this word used in this context?	Uses knowledge of elements of visual text
Which reading strategies did I use to understand this text?	

WHAT THE TEXT ENCODER ASKS WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT	WHAT THE TEXT ENCODER DOES WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT
<p>How do I use the code to create my message?</p> <p>How do I put my thoughts into writing/visual text?</p> <p>How do I write this correctly?</p> <p>How do I work out how to spell the words?</p> <p>Which convention (for writing or visual text) will I use?</p> <p>Do I know a better word to use?</p> <p>What would be the best way to present this information?</p>	<p>Encodes written and visual text</p> <p>Uses knowledge of print</p> <p>Uses knowledge of elements of visual text</p> <p>Pays attention to conventions of writing and visual text</p> <p>Applies knowledge of visual or written text structures and features</p>

Teachers can assist students to understand the codes and conventions of written and visual text by developing their knowledge of:

- » conventions of written text—e.g. phonics, spelling, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, text structures and language features
- » elements of visual text—e.g. salience (a strategy of providing emphasis to the important aspect in a written or visual text), structure, framing, placement, line, colour, texture, shape, space, distance, size, contrast, angle etc.

## TEXT PARTICIPANT PRACTICES

Text participant practices involve gaining meaning from or composing meaning into written and visual texts, both still and moving. Text participants apply their knowledge about the topic and their understanding of how written and visual texts are structured and organised to effectively create or convey meaning. They consider the purpose of each text and how the information in each is presented to meet the purpose.

**TABLE 1.2** EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES AND QUESTIONS TEXT PARTICIPANTS MIGHT USE

WHAT THE TEXT PARTICIPANT ASKS WHEN READING OR VIEWING	WHAT THE TEXT PARTICIPANT DOES WHEN READING OR VIEWING
<p>What does this mean to me?</p> <p>Does the text remind me of something, someone or another text?</p> <p>Can I make connections between the text and my life, the text and other texts, or the text and the wider world?</p> <p>What message is the author presenting?</p> <p>What are the main ideas?</p> <p>What might happen next? What visual or written conventions used give me this idea?</p> <p>What has the author used to help provide information? (Visual text type and elements, written text type and features)</p> <p>What did I feel as I read?</p>	<p>Gains meaning from written and visual texts</p> <p>Makes meaning by drawing on own experiences, prior knowledge, and knowledge of the structure and features of text</p> <p>Knows there may be other possible meanings of the text</p> <p>Expects the text to make sense and reads to gain meaning</p> <p>Knows that the purpose for using the text affects the interpretation of the text</p>

*(continued)*

**TABLE 1.2** EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES AND QUESTIONS TEXT PARTICIPANTS MIGHT USE (*CONTINUED*)

WHAT THE TEXT PARTICIPANT ASKS WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT	WHAT THE TEXT PARTICIPANT DOES WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT
How will I compose this text so that my meaning is clear to the reader or viewer?	Composes meaning into written and visual texts
What are the other possible meanings the reader or viewer might gain from this text?	Uses topic knowledge and knowledge of grammar to create text
Is my meaning clear?	Creates text to meet the intended purpose
What am I trying to say?	Draws on and links experiences
What do I need to do to create this text?	Pays attention to written or visual text organisation and layout
Do I know enough about the topic/subject matter to make the text clear?	Creates visual and written text with the reader in mind (makes the meaning clear)
Which visual and/or written text can I use to suit my purpose?	Uses visual text that clearly meets the purpose and conveys the intended message

Teachers can help students to make meaning and gain meaning from written and visual texts through explicit teaching and questioning that focuses and develops their knowledge of:

- » written texts—context, topic or subject, purpose and audience for reading and writing, text structure and grammar at whole text, paragraph, sentence and word level (use and meaning of words)
- » visual texts—context, topic or subject, purpose and audience for viewing and creating, structure and elements of still and moving images.

## TEXT USER PRACTICES

Text user practices involve selecting and using written and visual texts for specific purposes, audiences, contexts and subject matter. Text users draw on their knowledge of different written and/or visual text types (structure, organisation and language features) and the social purposes of each so that they select and use texts for their intended purposes.

**TABLE 1.3** EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES AND QUESTIONS TEXT USERS MIGHT USE

WHAT THE TEXT USER ASKS WHEN READING OR VIEWING	WHAT THE TEXT USER DOES WHEN READING OR VIEWING
What do I do with this text?	Uses written and visual texts for a range of social purposes
What sort of text is this? How do I know?	Understands the purposes of different written and visual texts for different cultural and social functions
What is the purpose of this text?	Knows that different types of texts have different purposes
How is the information organised?	Knows that the purpose shapes the way written and visual texts are structured
How can I find the information in this text?	Uses knowledge of text purpose, structure, features, and cultural and situational contexts to select, read/view and respond to appropriate texts
What sort of written or visual language is used in the text? Why?	



WHAT THE TEXT USER ASKS WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT	WHAT THE TEXT USER DOES WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT
<p>For which purposes do I want to produce this text?</p> <p>Why do I want to produce this text?</p> <p>Who is the intended audience?</p> <p>Who will read/view this text, for which purposes and in which context?</p> <p>Which text will best suit my purpose?</p> <p>What do I need to include in this text so that my meaning and purpose are clear?</p>	<p>Constructs written and visual texts for social purposes</p> <p>Uses knowledge of the structure and features of different visual and written texts</p> <p>Selects appropriate written and/or visual text to suit the communication purpose</p> <p>Understands the relationship between written and visual texts within a multimodal text</p> <p>Selects appropriate visual text to enhance or elaborate meaning in written text and vice versa</p> <p>Uses knowledge of context, purpose, audience and text to create a range of written and visual texts</p>

Teachers can assist students to use written and visual texts effectively by helping them build knowledge of:

- » how texts are used in everyday life and for which purposes and audiences
- » text structure and features
- » the language used to talk about written and visual language.

## TEXT ANALYST PRACTICES

Text analyst practices involve thinking critically about the way written and visual texts are created and how written language features and visual text elements are used to put forward points of view and to position the reader or viewer. Text analysts understand the interrelatedness of reading and writing and that written and visual texts can be used together to create and enhance meaning and to meet specific purposes in a range of contexts.

Text analysts understand that texts are not neutral; they are culturally constructed, thus they read or view texts critically, with the text creator in mind. They read and/or view texts as if they were the text creators. They understand that text creators use written or visual language to position the text user and, as the text users, they evaluate the effectiveness of the text.

As text creators, text analysts produce texts with the user in mind. Drawing upon their own reading and viewing experiences and knowledge about effective written or visual texts, they create texts that position the user to believe and/or value the information represented in the text.

**TABLE 1.4** EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES AND QUESTIONS TEXT ANALYSTS MIGHT USE

WHAT THE TEXT ANALYST ASKS WHEN READING OR VIEWING	WHAT THE TEXT ANALYST DOES WHEN READING OR VIEWING
What does this text do to me? Who does the text favour or represent? Who might have a different point of view? How would the text be different if told from another point of view or if created in another time or place? What was the purpose for writing/creating this text? How has the text creator used written and/or visual language in this text? For which purposes? How does this text claim authority (consider language, structure and content)?	Reads and views texts critically Understands how written and visual texts position readers and viewers Knows that texts are crafted to represent the views and interests of the text creator Identifies the devices used in the text to manipulate the user Questions what is read or viewed
WHAT THE TEXT ANALYST ASKS WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT	WHAT THE TEXT ANALYST DOES WHEN CREATING WRITTEN OR VISUAL TEXT
What do I want the reader/viewer to do, feel, believe or value as a result of using this text? How can I best use written and/or visual language to manipulate the user of the text? How will I present my information? What do I want the text users to know about my viewpoints and values? Which words and images shall I select to best position the text user?	Constructs texts that draw on underlying values, beliefs, views and that 'position' the text user Uses knowledge of how text creators manipulate text for own purposes Creates texts to 'position' the reader Selects written and visual text elements to suit own purposes Selects and manipulates written language devices or visual elements to create effective texts

Teachers can assist students to understand how texts are created with a specific purpose in mind by building their knowledge of:

- » representation—how authors construct or represent things (people, places, events, things etc.)
- » reader positioning—how texts position the user to suit the author's purpose
- » values and ideologies—how cultural, political, social and/or economic situations and identity, roles and power affect the choices that the text creator makes.

Literate individuals are able to effectively participate in the culturally defined social practices of society using the literacy practices that are appropriate to the situation. They are able to select and use literacy practices that enable them to act effectively within society and to enhance their own and others' lives. The literacy practices are shaped by the situational and cultural context, the roles and relationships of the participants, the language mode used, and the participants' knowledge of the subject or topic for which the literacy practice is required. Literate people draw upon four interdependent roles or resources (text encoder/decoder, text participant, text user, text analyst) to create, compose, interpret and respond to written and visual texts.

Programs need to include a range of literacy purposes, practices, experiences, activities, contexts and resources.

**THINK AND LINK**

- 1 List the written and visual texts that you have created during the last week. Identify the purpose, audience and context for each. Share your list and discuss which factors (purpose, audience, context) influenced what you produced. Think about the content of the text, its structure and your choice of written or visual communication features or elements.
- 2 Reflect on your classroom experiences and discuss the sorts of texts you have seen students use and create. Which literacy practices and knowledge did the students exhibit?
- 3 Discuss what your findings might mean for your teaching.

**LANGUAGE AND LEARNING**

Language is a complex social practice that involves using visual, verbal and non-verbal cues, signs or codes to produce, receive and respond to information, that is, to make and share meaning. It is determined by the culture in which it is used, is part of that culture and is used to pass on culture. 'Language is used to fulfil all sorts of purposes ... the function or purpose of language determines the type or form of language we use' (Emmitt, Zbaracki, Komesaroff & Pollock, 2015, p. 10).

Language is used to express and connect ideas, interact with others and to create texts (Derewianka & Jones 2012, p. 24). It is used in the processes of, for example, informing, entertaining, amusing, narrating, recounting, listing, describing, explaining, persuading, instructing, comparing, contrasting, and building and maintaining relationships. Language itself, and how we use it, is constantly changing but its basic, underlying purpose—to make and share meaning—remains constant. Language is modified by the context (that is, the situation and audience) in which it is used and by the user's specific purpose.

Language is processed and understood in the form of texts that are products of a social process as well as 'a process that is the outcome of a socially produced occasion' (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 13). For example, during a particular social context we may participate in an event in which we are describing something (a process) and produce a description (a product/text).

For each language purpose, there are culturally accepted text structures/types that result from the processes within a social context. For example, the language purpose might be to tell what happened (purpose) through the process of sequencing the happenings (process) and using the text structure that provides an orientation to the event, a sequence and description of the happenings and the outcome (text structure). The text structure is that of a recount (the text type/**genre**). Genres or text types (oral, written, visual and multimodal) make the purpose more precise and appropriate to the context and audience. A variety of formats (written, visual, oral, digital and multimodal) can be used to deliver/present the chosen text type for the specific context, purpose



**genre:** The social practices that are reflected in texts created to achieve specific purposes.

and audience. There are several language purposes, genre/text types and formats that are most commonly used in primary and secondary school settings. See Chapter 2 for details.

Teachers need to plan programs and establish an environment and contexts in which students simultaneously *learn language, learn through language and learn about language* and develop effective literacy practices.

## LEARNING LANGUAGE

This involves students learning about the systems and codes of language—not just oral and written, but also visual, gestural and spatial (Cope & Kalantis eds, 2000; Bull & Anstey, 2007)—and developing knowledge of the processes involved so that they can use language for a range of socially and culturally determined purposes.



**semiotics:** The signs, symbols and design elements of visual texts that work together to produce meaning.

### ► ACTION

Acknowledge, and build on, the wealth of language and language experiences students bring to school. Provide opportunities for students to use language for a variety of purposes. Help them learn about the system of oral language (including pronunciation, conventions and vocabulary). Teach about the written language system (including punctuation, semantic, syntactic and graphophonic components). Help the students to '... understand and use the grammars of language, still and moving images, music and sound' often known as **semiotic** systems (Bull & Anstey, 2007).

## LEARNING THROUGH LANGUAGE

This involves using language to think about, gather, organise, remember and disseminate information and ideas. It is central to the process of making and conveying meaning.

### ► ACTION

Provide opportunities for students to use language to learn across the curriculum (subject-specific and integrated units of work). Help them use language for different purposes and audiences and to use the appropriate text types and vocabulary for each subject or field. Help them to read and write to learn within subjects as well as learning to read and write.

## LEARNING ABOUT LANGUAGE

This involves learning about the conventions of English and how to use these to express and interpret meaning. Students learn a metalanguage to describe how language works, its components and the processes involved. They learn about language at whole text, paragraph, sentence, word group, word and letter level.

**▷ ACTION**

Plan for explicit teaching and demonstrations of language conventions. Focus on the *work* of the components of text and provide vocabulary that will help students to talk about these aspects. Cater for individual student needs and provide point of need teaching as well as planned teaching focuses. Foster a love of language by providing a wide range of oral, written and multimodal texts that include diverse purposes, language uses, structures and features.

## CONDITIONS FOR LITERACY LEARNING

The approach to teaching literacy, as described in this book, is based on the conditions for literacy learning as identified by Cambourne (1988). These optimal conditions for learning resemble those in which early language learning takes place. Teachers need to plan for, organise and deliver classroom programs and establish an environment that fosters these conditions and facilitates literacy learning. As Lent (2006) explains, Cambourne's conditions for learning also apply in secondary school settings.

### IMMERSION

Students' literacy learning can be supported when they are surrounded by literacy practices and products that enable them to see how literacy works and what literate people do and use.

**▷ ACTION**

Provide a range of good quality texts (oral, written, visual and multimodal) that are read to, with and by the students. Provide opportunities for students to create texts in shared, guided and independent situations across all areas of the curriculum. Provide time for the students to be immersed in the purposes, structures and features of texts.

### DEMONSTRATION

Students' learning is facilitated when they actively observe and participate in demonstrations by literate people in which the literate person verbalises and explicitly shows what they are doing and why.

**▷ ACTION**

Provide opportunities for students to observe how texts are created and used in daily life. Include planned, incidental, explicit and implicit demonstrations of literacy practices (skills, knowledge) to help students to understand what literate people do and what literacy involves.

## EXPECTATION

Students need to know that we trust that they can learn and expect that they will become effective literacy learners. By conveying our expectations we are showing our confidence in them as learners and in their ability to learn.

### ► ACTION

Ensure that the students understand that you will teach at their point of need and that you expect that they will learn. Structure learning experiences in which the students are challenged but are able to note and celebrate their progress. Plan purposeful teaching and learning experiences in which it is expected that the students will develop the literacy practices and knowledge to effectively use (create, read or view) a range of visual and written texts for a range of purposes, audiences and contexts.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Students need to understand their role as learners and how they can help or hinder their own learning. They need to actively participate in the learning process and gradually assume greater control over and responsibility for their learning.

### ► ACTION

Create a classroom environment in which students can make decisions about their learning. Help them to identify their strengths and areas for further learning and to set achievable learning goals. Plan teaching and learning experiences that enable the students to negotiate aspects of their learning and to use what is appropriate to their development and needs at the time. Help the students to become independent and responsible text users: critical readers, viewers and creators of effective written and visual texts.

## USE

Students' literacy learning is enhanced when the learning is related to their experiences and links with their needs and purposes. They learn best when they can see 'what's in it for them'—when they can use the learning within and beyond the classroom.

### ► ACTION

Ensure that visual and written text types are introduced in meaningful contexts that enable the students to practise and develop their skills for specific purposes, situations and audiences. Make links with the use of written, visual and multimodal texts in their everyday life. Provide time for the students to use their developing skills and knowledge in purposeful and relevant contexts.

## APPROXIMATION

Students' literacy learning is assisted when they understand that they are on a learning journey that involves attempting literacy practices ('having a go'), drawing on their current knowledge and skills, and modifying their attempts as their learning develops.

### ▷ ACTION

Establish a classroom climate in which students are confident to attempt or 'have a go' at new learning and to make approximations as they develop competency. Regard their approximations as indicators of their learning and as part of the learning process.

## RESPONSE

Students need to know that they will get help when they need it and that they will get positive responses to their attempts at literacy practices. The responses should focus on what the student has done well and provide encouragement and guidance for further action so that they continue to confidently demonstrate their learning.

### ▷ ACTION

Make appropriate, relevant, timely and constructive comments as students learn. Provide honest and point of need feedback that helps students to identify their progress, provide ideas for further learning and know that they are valued as learners. Provide opportunities for the students to share and demonstrate their skills and knowledge and receive feedback from peers and/or the teacher within a supportive classroom environment.

## ENGAGEMENT

Students need to be fully 'tuned in to' or engaged in the teaching and learning experiences if they are to actively participate in their literacy learning. Building on their prior knowledge and experiences and helping them make links between these and the new learning helps to engage them.

### ▷ ACTION

Make links between school learning and the students' lives. Help them to understand how written, visual and multimodal texts are part of everyday life within and beyond school. Make the connections between a particular text type and its possible use for them to ensure they are actively involved in the learning process.



Use each student's prior learning—the cultural and intellectual resources they bring to school—to inform and enhance literacy teaching.

**THINK AND LINK**

- 1 Think of something you have recently learnt to do. On a T chart, list the factors that supported your learning and those that hindered it (see p. 37 for more information on T charts). Share your information and identify which of the conditions of learning discussed above are represented in your lists.
- 2 Think about a situation when you observed students being taught something new. How did the teacher support the students' learning? Which conditions of learning could you identify? What did they look like in this context?

**SUPPORTING LEARNERS**

To ensure that students learn effectively, teachers need to structure the teaching and learning experiences to match the needs of the students within specific contexts (Hertzberg, 2012, Gibbons, 1991, 2002; Hammond, 2001). Classrooms have a diversity of students for which teachers must plan and implement differentiated literacy teaching and learning experiences so that each student is supported as they move along the learning continuum. There might be students from a range of sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, students who are learning English as an additional language (EAL), students who are learning English as an additional dialect (EAD), and students who are at, beyond or below expected standards.

Vygotsky (1978) identified that the optimal space for learning is in that zone between a child's actual developmental level (what they know and do without assistance) and their potential developmental level (what they could do with the adult support). He called this the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It is within this zone that the most effective learning occurs. Teachers need to carefully observe and monitor each student's learning so that timely teaching, support and feedback can occur within this zone. This 'point of need' or 'just in time' teaching ensures students move beyond what they already know and can do and continue to progress along the learning continuum. The use of developmentally appropriate teaching content, pace and experiences facilitates student learning.

Effective learning requires students to activate their prior knowledge, make connections with this and new learning, and identify what helps and hinders them as learners. They need to be supported during the learning process so that they move from being novices or 'apprentices' in a particular skill, knowledge or context to being able to independently apply the skills or knowledge in a variety of contexts (Chambers, 1991).

This support involves program structures, teacher actions and teaching practices that gradually build up the students' control over and responsibility for their own learning (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1996). This might involve:

- » the teacher doing what the learner can't do independently. The teacher explicitly demonstrates how to do something and verbalises the processes used so that the



students see and understand the thinking processes as well as the physical actions required to do the task. This teaching practice is often referred to as **modelling** or **demonstration**.

The term ‘modelling’ refers to planned and incidental opportunities to explicitly demonstrate to the students how written language is structured and used for different purposes, audiences and contexts. It can be used to introduce, revise, consolidate or extend the skills and knowledge students require as effective readers and writers and can be conducted in whole class, small group or individual situations.

Effective modelling enables students to, with teacher guidance, observe, discover, classify and organise their knowledge about the processes and strategies used by readers and writers as well as language purposes, functions, text structures, features and written conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary) and so on. For modelling to be effective, students must be able to see the text clearly as it is written or read, and teachers must verbalise what they are thinking as they read or write to make explicit to the students what they do as a reader or writer.

Modelled writing involves the teacher writing in front of the students and making explicit—through demonstration and articulation—the thinking, considerations and processes associated with writing. Modelled reading involves the teacher reading to or with the students, using an enlarged text that is visible to all or using multiple copies of a text of which each student has a copy. The focus is on demonstrating how to gain meaning from the text and making explicit the reading process.

- » the teacher and learner doing the task together. The teacher determines the direction and focus of the demonstration, but invites the students to contribute to the demonstration by sharing ideas and information. Through discussion and demonstration, the students and teacher make decisions about which actions need to be taken during the demonstration. They focus on the task, the learning involved and themselves as learners. This teaching practice is called sharing, **joint construction** or **joint deconstruction**.
- » the learner doing the task under the guidance of the teacher. The teacher provides an opportunity for the students to practise the skills, knowledge and/or tasks that have been the focus of modelling and sharing. The students do the work, with the teacher helping and providing feedback at key points in the process. This teaching practice is called guiding or **guided practice**.
- » the student doing the task independently. The students work independently, applying the skills and knowledge they have learnt in the demonstrations and in the guided situations. They are responsible for their own learning and seek assistance as they require it. The teacher monitors the each student’s progress and offers assistance and advice when appropriate. This teaching practice is called **applying** or **independent practice**.

Teachers use teaching procedures that take students from where they can’t do something for themselves, to doing it with teacher support and finally to being able to do it independently.

Effective literacy teaching procedures include modelled, shared, guided, interactive and independent reading and writing.

The above teaching practices support students as they work towards increasing their responsibility for, and control over, their learning. They also help teachers to provide optimal learning experiences that are integral to the ‘to/for, with, by’ approach to literacy teaching in which:

- » Teachers read *to* or write *for* students and provide maximum support for the students as they observe what it means to be literate. Literacy teaching sessions may include opportunities for **modelled** reading and writing of written, visual and multimodal texts.
- » Teachers read or write *with* the students and provide opportunities for the students to assume increasing control over their learning as they jointly participate in a literacy demonstration. Literacy sessions may include **shared reading** and **writing, interactive writing**, or **guided reading** and writing.
- » Students work *by* themselves as they assume major responsibility for reading and writing independently. Literacy sessions may include **independent** reading and writing.

Students can assist their own and others’ literacy learning by demonstrating their developing literacy skills to less experienced literacy learners. This involves role reversal during which they assume the role of an experienced language learner and work with a less experienced literacy learner (apprentice) to help develop and enhance an aspect of literacy. This can be conducted through cross-age tutoring, peer tutoring or cooperative learning activities.

## DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION

Each student’s experiences, interests, abilities, learning styles and prior knowledge affect their learning. Teachers need to seek, acknowledge, value and build on what students bring to school and provide differentiated teaching that caters for each learner.

Small group teaching enables the teacher to provide explicit teaching that targets the specific needs of each group member. Students can be grouped in many ways depending on the teaching purpose. For example:

- » homogenous groups, in which students with similar literacy needs (support or extension) or characteristics work together
- » mixed ability groups, in which students with diverse abilities learn with and from each other.

Some students will require further individualised, ongoing and intensive teaching and support as they develop as literacy learners. This will require the teacher to plan specific teaching and learning sequences that meet the unique needs of the student and that will provide multiple opportunities to revisit, learn about and use literacy practices. Tasks might be broken into smaller achievable parts; model texts might be modified; task time

might be extended; teacher explanations and demonstrations might be more explicit and precise and so on.

Other students might require extension, so set tasks might be amended or replaced with more complex, challenging and multifaceted tasks, and on-going projects might be negotiated along with time limits, expectations etc.

As teachers, we are the most important factor in determining:

- » the quality of the students' literacy learning experiences
- » the effective development of their literacy skills and knowledge
- » the formulation of positive attitudes towards literacy.

We need to be careful observers of students and have a deep knowledge of language, texts, and literacy teaching and learning as well as an understanding of the developmental stages of the students in order to intervene in the learning process and act when 'teachable moments' occur.

#### THINK AND LINK

- 1 How might the information in this chapter affect your planning for and teaching of literacy?
- 2 How is literacy learnt and what are the needs of literacy learners? What does this mean for you as a teacher?
- 3 What would a literacy-focused classroom that supports all literacy learners look like/sound like/feel like? Why?

## RESOURCES

Cecil, N.L. & Gipe, J.P. 2009, *Literacy in Grades 4–8: Best Practices for a Comprehensive Program*, Second Edition, Holcomb Hathaway Publishers, Scottsdale.

The authors provide information about establishing a balanced and comprehensive literacy program that caters for student diversity. The book includes practical classroom strategies, procedures, activities and resources that assist student learning.

Emmitt, M., Zbaracki, M., Komesaroff, L. & Pollock, J. 2015, *Language and Learning: An Introduction for Teaching*, Sixth Edition, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

This book includes information about the nature and functions of language, language learning, multiliteracies, and the changing nature of literacy.

Healy, A. (ed.) 2008, *Multiliteracies and Diversity in Education: New Pedagogies for Expanding Landscapes*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

This book explains the theoretical basis underlying multimodal communication in literacy education and incorporates real-life examples of literacy activities.

Hertzberg, M. 2012, *Teaching English Language Learners in Mainstream Classes*, PETAA, Newtown.

The author provides theory, principles, strategies, support and student work samples for teaching English language learners.

Howell, J. 2014, *Teaching and Learning: Building Effective Pedagogies*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

The book, for teachers from early years to secondary school, includes information on the phases of learning and development; the principles and practices of teaching, assessment and reporting and ways of catering for student diversity.

Walsh, M. 2011, *Multimodal Literacy: Researching Classroom Practice*, PETAA, Newtown.

This book, which is based on research in actual classrooms, describes the new literacy practices within print and digital resources. It also provides examples of students' work and ideas for teaching with and for new literacies.

Winch, G., Johnston, R., March, P., Ljungdahl, L. & Holliday, M. 2014, *Literacy: Reading, Writing and Children's Literature*, Fifth Edition, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

The authors provide a variety of practical approaches to teaching literacy that acknowledge the role of oral language, multiple literacies and the effect of technologies in developing students' literacy skills.