

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.