

# Introduction to Literacy: Definitions and Theoretical Perspectives



## Chapter objectives

This chapter will increase your understanding of:

- definitions of literacy
- multiliteracies
- theoretical perspectives on literacy learning
- affective factors in literacy learning.

In this first chapter of *Language, Literacy and Early Childhood Education*, third edition, you will be introduced to various definitions of literacy, including the concept of ‘multiliteracies’. You will discover that literacy is a dynamic social practice that is used in different ways for different purposes by diverse groups. Literacy is highly influenced by context, so with rapid advances in technology and increasing globalisation, it has changed significantly since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this chapter, we also present major theoretical perspectives on how children learn literacy and outline how these perspectives have shaped pedagogical approaches. Finally, we will briefly discuss affective factors such as children’s motivation and engagement in literacy learning.

## Key terms

affective

cognitive developmental perspective

emergent perspective

evidence-based

maturational perspective

multiliteracies

multimodal

socio-cultural perspective

whole language

## Introduction: Defining literacy

There is no ‘best’ definition of literacy, as literacy is almost a living thing that changes and is moulded according to the needs and practices of groups of people. As Thames and York (2004, p. 603) put it: ‘Literacy is complex; it is a constantly mediated force that can take on a life of its own in different contexts, cultures, and social and political arenas’. Definitions of literacy reflect various theoretical perspectives, which are briefly outlined later in this chapter.

Although there is no universally agreed definition, most contemporary definitions of literacy do include reading, writing, speaking and listening and viewing or visual literacy. Many definitions also include critical thinking, critical literacy, and the ability to choose and use appropriate modes of communication for particular contexts or purposes. The ability to use and produce a *variety* of text forms, including electronic and multimodal texts, is seen as a crucial element of literacy. Some contemporary definitions of literacy are very broad, with some even including dance, music and movement.

### Why are definitions important?

People may wonder why definitions and theoretical perspectives matter and how they relate to educators’ everyday, practical work in the classroom or early childhood setting. In fact, definitions and theoretical perspectives matter greatly, because they influence curricular decision-making, at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, there are bodies that produce the curriculum policies and documents that educators must implement, and definitions of literacy play a role here. At the micro level, individual educators create and implement classroom or childcare centre curriculum—and everything an educator does is inevitably filtered through their personal beliefs, understandings, definitions and theories about literacy. When writing their teaching philosophies and rationales, educators need to be able to coherently explain and justify the definitions, theories and research that underlie their practices.

### Definitions in Australia

Definitions of literacy in Australia are influenced by international definitions and trends. UNESCO (2004) defines literacy as: ‘[T]he ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts’.

Definitions of literacy have changed over the years, both internationally and nationally, and the reasons for these changes will become apparent when we outline the theoretical perspectives that have been influential. First, we present the definitions that are in current curriculum and policy documents. *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) defines literacy as follows:

Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing. Contemporary texts include electronic and print-based media. In an increasingly technological world, the ability to critically analyse texts is a key component of literacy (p. 38).

The Australian Curriculum: English defines literacy as follows: ‘Literacy involves students in listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and

modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts'. In the Australian Curriculum, it is acknowledged that language and literacy change according to the context; thus it is important to teach children how to 'do' literacy in different subject areas. Within the 'Literacy as a general capability' scope description, the following definition is used: 'Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school'.

The Australian Curriculum: English divides the English learning area into three strands: language, literature and literacy. It should be noted that many other definitions, including international definitions, include the appreciation of literature and knowledge about language *within* the broader definition of literacy and do not treat language, literature and literacy as separate strands. The Australian Curriculum: English describes the three interrelated strands as:

- *Language*: knowing about the English language
- *Literature*: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literary texts
- *Literacy*: expanding the repertoire of English usage.

ACARA, 2018a

The language strand is concerned with knowledge *about* language, be it written, spoken or visual; the literature strand has an emphasis on literary texts, which may not necessarily be fictional; and literacy is primarily concerned with *using* language for a variety of purposes. In contrast to the EYLF, which is concerned with the literacy learning of children from birth to five years, the Australian Curriculum: English does not highlight the arts, such as music and dance.

It would be fair to say that, internationally, literacy nowadays is viewed as a flexible group of skills and strategies that are closely linked to context and purpose. Contemporary views of literacy have moved beyond simple print literacy to encompass notions of active citizenship, new communication practices and information technologies, critical thinking, and linguistic and cultural diversity. This multiplicity of literacy practices has led many educators to use plural terms such as 'literate practices' and 'multiliteracies' to acknowledge the diverse ways in which people use non-verbal, spoken, print, visual and multimodal communicative practices. Mills (2016) has suggested that as well as classic literacies such as socio-cultural, multimodal, and critical approaches, we should now acknowledge socio-spatial, socio-material and sensory literacies. These emerging perspectives are all not covered in this chapter but some of them are discussed in Chapters 24 and 25.

## Our Definition of a 'Literate Person'

A literate person has a repertoire of understandings and capabilities that enable effective representation of ideas and communication. A literate person can participate in comprehending and composing, with critical awareness and confidence, a range of texts in spoken, written, visual and multimodal forms that serve a variety of purposes.

Educators' own personal definitions of literacy develop throughout their careers and are influenced by classroom experiences and professional reading, professional development and professional discussions. Educators may also be influenced by their own childhood experiences in becoming literate and their personal beliefs about how people learn. It is worth noting that we as educators sometimes

have fragmented theories with conflicting elements. For this reason, it is necessary to reflect regularly on what we do in the classroom and on how our personal definitions and theories interrelate with our practices. We may have an *espoused theory* (what we say or think we believe about literacy learning) and a *theory in use* (the theory underpinning our actual teaching practices) (Argyris & Schön, 1974). There should, in reality, be no discrepancy.

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

### Literacy theories

Which theories do you think influenced the educators who taught you to read? Why do you think this?



## Multiliteracies

### multiliteracies

A term reflecting the view that there are many literacies that stem from the communicative practices of diverse cultures. The role of technology in literacy is also foregrounded.

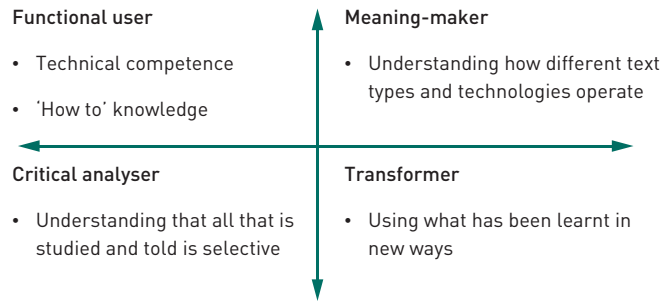
As mentioned above, some authors have suggested the use of the term ‘literacies’, which acknowledges that there are many different ways of ‘doing’ literacy. The term **multiliteracies** was coined by the New London Group (NLG) (1996), who argued that there are many literacies, examples being scientific literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy and so on. Furthermore, different cultural groups practice specific literacies because they have their own particular ways of doing things, ways of seeing the world, and communicative practices. For example, literacy practices in a family that has up-to-the-minute computers and mobile devices, numerous books and a fast internet connection may be very different from literacy in a family living in a remote area that may not have access to these resources. Furthermore, not all families and communities value the same things, which impacts on their literacy practices.

Multiliteracies theory proposes that definitions of literacy should be broad, to reflect linguistic and cultural diversity as well as the multiplicity of communication channels or modes through which people may choose to make and convey meaning. The increasing prevalence of electronic multimodal texts, DVDs and picture books, along with the reduced cost of technologies for creating and sharing texts, has changed the textual landscape dramatically. Because multimodal texts can be highly complex, children need to be explicitly taught how to read and write (or comprehend and compose) them. Since the mid-1990s, educators and researchers have significantly extended the work of the NLG and have devised a range of practices that can assist children in becoming multiliterate.

The Multiliteracies Map (Figure 1.1), developed in South Australia (DECS, 2010), is a useful framework that can be used to conceptualise what needs to be taught in early childhood settings. The framework is loosely based on Luke and Freebody’s four resources (Luke & Freebody, 1999), which is described in the discussion of theoretical perspectives below.

The *functional* dimension of the Multiliteracies Map is concerned with the acquisition of technical competence and ‘how to’ knowledge. This might involve: knowing how to use tools such as pencils, pens, tablets, computers or video cameras; recognising and understanding icons when using the computer; knowing how to decode sounds and symbols (including letter–sound correspondences) or knowing how to spell.

Figure 1.1 Multiliteracies Map



The *meaning-making* dimension is to do with understanding how to make meaning from different text types and technologies and how they can be used for a variety of purposes. Here, it is particularly important to draw children's attention to the form or type of text with which they are engaging and how this links to the purpose and audience.

The *critical* dimension is to do with building an understanding that there can be multiple ways of looking at the world and there is no 'universal truth' in any text; authors select what to include in texts for particular reasons. Insights into authors' choices must therefore be considered when engaging with texts, whether comprehending or creating them. Also, the critical dimension involves being able to select appropriate tools, texts and technologies for a particular literacy or communicative task.

The *transformative* dimension is extremely important and is to do with learning how to *use* what has been learnt in novel ways and situations. A child may hear or read a story and transform it into a role-play that is video-recorded or a comic strip, for example. For more information about the Multiliteracies Map and how it works in the early childhood years, see Hill (2004).

Multiliteracies pedagogy aligns well with contemporary early childhood policy, which acknowledges and values diversity and children's voices. As noted by Hesterman (2013, p. 159), 'multiliteracies pedagogy can support children in developing a strong sense of identity and well-being; feeling connected to their world; and becoming confident and involved learners who can communicate effectively using their preferred "languages" of communication'.

Chapter 14, on reading for comprehension, will help you understand the meaning-making dimension, as will the chapters on writing different text forms.

See Chapter 23 for more detail about the critical dimension of literacy.

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

### Literacy practices

Think about your own literacy practices. Where would they fit within the Multiliteracies Map? In what ways do you practice the transformative dimension, for example?



Theoretical perspectives on oral language learning are dealt with in Chapter 4.

## Theoretical perspectives on literacy learning

Over the years, there have been several theoretical perspectives on how children learn literacy. The emphasis in most of the perspectives presented in this chapter is on *print* or *written* literacy. In the context of early childhood education, the following perspectives on print literacy have been the most influential.

## Maturational

### maturational perspective

This perspective posits that children cannot learn to read or write until they are sufficiently biologically mature.

The **maturational perspective** informed practice in the early to mid-twentieth century and held that children could not learn to read or write until they were sufficiently biologically mature. That is, children had to wait until they had reached a mental age of six years, which is when they were deemed to be ready to learn to read and write. To this end, *readiness* tests, which measured visual, auditory and motor skills, were used in schools to ascertain whether children were ready. According to this perspective, which originated largely in the work of Gesell (1928), socio-cultural influences such as home literacy practices and early communicative experiences had little to do with children's capacity to learn to read and write—biological maturation was deemed to be the key.

Much of the early research and theory in the area of literacy was generated by psychologists (such as Gesell). The methodologies employed by psychologists were and generally still are those used in the physical sciences such as chemistry and biology, and therefore focus on aspects of literacy that are observable and measurable. In the name of being objective, this approach can miss or overlook much about literacy learning in context. In the literacy research conducted by psychologists in the first half of the twentieth century, emotions, relationships, cultural factors and even cognitive factors were not studied. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a somewhat narrow view of literacy. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and International Reading Association (IRA) (1998) have expressed concern that maturational perspectives have persisted among many early childhood educators, despite much evidence that this perspective has limited usefulness.

The maturational perspective does not sit well with models of the child put forward in current Australian Early Childhood Education and Care policy, as articulated in the EYLF and the National Quality Standard (NQS), which requires that 'Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and to influence events and their world' (ACECQA, 2013, p. 17). Here, the young child is seen as being competent and having agency, whereas the maturational perspective sees the child as immature and 'unready' for many experiences. Also, current policy documents see socio-cultural influences as paramount, which are not generally considered in maturational perspectives.

## Cognitive developmental

### cognitive developmental perspective

This perspective asserts that children develop in a predetermined way.

The **cognitive developmental perspective** was built on the work of psychologists such as Thorndike. This perspective holds that although children need to reach a point of 'readiness' before being taught to read and write, certain environmental and classroom-based experiences and activities can speed up the maturation process. During the era in which this perspective guided literacy pedagogy, so-called pre-reading activities were introduced to children upon starting school. These had little to do with authentic reading and writing activities. For example, perceptual-motor activities were carried out, which were supposed to prepare children for tracking print with their eyes. Perceptual-motor activities involved tasks to develop gross motor, fine motor and intersensory development, or the coordination of different senses such as hand-eye coordination. Other activities involved the recognition and discrimination of shapes, some of which were letter-like. Many activities were in the form of worksheets, which were perhaps not very motivational or meaningful to children. According to many educators and researchers today, these activities were actually a waste of time (e.g. Vukelich, Christie, Enz & Roskos, 2016), and delayed more

useful reading activities and instruction until the middle of the first year of formal schooling. As with the maturational perspective, there are elements of the cognitive developmental perspective that do not sit well with current Australian policy on Early Childhood Education and Care as espoused in the EYLF and the NQS. For example, many of the pre-reading activities did not recognise the child's right to participate in meaningful activities that focus on the here and now, or the importance of social interaction and play-based learning. Also, the recognition of parents as partners in children's learning was largely absent in the developmental perspective. In fact, the developmental perspective held that if parents tried to 'teach' their children about reading and writing before they reached the point of readiness, they could do more harm than good.

## Emergent

The **emergent perspective**, which arose in the 1970s, constituted a major challenge to the maturational and developmental perspectives, and was based on the works of Jean Piaget. Whereas the maturational and developmental perspectives held that early experiences in the home and community had little to do with successful literacy learning, the emergent perspective posited that these influences were central. It proposed that early literacy experiences in the home, such as talking, singing, drawing and scribbling, lap reading and so on, were central to an ongoing literacy learning *process*, which was seen as active, constructive and social. Literacy learning was no longer seen as the acquisition of a series of discrete skills, but as an ongoing process beginning at birth. Major proponents of this perspective were Marie Clay from New Zealand (1979), Ken Goodman (1973) and Frank Smith (1971). This perspective was at the heart of the **whole language** movement, which encouraged educators to teach reading and writing in the context of real texts such as quality children's literature, and for authentic purposes. Skills such as learning about letter–sound relationships were learnt within the context of whole texts, not as separate, decontextualised sets of skills.

Some researchers, such as Neuman and Roskos (1998) and Alexander (2005), have argued that the term 'emergent' implies that there is a disjuncture between beginning readers and conventional ('real') readers, and that it is in reality difficult to identify a point at which emergent becomes conventional literacy. For this reason, they argue that the term 'emergent' is of limited usefulness and that it may be preferable to see becoming literate as a lifelong process that begins at birth and has no end point. In other words, a continuum that acknowledges the concept of lifelong learning may be of more value than seeing literacy development as a series of discrete stages.

## Cambourne's seven conditions of literacy learning

In the late 1980s, the Australian scholar Brian Cambourne (1988) proposed that many of the conditions that enable the successful learning of spoken or oral language should be transferable to written language contexts. So, in order to learn written literacy, children need to be immersed in written language, be exposed to demonstrations and be in environments in which several other 'conditions' are met. The seven conditions, which have been influential in Australia, are immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, approximation, employment and feedback. It is beyond the scope of this text to describe them in detail, and readers are encouraged to refer to Cambourne's original work.

### emergent perspective

This perspective posits that literacy 'emerges' from a very early age as children are immersed in literacy practices from birth. Their early scribbles and contact with storybooks and other texts in the home and community are seen as emergent writing and reading.

### whole language

A philosophy of literacy education that emphasises meaning-making. This approach encourages starting with whole texts, rather than words or letters in isolation, to teach reading and writing.

Cambourne's framework has been criticised as not being sufficiently research- or 'evidence'-based. However, it would be fair to say that research carried out in later years does support many aspects of Cambourne's framework. For example, research has shown that children often need to be given systematic and explicit teaching in some areas, and it could be argued that this is 'demonstration'. Also, there is plenty of research showing that good feedback is crucial in the development of literacy (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

## Socio-cultural

### socio-cultural perspective

A perspective that sees literacy as a social practice, something that varies according to communicative purposes and socio-cultural context.

**Socio-cultural perspectives** of literacy learning emerged in the 1990s. This view of literacy learning further highlights the importance of cultural practices in the home and in other social groupings. According to this view, some children go to school with experiences and attitudes that are closely aligned to what is needed in school literacy contexts. These children are advantaged in that they can accommodate easily to the school environment and the literacies that are 'done' in such settings. Other children, however, may not have the appropriate *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1977) or *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Niff & Gonzales, 1992) to help them get to grips with the literacy practices that are valued and practised in formal educational contexts.

Thanks to the socio-cultural perspective, early childhood professionals have come to appreciate the importance of finding out about, valuing and building upon literacy practices that occur in the home. They realise that they need to find ways to build bridges between home and school literacies. Furthermore, they value diversity and the importance of contextual factors in literacy learning. Drawing from the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), they see social interaction as fundamental in literacy learning.

Barratt-Pugh (1998, p. 5) described six elements of a socio-cultural view of literacy:

- 1 Children's learning about the nature of literacy and how to 'do' literacy arises from participating in a variety of literacy activities in the home and the community.
- 2 Literacy practices are often 'culturally specific' and these practices contribute to children's sense of identity.
- 3 Children have a variety of understandings about what literacy is and how it is 'done'.
- 4 There are different literacy practices for a variety of literacy purposes.
- 5 Children learn literacy in different ways, or have different 'patterns' of literacy learning.
- 6 Literacy practices are valued differently, depending on the social and educational context.

Freebody and Luke's (1992) socio-cultural theory of reading asserts that there are four sets of roles, resources or practices that children need to be able to control in order to become effective readers and writers. The four practices are not hierarchical but are equally important and should all be addressed right from the start, although the emphasis will change according to the particular teaching situation.

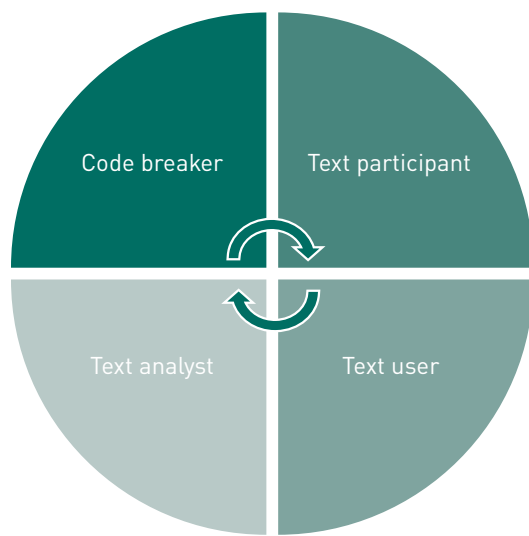
- The *code breaker* practice is to do with 'cracking' the codes of letter-sound correspondences and the grammar of particular texts.
- The *text participant* practice involves making meaning of the text, including making personal connections such as linking the text with prior experiences and knowledge.
- The *text user* practice is to do with understanding that there are different text types for different purposes, and that there are different audiences with different needs and expectations.



- The *text analyst* practice involves appreciating that texts are not neutral and that authors have values and agendas that readers need to uncover and think about (critical literacy).

The socio-cultural perspective (Figure 1.2) has played a significant part in informing Australian Curriculum documents, such as the Australian Curriculum: English and the EYLF, where there is considerable emphasis on contextual influences on all aspects of literacy and on valuing diversity.

**Figure 1.2** Freebody and Luke's socio-cultural perspective



## ‘Evidence-based’ approaches to teaching literacy

There has been a call for educators to apply an **evidence-based** approach to the teaching of literacy. This has followed on from large-scale reviews of literacy teaching such as the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) and the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) in the United States, the Rose Report (Rose, 2006) in the United Kingdom, and the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL) (2005) in Australia. Although there is no simple recipe for success in teaching literacy, there are bodies of research that are deemed to be good evidence that certain approaches will likely work with particular groups of children. In order to be successful in ever-changing literacy contexts, it is imperative that educators keep up to date with new research findings and constantly reflect on their practices in light of these. It should be pointed out that so-called evidence-based approaches are not necessarily incompatible with any of the perspectives described above.

Throughout this book, research is constantly referred to and discussed to help you base your practice on research evidence. Teachers should endeavour to read research reports and articles with a critical stance so as not to be susceptible to faddish practices (such as some of the practices disseminated via social media) that are not sufficiently supported by research. You may be interested in accessing meta-analyses of research findings, where the results of many research studies are considered and synthesised. Hattie’s (2009) ‘Visible Learning’ is a well-known synthesis of meta-analyses that offers ‘effect sizes’ for a wide range of teaching strategies and approaches. An effect size often measures differences between groups but it can also be used to measure progress (Hattie, 2012),

### evidence-based

An approach to literacy teaching that emphasises the role of research; educators need to know what research literature says about ‘what works’ rather than just rely on traditional methods.

with an effect size of greater than 0.40 deemed to be above the norm and therefore likely to result in higher than expected growth or progress. The Teaching Toolkit at <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/the-toolkit> also claims to summarise the global evidence base relating to a range of teaching approaches.

It is noted that some academics, such as Bergeron (2017) state that such syntheses may need to be treated with caution as they may overlook some of the limitations of the individual research studies included in the meta-analyses.

## Affective factors and young children's literacy learning

It is vital that children develop positive attitudes, or dispositions, and behaviours towards literacy as this impacts on their achievement (Cartwright, Marshall & Wray, 2016). It has already been mentioned in this chapter that practices based on some of the early perspectives on literacy learning may have led to reduced levels of motivation in children, since they dealt with fragmented elements of literacy, sometimes in meaningless contexts. Children who do not have positive attitudes towards literacy will not be motivated to engage in reading and writing very much—they will not be drawn to books, magazines, digital texts or paper and pencils, and will consequently not achieve at optimal levels. It should be noted at this point that the terms 'positive attitudes', 'motivation' and 'engagement' are often used interchangeably in the educational literature, although they are different concepts. Attitudes are to do with feelings and beliefs, whereas motivation refers to a desire or intention to take action (such as read a picture book). Engagement is when a person is involved in an activity, often deeply involved (such as being engrossed in writing a letter to a grandparent or watching a movie). A positive attitude and motivation can be seen as necessary to engagement.

The concept of motivation has been heavily researched in the field of psychology. *Intrinsic motivation*, which is said to come from within the individual, is what educators should attempt to generate. Guthrie, Wigfield and Perencevich (2004) point out that intrinsically motivated children frequently seek out texts to read in their leisure time, and that these texts will not necessarily be of a trivial, 'light' nature used for 'entertainment' purposes only. Texts selected will often be at a challenging level because young readers are often eager to access interesting content. In childcare and preschool settings, children may not actually read selected texts in a conventional way but may engage in exploratory or role-play reading, or emergent literary practices, which are valuable aspects of becoming literate.

Guthrie and his colleagues point out that educators can most effectively increase children's intrinsic motivation to read by *ensuring success* through the provision of appropriate (scaffolded) instruction and literacy activities. Giving children texts and activities at an appropriate difficulty level is an obvious starting point. Explicitly pointing out to children their successes is also important. Celebration of success and 'having a go' are important elements of a positive classroom environment. However, feedback to children should always give them information about what they have done well and what could be done better, as this is empowering for them. An example of feedback might be: 'I like the way you read that, Georgia. You read most of the story fluently, and you used sounding out to read the words you didn't know. I noticed that you used the punctuation in the story to help you know where to take a breath.'

Next time you come across a tricky word that you can't sound out, what are some of the other things you could try?' This kind of feedback enables the child far more than comments that focus on qualities of the child, such as: 'You are so clever! What a good reader you are!' (Dweck, 2007). Oakley (2006b) summarises some elements of literacy motivation in Table 1.1.

Educators of children in their early years need to create environments in which children can experience texts (spoken, written and **multimodal**) and experiment with them with a sense of purpose, agency and enjoyment.

## Assessing affective factors

As explained above, **affective** factors, which include motivation to read, attitudes towards reading, and feelings of self-efficacy and confidence about reading and writing, are important in literacy learning. It is necessary for educators to find out about children's feelings about themselves as readers and writers (or as emergent readers and writers) and about their reading interests. Much of this can be done through observation of their reading and writing behaviours, through conversations with them and/or their parents, and through monitoring reading logs and reading journals, in which children (or their parents or carers) record what they have read or written.

An example of a checklist for recording observations of children's attitudes is shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.1** Elements of literacy motivation

<b>Success</b>
Children are likely to be motivated in literacy when they expect to succeed. In reading, it is necessary to provide the appropriate level of texts and the appropriate level of support. Likewise, in writing, children need to experience success. To experience success, children also need a good grounding in how letters and sounds work. Although the experience of success is important, children do need to learn how to cope with failures.
<b>Choice</b>
As much as possible, allow children choices in the texts that they will read. Even in content areas, it is possible for educators to provide an array of books on a topic for children to choose from. In writing, children should have some choice regarding what to write about.
<b>Challenge</b>
Generally, children enjoy a challenge and can experience a great sense of achievement and satisfaction from engaging with challenging texts. It is important that the challenge is not so great as to become 'frustrational'.
<b>Interest</b>
Even very young children have interests and are more likely to be motivated in reading and writing if there are texts available in topics of interest to them.
<b>Purpose</b>
Reading and writing without a clear purpose is rarely motivational and, furthermore, it is difficult for children to succeed or self-monitor if they are not sure of the purpose of the task.

Based on Oakley, 2006b

### multimodal

A text that comprises more than one mode of communication; a mode may be linguistic (written, spoken), visual, animation, gestural or audio.

### affective

About emotions, feelings, likes and dislikes.

**Table 1.2** Observational checklist: Reading attitude

Name: Michael Piazza, Year: 1. Date: Over the last <u>two weeks</u> , Michael has:	Yes	No	Comments
• seemed happy and relaxed when engaged in reading	X		
• talked about stories or other texts he's read or had read to him	X		
• borrowed and talked about library books		X	Michael has borrowed books but does not get around to reading them at home.
• brought in books or other texts from home to share with classmates and teacher		X	Not yet.
• chosen to read instead of engaging in another activity such as puzzles, blocks, etc.	X		
• listened and engaged enthusiastically during story time	X		
• engaged in reading ebooks on the computer	X		Michael loves ebooks.

Based on a checklist by Cunningham & Moore, 2004, p. 279

Structured surveys and interviews are also available to help educators find out about motivation and attitudes towards reading. A well-known example is the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) (McKenna & Kear, 1990), which is suitable for children in Year 1 and above. This survey contains forty statements about reading, and children are asked to indicate how they feel about the statement by circling the appropriate picture of a cartoon cat character named Garfield, who looks glum at one extreme of the scale and ecstatic at the other. Examples of statements contained in the ERAS include:

- How do you feel about reading for fun at home?
- How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
- How do you feel when the educator asks you questions about what you read?
- How do you feel when you read out loud in class?

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

### Attitudes towards reading and writing

Consider your own attitudes towards reading and writing. Do you read and write for pleasure and for a variety of purposes? How might you increase your own passion for literacy so that it might be relayed to the children you educate?



Issues in the assessment of young children are discussed in Chapter 9.

In early childhood settings, it is generally best to carry out assessment of motivation and attitudes in the context of everyday tasks and on an ongoing basis.

## SUMMARY



In this chapter, we have discussed several definitions of literacy and explained why they are important. We have also outlined the major theoretical perspectives on how children learn to read and write. Theoretical perspectives are of consequence because they underpin educators' beliefs about how children's learning occurs, and thus their choice of pedagogies. In addition, we have discussed affective factors in literacy learning—without having an understanding of how to motivate and engage children, an educator is less likely to see satisfactory learning. We strongly recommend that you return to this important chapter during and/or after reading the rest of the book so that you can check and deepen your understandings.

### Review questions

- 1 Which theoretical perspectives on literacy have been influential over the last century and what impact have these had on teaching practice? Are there any current political or media debates about literacy that are rooted in particular theoretical positions?
- 2 How can an educator encourage motivation and engagement in literacy? What role might parents play?
- 3 Consider Barratt-Pugh's six elements of the socio-cultural perspective on literacy, as discussed in this chapter. How do they relate to your own culture? How do they relate to other cultures that you know about?
- 4 In your opinion, do dance, drama and music count as elements of literacy? Explain your answer.
- 5 Identify and define each of the four dimensions of the Multiliteracies Map (DECS, 2010), as outlined in this chapter.

### Review activities

- 1 Examine the EYLF. Which of the theoretical perspectives described in this chapter are reflected in these documents?
- 2 Attempt to link the theories of literacy that have been outlined above to your knowledge about general learning theories and child development. How far do you think the literacy theories outlined above take into account current knowledge about children's development in the various domains?