



In this chapter, I introduce a case study of Ryan (pseudonym), a student who both challenged and intrigued his teachers. Ryan's bad behaviours at school quickly alienated some teachers, while his successes on some measures of literacy achievement challenged their thinking about what makes a good literacy learner. The case study of Ryan continues throughout the chapter, prompting a discussion about research into literacies and how literacies are learnt and taught in schools. The chapter concludes with a list of suggestions for teachers—principles to inform practice—and an introduction to critical reflection as a useful tool for reflecting on practice.

- literacy learners
- myths and realities of school literacy learning

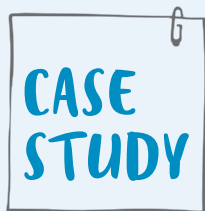
- active learning  
disciplinary literacies  
content area reading and writing

home literacy practices  
school literacy practices  
critical reflection

## Introduction

As teachers, we know that literacy education has been, and remains, a contested field. We also know that discussions about literacy education for the primary, middle and secondary years of schooling tend to be complex. During those years, students move from childhood to adolescence and towards adulthood. They not only experience a range of physical, social, psychosocial, emotional and cognitive changes (Main, 2017; Pendergast, 2017), but they are immersed in schooling that shifts from being student-centred towards being increasingly subject-centred and discipline-specific in nature (Dowden, 2017; Pendergast, 2017).

To help us reflect on some of the complexities of school literacy education, this chapter presents a case study about a middle years student called Ryan. As Lexmond (2003) pointed out, there is a widely accepted view of middle school learners as ‘bundles of raging hormones’ and disengaged from schooling (p. 46). At first glance, Ryan seemed no exception.



### Ryan: Part I

Ryan was small for his age and looked younger than his peers. Although he wore the regulation school uniform shirt, a knit polo-styled shirt embroidered with the school's name and logo, he did not wear the basketball-style shorts that the school recommended. Instead, he wore board shorts or cargo shorts, which were the fashion at the time. In the playground, Ryan wore a broad-brimmed hat, in accordance with the school's ‘no hat, no play’ policy, but in the classroom his changing hairstyles—sometimes a number one cut and, at other times, an unusual style with shaved sections—stood out against the other students’ more conventional hairstyles. Ryan's hairstyles and non-regulation shorts, in combination with the metallic beads he wore around his neck, suggested that he liked to look trendy and flaunt school rules.

### Reflection activities

- 1 When you read about Ryan's appearance, did you make any assumptions about how he might have behaved in the classroom? About his successes or failures as a student? Or about his successes or failures as a literacy learner? What conclusions did you reach?
- 2 How did you come to those conclusions? What evidence did you draw on?

We also recognise that students often experience major changes in the nature of schooling as they make the transition from the early childhood years, through the upper primary years and into secondary education. In particular, the changes in literacy learning across those years are marked. In the past, we talked about the shift from ‘learning to read’ to ‘reading to learn’. We now have a more nuanced understanding about how literacy

learning changes across the years of schooling: students have to cope with not just one transition, but a series of them. As Honan (2010) emphasised, literacy education becomes ‘increasingly more complex’ and ‘learners need to master the literacy requirements of a greater range and diversity of texts than ever before’ (pp. 139 & 140).

One obvious change students experience during their schooling is the shift from what Carrington (2006) called the ‘fiction-oriented’ texts students encounter in their early years of school to the ‘non-fiction, content texts’ they are expected to deal with as they move to higher year levels (p. 109). However, this move from fiction to non-fiction texts reflects another, more fundamental change in literacy requirements. In 1984, Morris and Stewart-Dore talked about the increasing need for students to cope with **content area reading and writing**—that is, the particular literacies associated with different learning areas. They argued that the move towards specialised subject areas, which tends to occur as students change from primary school to high school, requires students to manage the ‘reading associated with the learning of a particular subject or the performance of a particular subject area task’ (p. 21).

Over time, the terminology used to describe subject-specific literacy demands has morphed. Wyatt-Smith and Cumming (1999) coined the term *curriculum literacies* to highlight the diverse range of literacies that students encounter (p. 21), while others talk about *subject-specific literacies* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2017b), *content literacy* (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2016) and **disciplinary literacies** (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Regardless of the terminology that is used, it is important to remember that ‘differences in how the disciplines create, disseminate, and evaluate knowledge’ are evident in the use of language (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 48). Thus teachers need to be aware of the specific literacy demands of the subjects or learning areas that they teach.

To fully understand the changing literacy demands students face, it is useful to think back to your own post-primary schooling, or, if possible, to try to ‘relive’ it. Many years ago, as an experienced teacher who returned to full-time study, I was fortunate enough to do just that. For one of our courses, we had to ‘walk in the shoes of a Year 8 student’. I spent a day with a Year 8 class, moving from subject to subject and classroom to classroom in an unfamiliar school, engaging in their lessons as if I was a student. It turned out to be one of the most challenging days I had ever experienced. Without any knowledge of what my ‘classmates’ had studied in previous lessons, it was often difficult to know what I was required to do. To make things harder, there were obvious differences in the literacies that I was expected to use and in the types of instruction provided. In some classes, the teacher taught explicitly about the literacy requirements; in others, teachers seemed to expect that students would just know what to do.

Each day, school students experience a diverse range of literacies. And, while the timetables used in secondary schools signal the shift from one literacy to another as students change subjects or rooms or teachers, we have to remember that primary school students, too, have to ‘switch’ (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 1999, p. 22) between and among different knowledges, skills and discourses in the course of a school day. As Moje



Transitions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 11.

#### **content area reading and writing**

The literacies associated with particular subjects or learning areas (Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1984).

#### **disciplinary literacies**

The specific literacies used in different disciplines. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) explained these as the ‘unique practices’ of disciplines for creating, disseminating and evaluating knowledge (p. 48).

(2008) highlighted, this is complex business because students are expected 'to participate in the discourses of the disciplines, to incorporate those discourses with other discourses and identities they experience throughout the day, and to forge, or at least try out, new identities' (p. 101).

This chapter, and indeed this book as a whole, addresses a range of issues relating to the teaching and learning of literacies. Here, I discuss selected principles and practices as a way of beginning conversations about what is important in the teaching of literacies in schools. This discussion alternates with the case study of Ryan, to which we now return.

Ryan changed schools a number of times. After being a Year 8 student for a day, I have often wondered whether Ryan's experiences in a new school were as disorienting and challenging as mine were.



### Ryan: Part 2

Ryan's parents were apple pickers from New Zealand. They had heard that if they were willing to follow the harvesting seasons from North Queensland to southern New South Wales, they could earn good money, which would enable them to pay off their house in New Zealand. In moving to Australia and becoming itinerant workers, they experienced a considerable change of lifestyle. They knew that they would need to develop new skills—especially since they were going to pick tomatoes rather than apples for part of the year—and that Ryan would need to change schools as they moved locations.

When the family first arrived in North Queensland, Ryan enrolled at the local school. In the first couple of days, he made friends with a group of boys who played rugby league and he soon joined the town's junior club. Ryan's parents were pleased that he had made friends quickly and had joined a community sporting club. Through Ryan, they were able to make connections with local residents and themselves make new friends.

## Myths and realities of school literacy learning

Literacy learning has been discussed at length in Australia and internationally. In the US, the National Council of Teachers of English published a list of common myths about adolescent literacy:

- Myth 1: Literacy refers only to reading.
- Myth 2: Students learn everything about reading and writing in primary school.
- Myth 3: The teaching of literacies is the responsibility of English teachers.
- Myth 4: Academic issues are all that matter in literacy learning.
- Myth 5: Students who struggle with one literacy will have difficulty with all literacies.
- Myth 6: School writing is essentially an assessment tool that enables students to show what they have learnt. (Based on National Council of Teachers of English, 2007, p. 2)

Over time, our understandings about literacies have changed. In fact, as will be emphasised throughout this book, we no longer think of *literacy* as a singular term, but as a plural, *literacies*. Once seen as being synonymous with reading, or with reading and writing, the term *literacies* is now generally accepted as encompassing a much broader range of practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016). As Kalantzis and Cope (2009) explained, in today's globalised world, the focus of traditional literacy curriculums on 'a singular standard (grammar, the literary canon, standard national forms of the language)' does not meet the needs of our students, who are negotiating multiple Englishes and social languages each day (p. 166). Students need to 'interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society' and be able to use and modify 'language for different purposes in a range of contexts' (ACARA, 2017a); they have to engage with texts of many different forms, including traditional print and digital texts.

### Standard Australian English (SAE)

The standard form or dialect of English used in education, government and the media in Australia. Competence in this form of English is required for academic success. (For further information, see Barnett, 2001.)

### Ryan: Part 3

Ryan experienced several Englishes daily. He moved between the New Zealand English of his family, the **Standard Australian English** that characterised the accepted language of the classroom and the school, and the other forms of English used by his new classmates and friends. At the school that Ryan attended, many students spoke other Englishes, particularly forms that were influenced by the languages that the students spoke at home. This was not surprising since approximately sixty of the school's students were from itinerant farm worker families and many of those students spoke English in addition to their first language of Tongan, Samoan or Turkish.



Additionally, we think about literacies as involving a wide range of activities with texts. The proliferation of digital technologies and the increasing range and multimodality of textual forms (Henderson, 2011; Honan, 2012; Walsh, 2010) have to be taken into account, since we have to be able to negotiate a wide range of texts. Therefore, in schools, it is important that we move beyond a focus on reading and writing in the traditional sense. While reading and writing as we know them are still important, our students have to be able to engage not only with the texts that are valued in schools, but also with the texts that they use or will use outside school.

In fact, it is important to remember that students come to school with knowledges and skills that relate to the **literacy practices of their home** or communities. A number of research projects (e.g., Purcell-Gates, 2008) have examined the literacies of families in particular contexts and highlighted how different these can be from the literacy practices that are valued and taught in schools. For some students, **school literacy practices** are similar to those used at home. For others, however, home literacy practices are unlike the ones taught at school; moreover, sometimes the literacies of home are invisible in school contexts. For instance, Comber and Kamler (2004) cited an example where a student was identified as an at-risk non-reader in the school context, even though he was an avid



See Chapters 2, 8 and 16 for further discussion of multimodality and multimodal texts.

### home literacy practices

The literacy practices used by students and their families in their out-of-school lives.

### school literacy practices

The literacy practices that are valued and taught in schools. These may be similar to or different from the literacies that students use in their home lives.



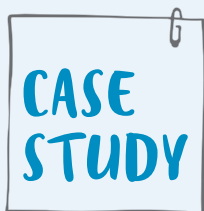
Chapter 11 talks about the way that home literacy practices are sometimes invisible in school contexts.

reader of sports books, including sports biographies, at home. It was only after the teacher conducted a home visit and learnt about the ways literacies were used in the home that he was able to rethink his assumptions about the student and to begin to 'turn around' the student's learning in the classroom.

As another example, consider the range of digital media that are popular with many of today's teenagers, particularly boys. Much has been said about boys who are successful at playing electronic games that are saturated with literacy activities, while demonstrating no interest or success in school literacy learning (see Henderson, 2010). This suggests that success in one literacy does not mean interest or success in all literacies.

It should be evident that literacy learning is not something that happens only at school. Neither is it something that happens once and for all, such as at a young age or in the early years of schooling. When we reflect, for example, on the increasing number and complexity of literacies that students need as they progress through schooling, particularly in relation to the subject or discipline specialisations discussed earlier, we begin to understand that competency across multiple literacies is absolutely vital for negotiating the demands of school. Therefore, it is essential that *all* teachers regard themselves as teachers of literacies and integrate literacy and learning in their classrooms (Irvin, Meltzer, Mickler, Phillips, & Dean, 2009).

We now return to the case study of Ryan to hear what teachers said about him as a literacy learner and as a learner more generally.



#### Ryan: Part 4

At school, Ryan was regarded by his teacher, Mr Greene, as a 'challenging' student who was often 'pushing the boundaries' and displaying 'unacceptable behaviours'.

Mr Greene suspected that Ryan was a capable literacy student, but that he deliberately hid his abilities in the classroom. He described Ryan as a 'tough guy' who hung around with the 'tough guy crowd' and 'didn't give the appearance of being a great lover of reading'. In Mr Greene's opinion, 'You can pick usually the kids who are right into reading. They'll be the ones who always have a book around etcetera ...'

Mr Greene was surprised, then, that Ryan performed well on the Australian Schools English Competition conducted by the University of New South Wales. He explained that Ryan 'was one of the kids who rated highest out of the whole school population ... he either got a credit or a distinction certificate. I forget which.' He continued: 'That would put him into the top fraction of the school, or the top fraction of his peers, as far as those sorts of decoding and interpretation skills are concerned, which is quite interesting because, as I said, I didn't think he was a particularly keen reader or student of literature.'

When Mr Greene assessed Ryan's abilities in literacy learning, he observed that Ryan 'tended to approach the writing side of things as do-it-as-quickly-as-you-can and then go and do something else'. Yet he recognised that Ryan 'basically ... wrote



okay. Proofreading skills needed a little bit of work, but you would expect that was a case of [needing] a little bit of effort rather than skills.' Mr Greene could see that Ryan 'was very good in some ways, picking out nice turns of phrase and things like that, which thinking back over it, possibly suggests that he read or recalled a bit more than he was letting on. But I think really he was pretty much in that sort of category of the guy who doesn't want some of his skills to be recognised.'

In the following year, when Ryan returned to the school, he was assigned to Mr Connington's class. Before the end of the first week, Ryan was in trouble for bullying another student. Two weeks later he was suspended for 'misconduct, disobedience, and conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school'. Ryan seemed to be in trouble nearly all of the time. It was apparent that, in this class, he was seen as a naughty student who upset the teacher whenever he could. Ryan's behaviours were visible to all. He 'frog marched' when sent to another class; he repeatedly disrupted the class; he refused to do what he was told; he sometimes annoyed other students; and he swore at Mr Connington.

Ryan's bad behaviour had become predictable. According to Mr Connington, Ryan 'had trouble written across his forehead' as soon as he entered the class. 'He had this look in his eyes ... all these guys in here went, "Ooooooh Ryaaan." You know, they knew what was going to happen.' With this focus on Ryan's bad behaviours, it seemed as though his literacy learning had become invisible.

### Reflection activities

- 1 Consider the literacy myths listed by the National Council of Teachers of English (2007). Nominate a school year level, then write a corresponding list of realities or facts that might apply to the literacy learning of students in that year level.
- 2 Reflect on your observations in a particular classroom. What literacies did you see?
- 3 The description of Ryan suggests that he was beginning to disengage from schooling. What were some of his strengths? Do you have any suggestions about how these might have been used to re-engage Ryan with school literacy learning and schooling in general?

## Some principles and practices

When thinking about how to best teach literacies, it is useful to consider principles that will inform your teaching. This helps to shift the focus away from methods and a one-size-fits-all approach (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015), towards thinking about flexible repertoires of teaching that will enable the teacher to cater for all students (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). Teachers need to have an 'adaptive expertise', so that they can adapt, morph, shape, refine and change learning experiences to cater for individual



Other chapters take up the issues Freebody discussed. Chapters 3, 12 and 13 provide detailed discussions about the teaching of curriculum. Chapters 8, 9, 14, 15 and 16 highlight ways of engaging and motivating students. Chapter 10 talks about teachers' roles in ensuring students' wellbeing.

learning needs (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005; McNaughton & Lai, 2009). Freebody (2005) called this ability to deliver the curriculum, to manage, protect, engage and motivate students, and to cater for individual differences 'professional sophistication' (p. 177).

Teaching practice should be underpinned by a set of principles that engage students in the learning of literacies. In addition, teachers need to recognise that literacy learning contributes to identity building. As Honan (2010) and Hinchman (2008) explained, the links between students' identities and the literacy practices they engage in are important considerations for teachers. According to Honan, this is particularly important for adolescents, because

young people practise and experiment with different constructs of identity. Each construct (e.g., rebellious daughter, sports fan, Internet geek, competent student) carries with it specific literacy practices and increasingly those literacy practices often do not resemble those used or valued in school settings. (p. 140)

The case study of Ryan suggests that one of his identities was that of 'naughty student'. Yet, in other contexts, other identities were visible.



### Ryan: Part 5

After his bad behaviour in Mr Connington's class and frequent suspensions from the school, Ryan was moved into another class with Ms Anderson, a teacher considered highly skilled in behaviour management. In order to prepare Ryan for a successful return to Mr Connington's class, Ms Anderson's role was to engage Ryan in problem-solving activities when he misbehaved. However, as she explained, Ryan fitted well into her class and 'never displayed any behavioural problems ... He's polite. He puts his hand up. He's just lovely. He's well thought of in the classroom.'

Nevertheless, Ms Anderson was not unaware of the Ryan who had been so naughty in Mr Connington's class. She described him as a student who would like 'to be seen as a good kid, but he's also rough and tumble and he's also very sporty and he likes to have a biff and a bash in the playground a bit, because he's a boy. He's a real boy.' Having recognised these characteristics, Ms Anderson devised a strategy:

I've got him sitting next to a boy who's one of my real boys, who doesn't need to be sat on in class or need to be constantly reminded to get his work done, but he's a real boy. They want to behave, they want to conform and they want to achieve, but they're also really good at sport and they're quite popular. So Ryan sees that I can be well-behaved, I can be well-mannered, I can get on with my work, but I can also get out in the playground and play sport, make it to the North Queensland [competition] like this boy's done. I can be a real toughie but I can still be a nice kid. He's starry-eyed about this one—he's made [the] touch



football [team] and I think he may have even made [the] rugby league [team]. Where else would I put him [Ryan] but next to a rugby league player? So he can see that he's a tough rugby player but he's also a nice boy, gets his work done and gets on well with the class.

Teachers and researchers agree that getting to know and understand the learners in your class is an important component of successful teaching. This can be easier said than done, as the student populations of Australian schools reflect the diversity that is characteristic of the wider population, as identified in the following statement from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017):

In communities across the country, there is an increasing variety in terms of country of birth, languages spoken, whether people are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and religious affiliation (or secular beliefs).

Kalantzis, Cope and the Learning by Design Project Group (2005) suggested that, in schools,

the gross demographics of difference ... the dimensions of gender, age, ethnicity/ race, locale, socio-economic group and (dis)ability ... stare you in the face, as does the difference these demographic realities so predictably seem to make when it comes to educational and social outcomes. (p. 44)

They also highlighted how the 'underlying substance of these differences—experiences, interests, orientations to the world, values, dispositions, sensibilities, communication styles, interpersonal styles, thinking styles and the like' are the lifeworld differences that underpin whether learners experience (or do not experience) a sense of belonging and engagement with school (pp. 44–45). As Kamler and Comber (2005) pointed out, it is very easy for teachers to blame students' 'poor attention, disruptive behaviour, apathy or disinterest' on these differences and to come to stereotypical understandings about students (p. 5). Yet teachers have a responsibility to do as James and Pollard (2011) suggested—to focus on 'taking seriously issues of equity and social justice for all' (p. 283), and therefore to ensure that school learning caters for all students.

How can teachers do this? It is widely recognised that learning needs to be **active** and learners actively engaged (Hardin, 2012). Ryan (2008) and Fraser (2011) highlighted the necessity to engage students via authentic means. Ryan argued that authentic literacy projects 'can be used to provide students with the experiences, knowledge, and literacy skills that will help them to become engaged, successful learners' (p. 190). She recommended that teachers work 'from a research question that is pertinent to student lives and that addresses issues and interests in society' (p. 193). This can be done by getting students to be 'investigators who are putting their skills to work to solve a problem or address an issue that is relevant to them' (p. 193). Fraser, reflecting on his own classroom, described how behavioural disruptions reduced and students took responsibility for their learning when they 'had a say in both what they learned and



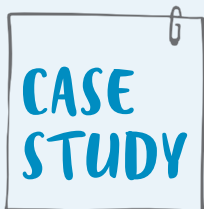
Chapters 10 to 16 focus particularly on how literacy teaching might cater for all students.

#### **active learning**

Refers to pedagogical approaches that encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning. In an active learning environment, learners are not passive recipients of teachers' knowledge, but they actively participate in classroom activities, including discussions, debates, collaborative tasks, and role plays.

how they learned' (p. 63). He argued that it is important to give students the right to speak about classroom learning.

We now return to the case study of Ryan.



### Ryan: Part 6

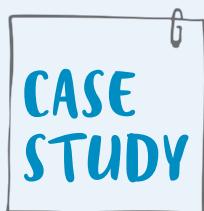
After 13 weeks in Ms Anderson's class, Ryan returned to his original class. In less than two days, he was again suspended. When asked about the behaviour that led to this latest suspension, Ryan's dad explained that, during an incident in the classroom, Ryan 'told Mr Connington to get fucked,' then 'threw a wobbly and walked out.' However, Ryan's parents were concerned that suspension would be ineffective, and argued for Ryan to remain at school instead. As Ryan's dad explained to the principal, 'You've given him a holiday. Five days off school and he'll be rapt.' Further, as Ryan's parents both worked, they would have to organise for someone else to look after him: 'Who's going to keep on him the way we would?' they asked. In addition, Ryan would be missing out on the teaching and learning of literacies that was happening in class. As a result of this discussion, the principal and Ryan's parents decided on an in-school suspension.

After the suspension ended, Ryan remained in Mr Connington's class until the end of the year. According to Mr Connington:

He still stirs up and pushes the boundaries, but he doesn't stand up and swear at anyone ... he has patches of good work and he's a capable student and he's manageable in the class at the moment. And he seems to have even improved from trying to be a big hero.

In talking about Ryan's literacy learning in the classroom, Mr Connington explained that 'anything he did was really half-hearted and he didn't demonstrate his ability' and that he had seen only 'one good piece of writing ... on rugby league, his rugby league game'.

The fact that Ryan performed best when writing about rugby illustrates the importance of allowing students to address issues that matter to them and to engage in authentic literacy projects. Through linking school learning with students' lives outside schools, teachers are addressing a broader aim of schooling—to prepare learners 'for life in its broadest sense' as active citizens (James & Pollard, 2011, p. 283). The following incident is another example of Ryan's participation in a learning task that was relevant to him.



### Ryan: Part 7

Ryan, it seemed, did not always engage in literacy learning in Mr Connington's class. When it came to standardised literacy tests, Mr Connington was concerned about Ryan's decision to write about a Game Boy. He explained that 'It was a description, a descriptive piece of writing [and] I told him, "Don't do it on a Game Boy," because I thought it would be very hard to describe a Game Boy.' Yet Mr Connington admitted

that Ryan ‘managed to talk about the games and how [the Game Boy] did this and that.’

When the test results were received, Ryan’s high results puzzled Mr Connington and the principal. In the reading and viewing components of the test Ryan scored in the top 13 per cent of his school cohort and in the top 25 per cent of the state. On the writing component of the test, he shared the highest result with another student in the school. In trying to explain Ryan, the principal said that he was ‘a very bright boy, really incredibly bright’. However, he lamented that the school had not been successful at engaging Ryan in literacy learning.

If there is one main message from this discussion, then it is probably that effective literacy teaching is a complex business. As the case study of Ryan indicates, one student can present multiple challenges. Yet teachers do not work with just one student, but many—plus, they have to work within school and education system constraints. As stated earlier in this chapter, it is useful to have a set of principles to inform practice. From the discussion in this section, I suggest the following seven principles to inform the teaching of literacies:

- 1 Develop a broad repertoire of knowledge, strategies and skills as well as the expertise to adapt these to meet the learning needs of all students you teach;
- 2 Consider the literacies that are required for success in as well as out of school;
- 3 Understand your students and the literacy strengths that they bring to school;
- 4 Avoid deficit and stereotypical stories about students and their families;
- 5 Ensure access to opportunities for real-life and authentic learning;
- 6 Cater for diversity;
- 7 Develop a learning environment where students take an active role in learning.

## Reflecting on practice and learning

As has already been said, teaching literacies is a complex process. Reflection is widely regarded as a useful tool for unpacking the complexities and thinking about both practice and learning. Mortari (2012), for example, argued that reflection is an important part of becoming a professional and is often described as ‘a necessary condition for acquiring expertise’ (p. 525). There has certainly been a long tradition of support for reflective activities in education and many examples can be seen throughout this book.

**Critical reflection** has the potential to ‘enable learning at the nexus of theory and practice’ (Henderson & Noble, 2015, p. 22). The critical element incorporates what might be called ‘a position of doubt’ that helps us to focus on and think about the ‘problematic, tentative, plural, multiple and complex’ nature of what we are investigating (Patterson, 1997, p. 425). This means that we need to look at our focus—whether that be actions,

### critical reflection

Analysing practice, identifying what went well and what did not, and considering what might be ‘done’ differently next time.

ideas, our practice or experience—with ‘hesitation’ (Patterson, 1997, p. 425). In other words, we should not take anything for granted and we should try to see beyond our assumptions about what is ‘normal’. By doing this, we can begin to make sense of experience and ‘re-imagine and ultimately improve future experience’ (Ryan, 2012, p. 209).

Although many models are available for framing critical reflection, two models are offered here as useful examples. These are tools that can be used by pre-service, novice and experienced teachers. In describing these models, I will assume that you will be applying them to classroom practice and the teaching of literacies.

One model is based on the work of Macfarlane, Noble, Kilderry and Nolan (2006) and involves a four step process:

- Deconstruct: Examine your classroom practices, focusing particularly on aspects that you would like to be more effective. Sometimes this will involve thinking about practices that might usually be regarded as ‘normal’ or ‘proper’.
- Confront: Consider the issues you find in your classroom practices and what needs to be modified or changed.
- Theorise: Make links between practice and theory. Identify theories or research evidence that might inform your thinking.
- Think otherwise: Challenge yourself to rethink your practice/s and ‘come up with other ways, or better ways of thinking about and practising teaching’. (p. 16)

These steps can be translated into a set of questions about your work as a teacher of literacies. Questions might include:

- Deconstruct: What am I doing? How am I doing it?
- Confront: Am I providing effective literacies teaching? What is working? What is not working? What might I need to change?
- Theorise: How might I theorise this? What theories, research and evidence can I draw on? How might I research this in my classroom?
- Think otherwise: What could I do differently? What options do I have? What aspects of my practice should change?

The second model—from Henderson and Noble (2015)—is based on Macfarlane and colleagues’ (2006) model, but it allows for some variations, including collaboration. In working with pre-service, novice and experienced teachers, Karen Noble and I came to the conclusion that collaborative critical reflection was a very effective way of gathering multiple ideas and perspectives and of thinking about multiple options.

If critical reflection focuses on what we might term ‘problems of practice’—issues that are ‘intimately embedded in practice’ (O’Connell Rust, 2009, p. 1883)—then our search for potential solutions needs to include multiple possibilities for action. As stated earlier, relying on a one-size-fits-all approach to the teaching of literacies is a narrow way to proceed. It is preferable to develop a repertoire of teaching practices that will assist us with a range of possible solutions to the issues and challenges that emerge. Such an approach will enable us to think about the adapting, morphing, shaping, refining and

changing (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005; McNaughton & Lai, 2009) that was noted earlier in this chapter.

Like the Macfarlane and colleagues' model (2006), the Henderson and Noble (2015) model, a model of collaborative critical reflection, has four steps:

- Confront in collaboration;
- Deconstruct in collaboration;
- Theorise from multiple perspectives;
- Think otherwise about practice.

You will no doubt have noticed that our model has swapped the positions of confront and deconstruct. We did this because the process of confronting is a good starting point for identifying and acknowledging the problem or the aspect that we want to investigate. Once we have done that, we can begin the processes of deconstructing the issue or problem and the implications for practice, theorising and seeking evidence, and 'ensuring that future practice is informed by multiple perspectives' (Henderson & Noble, 2015, p. 106).

By presenting models of critical reflection in this first chapter, I am hoping that they provide useful tools for reading and making sense of the remaining chapters and their embedded reflection activities. The models can be taken into your professional practice and teaching career, to provide a framework for thinking about ways of enhancing practice and supporting students to be effective learners of literacies.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have interwoven the case study of Ryan with a discussion of some of the research relating to the learning and teaching of literacies in school contexts. Ryan's story provides a real-life example of challenges experienced by teachers: how we can engage all students in school literacy learning, build on students' strengths, think beyond taken-for-granted views of particular students and particular families, and ensure that the type of learning we offer is relevant. The chapter concluded with a discussion of critical reflection as a tool for considering multiple ways of enhancing our teaching of literacies.

### Tutorial exercises

Ryan was a puzzle for school personnel. He appeared neither interested in schooling nor focused on learning; yet he continued to surprise teachers with his success on literacy tests. A simplistic explanation of his experiences in school would be to say that one teacher did a bad job while another did a good one. However, such an explanation glosses over the complexities of Ryan's time at the school. Ryan was a student at risk: 'at risk of being isolated from his year level peers, at risk of being suspended and perhaps

even excluded, and at risk of becoming totally disengaged from the school system and from school literacy learning' (Henderson, 2008, p. 85). In fact, 'it became apparent that "easy solutions" were not the answer to solving "the problem" that Ryan had become' (p. 85).

- 1 Reflect on Ryan's life and his literacy practices outside school. How might this information have been used to engage Ryan in school literacy learning?
- 2 Consider a student you have taught or observed, who was disengaged or beginning to disengage from learning literacies in the classroom. How would you ensure that the student was 'turned on' to the learning of literacies? Using the list of seven suggested principles to inform the teaching of literacies on page 13, develop a plan for working with that student.

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## Further reading

The readings below focus on some of the ideas presented in this chapter. Comber and Kamler's (2005) book describes teachers 'turning around' students to literacy learning, while the Henderson (2008) article provides further insights into some of the complexities of understanding Ryan as a literacy learner, beyond those discussed in this chapter. The edited book by Purcell-Gates (2008) shares multiple case studies of 'literacy in actual use' (p. viii) and Ryan (2008) discusses the use of literacy projects to engage students in literacy learning.

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