























which are always present. He sees language as something that derives from a context of a situation. In any situation, users take on roles and adopt certain styles of language appropriate to the role. Hence, any text consists of three major functions. Halliday calls the first the *ideational function*, which involves the information of the text. The second, the *interpersonal*, deals with the relationships between the speaker/writer and listener/reader/viewer. The third and final function, the *textual function*, makes a text coherent rather than just a collection of words. Halliday's second function foregrounds the relationship between the text producer and the interpreter of that text; the listener/reader/viewer is placed in some sort of interpersonal stance. In critical literacy, it is this function of text that is analysed. It is also through this function that language helps to create classroom relationships and learner identities so central to learning and achieving the goals of education. Halliday's views of language underpin many current approaches to language curriculum.

Users of a language make choices as to what roles are appropriate. We make assessments of the power relations involved—for example, between parent and child, teacher and student, husband and wife, or doctor and patient—and choose certain linguistic features appropriate to the roles assigned. A term used to describe this is 'positioning'. Speakers, writers and film producers ascribe social positions to their listeners/readers/viewers and take on social 'stances' when using language. The positions we ascribe and the stances we take depend on how we perceive our role and that of others in a group. Even in friendship groups, some individuals take on more 'power' than others; that is, they command more attention than others.

In any society, some members may not be in a position to speak or be listened to. The positions we construct generally conform to appropriate institutionalised behaviours and (culturally determined) values. Texts present information in particular ways (based on ideologies) and construct subjectivities (the ways people come to see themselves and the value positions they take up) in certain more or less predictable ways. For example, in popular romance novels authors tend to construct males as active and females as passive. Advertisements aim to position readers/viewers to construct certain images of modern life and persuade them to take on a product or service as socially desirable. People with differences are often constructed as disabled or deficient. We position ourselves and others through language.

Language users (speakers or sign-language users, writers and readers, creators and viewers) use language for some purpose in varying social contexts. As such, language users draw on their power and status in particular social groupings. The use of language involves positioning others in certain ways. It creates certain kinds of subjectivities that express or reflect particular cultural values and power orientations. For example, media reports on asylum seekers trying to reach Australia often use terms such as 'illegals' or 'queue jumpers'. We would advocate that educators teach students to be aware of these textual devices and strategies in order to resist such manipulation.

**critical literacy**  
An approach and perspective in reading and analysing texts for underlying socially constructed concepts as power, inequality and injustice in human relationships.

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Critical literacy teaches students to recognise the underlying ideologies in texts and assess the power relations involved.

An alternative construction on the issue of asylum seekers would be to talk about them as ‘displaced or dispossessed peoples’.

It is important to note that from this perspective of language use the focus is on the nature of representations or subjectivities, and certain kinds of representations or subjectivities are seen as oppressed, dominated or subordinated, while others are seen as oppressive and dominating. Subjectivity constructed along the lines of race, gender and disability are other examples. Students need to become aware of the beliefs and values (ideologies) operating in texts (their own and others’) and consider other ways of constructing texts that are less oppressive. This perspective underlies current views on what knowledge of language students need to have, which is explored in Chapter 4.

**ACTIVITY**

Select a significant event and read related articles in different newspapers or websites. See if you can determine the different ideologies (belief systems) underpinning each article by identifying the different uses of linguistic forms, such as choice of vocabulary and the use of passives and nominalisations (where verbs are turned into nouns, and sentences have no explicit subject or agent—refer to Chapter 8 for more details). Note the descriptors and metaphors that are chosen to characterise those involved and the event itself.

1. Consider the grade levels that you may be teaching. How might you construct a similar activity for that group? What would you expect the students to learn?

## CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE

In our concept of language as discussed above, language is perceived as being more than speech—it consists of a number of codes. What are these codes? If we investigate what we use for communication, we can begin to appreciate the potential range of language codes, both verbal and non-verbal, at our disposal.

**ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION**

A selection of language codes is listed below. Classify the codes into categories of your own choice:

body language	gesture	sculpture
Braille	graphics	semaphore
cries	instrumental (played)	song
dance	interior design	speech

design	mime	sport (rules)
drama	native sign language	textiles (art)
finger-spelling	painting	traffic code
flower arrangement	score (music)	writing

1. What categories did you make?
2. Why did you classify them that way?  
Share your responses with others.

One way of classifying language codes is by the method of production; for example, oral, graphic or gestural. Another classification is by deciding whether or not words are the basis of the code; that is, whether it is verbal or non-verbal. Table 1.2 uses these categories to classify the different codes we use to make sense of our world. In addition, you could add such mixed codes as drama, opera and interior design.

**TABLE 1.2** LANGUAGE MATRIX

MODES	ORAL	GRAPHIC	GESTURAL	MULTIMODAL
Verbal	Speech Song	Writing Braille Digital texts	Finger-spelling Lip-reading Semaphore Morse code	Websites Film performance Video clips
Non-verbal	Cries Laughter	Signs (directional) Signs (mathematical) Music score Art Object arrangement	Sign language Signs (in sport) Body position Posture Movement Facial expression	

By considering all the possibilities associated with language codes and the ways they can be classified, we begin to appreciate the complexity of and variation in language use and how language use today involves **multiliteracies**. First coined by the New London Group in 1990s (Cazden et al., 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), multiliteracies encompasses both the method of production and the basis of the code (verbal and non-verbal). The authors describe 'modes of meaning-making' where the textual is related to the visual, audio, spatial and behavioural. But there is another dimension to multiliteracies that acknowledges the cultural and linguistic diversity common in a globalised world: that of the sociocultural dimension of meaning-making.

#### **multiliteracies**

An understanding of literacy that acknowledges the changes in communication due to new technologies, shifts in language usage within different cultures and the effects of globalisation.

The New London Group members argue for the importance of thinking about design—not only what multimodal patterns are possible, but also how students are designers of meaning in these different ways. They stress the importance of students to be active participants in creating social change and making social futures through access and understanding multiliteracies.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION

1. List the characteristics that the codes shown in Table 1.2 have in common, then list the functions of these codes. Share your responses with others. Should the different codes be taught in isolation from each other? Why or why not?
2. Blogs and wikis are just two examples of internet communication tools that are readily available. Identify a blog or wiki topic that you would like to try and invite several others to join you (wikispaces.com, pbworks.com and blogger.com are some sites that can help get you started). Choose a topic that interests you and experiment with the dimensions of multiliteracies associated with the media to communicate ideas about the topic.
  - a. What verbal and non-verbal codes did you use?
  - b. How was your activity design work rather than writing?
  - c. How important was the collaborative aspect of your blog/wiki in creating and sharing meaning?
  - d. Are they appropriate to use within the classroom, for which grade level, and why?
  - e. What possibilities and challenges would you see in using this in the classroom?

From the activities above, it becomes very evident that there are many features that can be ascribed to the characteristics of language and language codes. For instance, language is systematic—signs and symbols are selected and used according to rules. These rules have been developed by the users and determined by the culture, and have to be learned by new language users such as children and second language learners. Language is also arbitrary—there is no inherent reason why the word ‘cat’ refers to the small, furry animal; it has been agreed to by a group of language users. For meaning to be shared, the signs and symbols, and the way they are to be used in any language, have to be agreed upon by the language users.

In other words, the agreement is a convention. Language is symbolic. In the example above, the word ‘cat’ is a symbol for a particular type of furry animal. There is no inherent relationship between the animal and the word or symbol ‘cat’. What is

wonderful about language is that it is generative; with a limited set of symbols and agreed rules for structuring (or stringing together) these symbols, we can always create new meanings. Language is continually changing to meet the needs of language users. Words come and go, and the meanings of words change over time. New words enter the language when there is a need to do so, such as those generated by new technologies.

The nature and use of our language sets us apart from other animals. Through language we symbolise experiences; the mental representation is something that lasts in time and doesn't disappear when the phenomenon disappears. By putting our experiences into language, we distance ourselves from them, transforming them into something that can be worked upon, and creating new meanings. Others can respond to our representations and work on them with us. We can learn from these responses. This enables us to make great advances in our knowledge and understanding of our environment, and makes language so powerful in our learning.

Given all these characteristics, we can begin to define language as:

A system of arbitrary signs agreed to by a community of users, transmitted and received for a specific purpose, in relation to the shared world of the users.

## LANGUAGE, THINKING AND LEARNING

Language, which is culturally determined, influences what we think and how we think. Furthermore, language gives us a way of reflecting on our thinking, and talking about our thinking, thereby enabling us to have greater control over our thinking. In this way language is like a pane of glass through which we can view our thinking. Language, meaning, thinking and learning are all very closely interrelated. This concept is basic to understanding the role of language in learning. With changes in language, particularly through the new communication technologies, questions are being asked as to whether how we learn is changing.

But what do we mean by 'learning'? We have said that language is central to both learning and teaching. Learning occurs when we change or elaborate what is already known by us. Learning is a process of making connections, identifying patterns and organising previously unrelated bits of knowledge, behaviour and activities into new (for the learner) patterned wholes. It is about making meanings; that is, about comprehending. We learn by attempting to relate new experiences to what we already know or believe. Learning is therefore about making new meanings for the learner, and these meanings are generally developed and articulated through language. Learning and the role of language are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 12.

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Language is systematic, arbitrary, symbolic and generative. Talking to students about the characteristics of language within the context of their learning develops an appreciation for its diversity and flexibility.

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Language is central to thinking and learning because it enables us to challenge familiar patterns by relating to or changing what we know.

## LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

### ACTIVITY

Human beings are born with an innate ability to learn and to acquire language; however, we are not born with the same innate ability to acquire the written language.

1. What do you remember about learning to read?
2. Do you have *one* specific memory of learning to read? If you can't remember something, why do you think this may be the case? Think about some of the challenges you may have experienced in learning to read.

**literacy** A collection of competencies needed to read, view, produce and interpret language and symbols in multiple contexts and formats for understanding and communication for various purposes.

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**Literacy has come to mean much more than teaching reading and writing; rather it refers to a range of competencies associated with language and symbol systems that students need to know.**

Written language is one code of language, therefore whatever is discussed about language in general has implications for understanding reading and writing. Written language is different from speech, but there are many similarities between the codes because they are both verbal; that is, based on words. They are both processes. Reading and writing cannot be separated from speaking, listening and interacting; or from using language to reflect and act on the world (Gee, 2001). Development of one certainly enhances the development of the other. Learning oral and written language is discussed in Chapters 9 and 11.

One important factor to keep in mind when thinking about language and literacy is the relationship between language and culture. Language, as discussed above, is a part of culture. It is used to pass on culture, but its use is also determined by the culture. Contemporary social life is 'textually mediated' (Fairclough, 1999). The huge uptake of email, Twitter and SMS, and the use of chat rooms, blogs and Facebook, and more recent platforms such as Tumblr, are examples of the way text is being used to establish and develop relationships.

The concept of **literacy** is also culturally determined and constantly changing. Once literacy was defined narrowly as reading and writing using print, but contemporary definitions emphasise that literacy is more than print-based. As discussed above, educators now think about multiliteracies, which acknowledges not only the multiple nature of literacies but also the multiple uses to which literacy is put: 'It is not simply that the tools of literacy have changed; the nature of texts, of language, of literacy itself is undergoing crucial transformations' (Costanzo, 1994, p. 11). To be considered literate today, you must know how to use literacy for a wide range of culturally determined purposes. Literacy has come to refer to a range of competencies associated with language and different symbol systems (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011b).



### THINK ABOUT...

While the term 'illiteracy' dates back to the seventeenth century, the word 'literacy' first appeared in the late nineteenth century and the term 'literacy education' was not used in Australia until the latter half of the twentieth century.

1. Some languages do not have a term for literacy—what social or cultural events might have influenced the need for such a term?
2. Do you ever hear the term 'illiterate' used? If so, in what contexts?
3. Are there contexts when one is illiterate? What factors are involved in such contexts?
4. Think of the different ways the term 'literacy' is used today. What is meant by these different uses?

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Different cultures place different values on aspects of literacy and have different uses for reading and writing. McNaughton (1995) has described how literacy, as practised by families, socialises children into appropriate ways of using written language for a specific family within a specific sociocultural environment. Literature is one particular way literacy is used within a culture, but not all members of a culture will necessarily support the same literate values. Some may regard fiction negatively, perceiving it as not representing reality. In some families, literacy will be valued for the support it gives to getting particular tasks done. Pahl and Rowsell (2012, p. 8) comment, 'Looking across cultures, religions, races, book sharing is one way to become literate, but it is not the only way. What we have found ... is that certain fields still privilege paradigms and models that narrow their scope.' In a society, different types of literacies are valued more than others; certainly some literacies in schooling have been valued more than others, which has implications for those coming to school with the less-valued literacies.

The widespread use of technology in our society is leading to different uses of reading and writing—to the development of different literacies, such as digital literacy. For example, a new symbol system has been developed by the widespread use of mobile phones and other communication technologies. Use of computers, tablets and other new communication technologies in classrooms has led to different teaching and learning strategies: 'No previous technology for literacy has been adopted by so many, in so many different places, in such a short period, and with such profound consequences' (Coiro et al., 2008, p. 2). Further, 'literacy ... has now come to mean a rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read and write, view, listen, compose and communicate information' (Coiro et al., 2008, p. 5).

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 Teachers need to be sensitive to the texts they use with students as they form a powerful part of the socialisation process.

It is important that, as adults, we consider the type of texts we give students to read, as this will greatly influence how they perceive literacy, their world and their place in it. To learn to read is more than learning decoding skills; it is also about learning to use reading and writing for a wide range of socially constructed purposes, which allow us to make social sense of the vastly different forms of print we encounter, including those on the internet. Hence, it is important that we consider the content of texts for their social values; for example, in relation to gender, racism and ageism (Meek, 1989). The approach taken in critical literacy is to urge the reader to interact with and question texts; to look behind a writer's words and images to the underlying sociocultural and political assumptions (Freebody & Luke, 1990). 'Literacy is a social and cultural construction ... its functions and uses are never neutral or innocent ... the meanings constructed in text are ideological and involved in producing, reproducing and maintaining arrangements of power which are unequal' (Comber & Kamler, 1997, p. 31). Critical literacy encourages a critical perspective on *literacies* themselves, a critical perspective on particular *texts* and a critical reading of the wider *social practices* mediated through texts (Lankshear, 1997).

As everyday lives become more pervasively textually mediated, people's lives are increasingly shaped by representations that are produced elsewhere: representations of the world they live in, the activities they are involved in, their relationships with each other, and even who they are and how they (should) see themselves. The politics of representation becomes increasingly important: whose representations they are, who gains what from them, what social relations they draw people into, what their ideological effects are, and what alternative representations there are (Fairclough, 1999, p. 75).

In addition, we need to consider which literacies are important for empowering our learners. Merely teaching reading and writing skills is not enough without enabling learners to become more aware of their world and be in creative control of it. This is the view of Freire (1996), a renowned liberatory educator who wrote at great length on the importance of literacy for functioning as a human being. Through his work with peasant groups in Brazil and Chile, he emphasised the need to 'read the word and the world'. Freire invited group members to speak about their experiences, thus establishing oral language as the basis for their learning to read and write. The contextual significance of their literacy skills enabled them to understand the social and cultural conditions in which they lived and to realise that such an existence was not inevitable but rather the result of inequitable power practices. One of Freire's most compelling ideas is *conscientização*, a Portuguese word to mean something like 'consciousness raising'. Freire was concerned that people should become aware of political and cultural structures in which they lived, and understand their own complicity in this oppression. Central to his position is the argument that all humans must function equally if any are to function as human. His view is overtly political and has come to be associated with

the terms ‘critical pedagogy’ and ‘critical literacies’. **Critical pedagogy** is a philosophy of education where the aim of schooling is seen in terms of social justice and equity. The pedagogies derived from this philosophy focus on students being encouraged to question the assumptions that underpin or inform policies and structures; in particular those that lead to all types of injustice. Freire’s insights have global implications. Critical literacy grows out of critical pedagogy and provides powerful tools of analysis to serve the purposes of critical pedagogy.

It is not enough merely to recognise that language use is a social construction; understanding can be created most fully only if language users are wide awake both to the voices of others and to their own part in that construction. When we are aware of our own ability to choose how we constitute ourselves and how we constitute others, the nature of the conversations in which we participate becomes a kind of negotiation with others. In these circumstances, both our language and our understandings of one another change and grow (Fleischer & Schaafsma, 1998, p. xix).

The more one engages in conscious action to understand and transform the world (one’s reality) through the interplay between reflection and action, the more fully human we become; that is, we have greater control over our destinies. If we just accept the world as set by others, we allow ourselves to become dehumanised—an object shaped and made by others rather than a person expressing their uniquely human potential to be involved actively in creating what they become. As human beings, our shared vocation is to become active individuals engaged on an equal basis with others in the process of creating (or naming) the world; a world that we hope is fair and equitable for all. We should engage in the ongoing creation of history and culture rather than exist merely as passive objects accepting reality and the world as ready-made by other people. In creating history and culture, we create our own beings in the process. This is a great challenge for literacy education and education more broadly.

Clearly, our understanding of literacy has broadened greatly from just referring to reading and writing, and continues to change as new technologies and practices emerge. Nevertheless, we can develop a working definition of literacy:

A collection of competencies and practices needed to read, view, listen, produce and interpret language in multiple contexts and formats for understanding and communication for different purposes.

**critical pedagogy**  
A philosophy of education that addresses inequality through the study of power in teaching and learning, and where students are encouraged to question dominant or common notions of meaning and form their own understandings.

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Paulo Freire influenced the development of critical literacy through his impassioned argument for learning to ‘read the word and the world’. His message reminds us that the context in which we learn is very important.

Consider the following report filed by reporter Alex Murdoch (Australian Associated Press, 26 May 2005):

Corby Case Transfixes a Nation

Her plight has kept millions of Australians glued to their television screens, clogging up talkback radio lines and pledging their hard-earned cash.

## ACTIVITY

But just who is Schapelle Corby? And why has an entire country taken her to heart? To Corby's supporters the 27-year-old is a unique mix of naive surfie chick, Gold Coast beauty student and beautiful divorcee who they claim has been framed for a terrible crime.

Contrast this with the following report aired on Australian television (*National Nine News*, 13 September 2005):

Convicted drug smuggler Schapelle Corby's appeal hopes are in doubt after Indonesia's highest court refused to intervene in her case so potential witnesses from Australia could testify via video link.

1. Why would the first author refer to Corby as a 'naive surfie chick', 'Gold Coast beauty student' and 'beautiful divorcee' in contrast to the second author's reference to Corby as 'convicted drug smuggler'?
2. What effect does the author's choice of words have on the reader?
3. Can you develop students' language and literacy without considering issues of power, control, relationships and actions?
4. In what way is teaching people to read a political exercise?
5. Draft a working definition of literacy that would be helpful for you as a teacher.

## TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE

The different dimensions and complexity of language have been highlighted. Before you read on, it is important for you to determine your own working definition of 'language'. In looking at different definitions, it becomes obvious that views of language have changed over time and they differ depending on the background (discipline) of the writers. Definitions have generally moved away from language as speech and language just for communication to a greater emphasis on the social nature of language.

### ACTIVITY

To help you determine your definition of 'language', consider the following definitions and how they have changed over time (publication dates appear after each quotation). Can you identify which definitions fit under the following categories?

- Language as predominantly speech
- Language as more than speech
- Language as linguistic symbols (words)
- Language as used predominantly for communication
- Language as about making meaning

- Language as used to serve social functions
- Language as a way of acting on the world.

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are, in the first instance, auditory, and they are produced by the so-called 'organs of speech'—animal communication, if communication it may be called, as brought about by involuntary, instinctive cries, is not, in our sense, language at all.

Sapir (1921, revised in 1949, p. 9)

Language is an organised system of linguistic symbols (words) used by human beings to communicate on an abstract level.

- a. Language is basic to all communication through words.
- b. Encompasses all forms of expression.

Wood (1964, pp. 6–7)

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.

Wardhaugh (1969, p. 34)

Language ... [is] human vocal noise (or the graphic representation of this noise in writing) used systematically and conventionally by a community for purposes of communication. Occasionally language is used for purposes other than communication; for example, to let off steam ... or as a vehicle for our own thoughts when no one else is present. But such uses of language are secondary.

Crystal (1971, p. 243)

Language is the sum total of explicit and implicit systems used by the individual to structure the environment.

Cameron and Saunders (1977, p. 217)

Language is for negotiating meaning, building understanding and relationships, and the activity of using language for any of these purposes always involves creating what is technically called a text—a stretch of language which is coherent and meaningful.

Christie (1987, p. 207)

Language, the possibility of making meaning, is the essence of being human. It is at the centre of individual empowerment. Through it, instead of simply being subject to the structures and activities that define the indifferent societal system, one interacts with and participates in the creation of the system. Through it one engages in the continual, active process of being.

Courts (1991, p. 137)

Whenever language is used, it is used in events—events that capture and create relationships among people and between people and objects (material and otherwise) in the culture. What is learned when people learn language includes all those relationships that were part of the events carried out through language use. The language used within those events is usually used for some purpose other than instruction in or evaluation of the language use itself—for informing, persuading, joking, warning, teasing, explaining, cajoling and so forth.

Edelsky (1996, p. 91)

The view of language as social action differs considerably from the view of language as a medium or vehicle of communication. The notion that language is made for communication suggests that writers or speakers simply convey or try to get across a message as ‘pure content’ in some shape or form. This kind of view, which is very pervasive in Western thought and history, tends to imply a view of language users as transmitters and receivers of neutral information. ... [L]anguage is a tool for acting in an interested and engaged way, on and in the material and social world.

Hodgens (2000, pp. 19–20)

Languages are not purely linguistic entities. They serve social functions. In order to define a language, it is important to look to its social and political functions, as well as its linguistic features. So a language can be thought of as a collection of dialects that are usually linguistically similar, used by different social groups who choose to say that they are speakers of one language which functions to unite and represent them to other groups.

Holmes (2001, p. 130)

Humans have many ways of making meanings, including gestures, dance, painting, singing and other forms of making music to name a few. Language is an important semiotic system we use, though it is in practice sometimes hard to separate it from other forms of semiosis in which we engage.

Christie (2005, p. 8)

[L]anguage is not a mirror of society. It is an unstable social practice whose meaning shifts, depending upon the context in which it is used. ... [L]anguage is not a neutral and objective conduit for description of the ‘real world’. Rather, linguistic descriptions are not simply about the world but serve to construct it.

Kincheloe (2007, p. 15).

Language varies according to its uses as well as its users, and according to where it is used and to whom, as well as according to whom is using it.

Holmes (2008, p. 235)

1. What is your definition of language?
2. Compare your response with your previous definition and file this response with others for future comparisons. It would be useful to also look at definitions of literacy and how they have changed over time.

Tyler wasn't aware of pragmatics (the way the context influences how we use language). When he spoke he was greeting his professor as he would a friend. Pragmatics plays an important role in social situations, and can impact how people are perceived. As you continue to read this book, think about the situations where you use different 'languages' when you speak. Are there languages you use in the classroom versus when you are with family or friends? Be aware of when you start to change languages in different contexts.

REVISITING  
THE VIGNETTE

### -SUMMARY-

This chapter briefly discussed the complexities of language and indicated the different aspects of language that we are focusing on. First and foremost, we defined language as a social practice rooted in a culture, and that ideologies and power relations are embedded in language. We emphasised that language is more than speech, and is also more than reading and writing. Rather, we use a number of systems, both verbal and non-verbal, to construct and convey meaning. Hence, we see language as consisting of a number of codes. Different codes and combinations of codes are used, depending on the purpose and context. We need a range of language codes if we are to be effective language users.

We discussed the characteristics of language: that it is systematic, arbitrary, conventional, symbolic and generative. Language is dynamic—it is agreed to by the users, and it changes with needs over time. Currently, with the introduction of new information and communication technologies, language and its use is changing rapidly. As such, the language of the internet provides a wonderful site for studying language change and growth as a basis for learning about foundational language concepts.

We emphasised that written language is a part of language and that the many factors that influence language use are also relevant for literacy. We also emphasised that literacy is much more than alphabetic texts and that understanding multiliteracies is important for understanding the complexities of using and producing in a digitally connected world. Language and literacies enable us to control our world.

Finally, literacy includes a number of linguistic and other symbolic competencies, and defining literacies often is motivated by political agendas.

### -IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING-

1. In our classrooms we have the enormous responsibility of ensuring that we enable our students to develop the skills to participate effectively in a democratic society, to have access to the language of power, and to have the skills to use it effectively and appropriately. We need to empower our students. As teachers we need to be aware of how our use of language impacts on students' developing identities and how they see themselves as learners.

*Activity:* Choose a grade level and plan an activity that invites students to create representations of themselves as language users. Encourage them to take a multiliteracies perspective.

2. Language is a teacher's most powerful tool in fostering learning across the curriculum. The way a teacher uses language will determine the classroom learning environment; whether it invites collaborative learning, risk taking, sharing of ideas and respect for the views of others.

*Activity:* Articulate the type of classroom environment you wish to create and then consider how you can use language to foster this environment.

3. As teachers we need to have better knowledge of language in order to be more effective in assisting our learners to be competent, critically aware language users.

*Activity:* As professionals we are required to be lifelong learners and extend and deepen our understanding of teaching and learning. Part of this is to assess your knowledge and taking steps to improve areas where there are gaps. Reflect on your understanding of language and literacy. Write down any areas where you feel uncertain about your knowledge and skill level. Decide how you can access that knowledge or develop the skills.

4. We need to have greater awareness of the language practices we validate in the classroom and their impact on our students.

*Activity:* Consider the following situation and discuss your thoughts with a colleague if possible:

As a teacher in a classroom, you observe that when students ask for your help in spelling, they only type in the first few letters and wait for the computer spell-checker to highlight the error. They then select from the alternatives provided. What would be your reaction?



- a. Do you consider they are 'cheating' and not attempting to spell appropriately?
  - b. Would you value that as language users they are being efficient and using an innovative strategy suited to the context?
5. We need to be aware of the types of texts we provide for our students to read because these influence not only how students perceive literacy but also their values.

*Activity:* View some of the books used in a classroom and take note of who is portrayed in the texts, who is missing, and how different groups are portrayed.

- a. What values are the students being exposed to?
- b. Are these the values that are conducive to an equitable, democratic society?

### -CHILDREN'S LITERATURE-

The following are titles that can be used to build on or connect with the themes of this chapter:

Bloom, S. (2005). *Splendid Friend Indeed*, Honesdale: Boyds Mills Press.

Henkes, K. (1996). *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, New York: HarperCollins.

King, S. M. (2008). *Leaf*. Gosford: Scholastic.

Stewart, B. (2012). *The Red Wheelbarrow*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

Online picture books that use sign language:

Herman and Rosie in Auslan—[m.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_rXuWfyhYfw](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=_rXuWfyhYfw)

Kids Corner—<http://auslanstories.weebly.com/kids-corner.html>

### -WEBSITES-

**Reddit—[www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)**

**An online community where users submit and vote on the content, which is an interesting way to see how social and cultural influences can determine messages.**

**-FURTHER READING-**

- Byram, M. (Ed.). (2004). *The Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning*. London: Routledge.
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