

Understanding English language and literacy development

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A position paper commissioned by Kristina Love for the Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne

Introduction

One of the most fundamentally important tasks of schooling is to teach children English literacy. Indeed, in the contemporary world, it is often argued that provision of good literacy programs is a matter of equity and social justice: the recent federal inquiry into *Teaching Reading* (DEST, 2005) for example, declared that there is a relationship between poor literacy levels and poverty in the community. One reason for this is that modern literacy is of a very high order: it is very diverse and often quite complex, while it is found in many different contexts. It often functions in multimodal situations, so that images, diagrams and graphs all need to be read and interpreted, as well as the actual written words found in books, video or on the computer screen. A major responsibility of all teachers from Prep to Year 10, regardless of the subjects they teach, is to understand the nature of written language in all its diverse forms, and to develop their students' skills in handling literacy, both in reading and in writing. Indeed, proficiency in reading will help develop proficiency in writing, and vice versa. As a result, good teaching programs will involve students in moving freely from reading to writing, and from writing to reading.

Consult the report: *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations, 2005*, and consider the evidence for the connection between poor literacy levels and poverty

<http://www.dest.gov.au/nitl/report.htm>

Moreover, since capacity to learn literacy builds upon oral language learning, good teaching should make constant use of listening and speaking, as children develop confidence in using reading and writing. A great deal of important language learning occurs in the years before schooling, and school practice should aim to build actively on that learning, expanding children's capacities in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Overall, all four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing- play a fundamental part in building the various learning activities of schooling: all school learning is language learning

This module will recognise three broad overlapping phases of schooling, in each of which there are important developmental tasks in learning literacy. The first of these, termed *Laying the Foundations*, deals with the initial years of literacy from Prep to about Year 4, the second, called *Building Breadth and Depth*, deals with the upper primary years and junior secondary years. The third, termed *Developing Pathways*, is devoted to Years 9 and 10 of secondary school. You probably teach in just one of these phases of schooling, and that phase will thus be of most direct concern to you as a teacher. However, we suggest that you should be familiar with the literacy needs of the other phases because learning literacy is a developmental process that lasts all the years of schooling. For its successful completion it is important that teachers see themselves as engaged in a joint enterprise with their colleagues in the other years of schooling. The early childhood teachers will thus be developing children's competence and pleasure in literacy in the first years while also looking ahead, and the upper primary and secondary teachers will be both concerned with the immediate needs of the age groups they teach, while paying attention to what has come before and what lies ahead.

The module will thus examine literacy and its teaching across the three phases, giving a broad sense of the developmental stages in handling reading and writing that occur. As a general principle we can say that when children start their schooling they normally have a reasonable grasp of their mother tongue for the purposes of talk (though that may not always be English) and they have two major tasks in (i) learning to handle the spoken language of schooling and (ii) learning to handle the literacy of schooling.

For further reading on the needs of ESL students refer to: Blueprint for Government Schools <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs1/guidelines/phase1/PSG/esl.htm>

- **Gibbons, P. 2002. *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**
- **Gibbons, P. 2006 *Bridging Discourses in the ELT Classroom: Students, Teachers and Researchers*, Continuum, London and NY.**

Young children may also know some literate language, depending on their previous experience, but whether they do or not, they have much to learn in mastering the writing system, the spelling system and the organization of written language, as opposed to spoken language. Attention to these matters should absorb children for some years in the junior to mid primary school, when they then learn to handle the literacy of the upper primary schools, which in turn helps prepare them for the significant shift to secondary schooling, with all the demands of the new curriculum and the range of school subjects to be learned there. Overall, the nature of literacy changes quite fundamentally from Prep and Year 1 to Year 10, and while some foundations are laid in the first years, it is misleading, as is sometimes suggested in the press, to suggest that reading and writing are learned in those first years. This could not be the case because, as we shall see below and elsewhere in the other modules in this program, written language is very different grammatically from speech and it takes many years to master it. Literacy by Year 10, while built on much that is learned in Prep and Years 1-3, is nonetheless quite different from it, and it also differs from that of the upper primary years.

Laying Foundations

The foundations for schooling and for lifelong learning are laid in the first months and years of life. At birth children enter a world of sound and of relationships and they begin to distinguish their care-givers and to explore their world, becoming conscious of ways to communicate through sight, touch and gesture. The need to master a language emerges through all these things, and children initially develop a *protolanguage* which leads on to mastery of the mother tongue.

For further reading on protolanguage see:

- **Christie, F. (2005) *Language Education and the Primary Years*, UNSW Press, Sydney, Australia. pp 14 – 29.**
- **Halliday, M.A.K. (1975) *Learning How to Mean: Explorations in the Development of Language (Explorations in Language Studies Series*. Eds P. Doughty & G. Thornton), Arnold, London.**
- **Painter, C (2000) 'Researching first language development in children'. In L. Unsworth (ed.) *Researching Language in Schools and Communities*, Cassell, London and Washington, pp. 65-86.**

Overall, in learning language, young children achieve more and more in their relationships with others, for example in seeking comfort, food and information, while also learning to play with and through language.

The role of the adult care giver in guiding the language learning that takes place during these early years is crucial, as we can see in the following short transcript, in which the father and child have just returned from the shops and the father has told the mother of an incident that occurred. The child – Hal - enters the room:

- M: What did you do at the shops?*
Hal: Jug.
M: Jug! What did you do with the jug?
Hal: Break it.
M: You broke the jug! And was daddy cross with you?
Hal: (slowly grinning) Ye-es!
 (Painter C. 2000)

Here we can see that the mother scaffolds the spoken text that is jointly produced with her child, using questions and comments. She asks questions that guide the child towards constructing an embryonic story by focusing the talk on an unusual event, the breaking of the jug. In this way her son is assisted to produce a short text of a kind that he was not yet capable of producing unaided. A great deal of good parenting in the pre-school years will be devoted to assisting young children to use language in order to narrate about experience and hence make sense of their world. Such assistance, from parents and other care givers, helps prepare young children for the challenges of school language learning, though as we shall note below, not all children are equally well prepared for the particular challenges of school learning.

Children thus know a lot about language by the time they come to school, for they use it jointly to construct a range of different types of texts as well as negotiate relationships. Language is a wonderful tool for living and for learning, and it is of course the major tool or behavioural resource with which teachers and children work together in schools. In the process children learn both oral language and literacy in many new ways. They learn new *registers*, in that they learn to take up new roles and relationships and deal with new experiences, and they also learn new *genres* or *text types*, spoken and written, in which different kinds of knowledge or information are expressed. In all these ways young children learn new *texts*.

For further reading on register see: [Blueprint for Government Schools Equity Guidelines](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs1/equity/default.htm)
<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs1/equity/default.htm>

For further reading on register, genre and text see:

- Christie, F. (2005) *Language Education and the Primary Years*, UNSW Press, Sydney, Australia. pp 8-12.
- Derewianka, B. (1990) *Exploring How Texts Work*, PETA, Sydney.
- Feez, S & Joyce, H (1998) *Writing Skills: Narrative and Non-fiction Text Types*, Phoenix Education, Albert Park, Australia.
- Hammond, J. (ed.) (2001) *Scaffolding Teaching and Learning in Language and Literacy Education*, Primary English Teachers Association (PETA), Newtown, Sydney.

For an extensive review of various written genres used in Victorian schools see:

- Love K, Pigdon K, Baker G, with Hamston J. (2005) *Building Understandings in Literacy and Teaching (BUILT) CD ROM 3rd Edition*, The University of Melbourne, Vic.

For example, with respect to oral language and associated physical behaviours, early childhood schooling requires that children learn to work with others in groups, to listen to the teacher and to each other, to answer and to ask questions, to move about the classroom and the school building in particular ways, even to eat, to go to the toilet and to play, all at established times in the day. These matters take time to learn and to adjust to. Some early childhood teachers introduce activities such

as “Morning News” as opportunities for children to gain experience and practice in speaking and/or in describing events. Other teachers generate other activities around joint tasks, such as discussions of pictures, retelling of stories read to the children and/or designing and building objects as a group activity. Gray (1999; in prep.) for instance who has worked extensively with Aboriginal children in Central Australia, uses much joint activity including retelling of stories and events, through which to engage young children in rehearsal of language for oral communication. These matters are important because though, as we have noted, all young children have learned a great deal of language before starting school, some are better prepared than others for the particular demands of schooling. Such demands, for example, involve children not only in responding to teacher questions, but also in building ability to offer explanations and descriptions and to offer opinions of various kinds.

For further reading on the differing language needs of children of different social groups see: Blueprint for Government Schools Equity Guidelines

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs1/equity/default.htm>

- Heath, S. B. (1983) *Ways with Words. Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Cambridge, USA, University Press.

For further reading on different types of activities to generate talk and facilitate learning, see discussions in: van Lier, 1996, Hammond, 2001, Christie 2000, and Gibbons 2002.

Whatever the selected activities used to promote talk, they should have the potential to permit children to take up different relationships vis a vis each other and the teacher, and to create different genres in well supported ways. Good teaching practices will in fact *scaffold* the activities in such a way that children are assisted to master the necessary oral language skills, moving- sometimes over several lessons or weeks- towards independent construction of some genre and its associated task. Consider for example the following little text involving Stacey in “Morning News”:

Text 1: Morning News

Stacey:	<i>My mum’s got a horse.</i>
Teacher:	<i>Oh that’s exciting. Where is it?</i>
Stacey:	<i>Out at Lara.</i>
Teacher:	<i>And who bought the horse?</i>
Stacey:	<i>My dad. She doesn’t behave so every time she gets a saddle on she mucks up so we have to sit in the car when she puts the saddle on. And she’s in the paddock and it’s just up that dirt road in Lara. And she always knows us when we come.</i>
(F. Christie 2005)	

Here Stacey offers a small instance of information important to her, and the teacher encourages her to pursue the matter in greater detail, thereby developing facility in producing some sustained information for an audience, building in a manner that schooling values and rewards. Text 1 clearly is an instance of speech, for its grammatical organisation shows all the marks of dialogue, as in the exchange: *Where is it? Out at Lara.* The subsequent longer contribution shows Stacey making extensive use of conjunctions to build a series of connected statements expressed in different clauses: *she doesn’t behave so every time she gets a saddle on she mucks up so we have to sit in the car when she puts the saddle on. And she’s in the paddock....*

Such features of the organization of speech often appear in the grammar of the first texts young children write and one would expect that, because they know much more about the grammar of speech than that of writing. Nonetheless, Text 2, written by a classmate of Stacy’s, shows the writer was on the way to learning to handle the grammar of writing. The text is set out to show the elements of schematic structure

For information about conjunctions and other grammatical terms, consult:

- Derewianka, B. (1998) *A Grammar Companion for Primary Teachers*, PETA, Sydney.
- Droga, L. and Humphrey, S. (2003) *Grammar and Meaning. An Introduction for Primary Teachers*, Target Texts, Sydney. or Christie 2005.
- Love K, Pigdon K, Baker G, with Hamston J. (2005) *Building Understandings in Literacy and Teaching (BUILT) CD ROM 3rd Edition*, The University of Melbourne, Vic.

Text 2: A recount about a class visit**Orientation**

We went to Werribee Park.

Record of Events

When we got off the bus we went in the mansion. I liked the beds and the loungeroom and the stairs after that we went to the garden and I liked the flowers and the colours. Then we went to the bus we got our lunch and ate it all. Then we went to see the animals and we saw lambs sheep ducks a kangaroo emus goats camels water buffalo pigs guinea pigs zebras rhinoceros and after that we played on the swings and then we went to the island and we climbed the island and when Mandy and I climbed it the mud was all slippery and we had to come down and go on to the top and we found a cave and there was a door in the cave and there was steps on the island and nearly everyone went into the cave and Stephen and I was the monster

Reorientation

*and it started to rain so we went home and all of us were tired. The end.
(F. Christie, 2000)*

Susy, who wrote Text 2, knew she was producing written language, for she laboured long over the spelling, for which she got a lot of support from her teacher, and she was proud of her efforts. Moreover, Susy shows good control of the temporal sequence of events, and she shows capacity to offer quite a sustained account of her class visit. Nonetheless, Text 2 reveals a great deal of the influence of the grammar of speech in its long sequence of clauses linked by conjunctions mainly of time (*then we went to the bus*) and addition (*and ate it all*), while her language is in many ways very simple. She makes frequent use of personal pronouns (*I, we*), as well as references to her friends such as *Mandy*, for she assumes her readers will know who these people are. A more mature writer would advise her readers about the identities of these people. She actually refers out of the text into the context, and since we, the readers, were not present, we cannot retrieve these participants. In fact, learning to achieve successful control of *reference*, so that written texts have a sense of completeness independent of immediate context is a developmental task that takes some years for children to master.

For a discussion of reference, see:

- Christie 2005: 50-53

When children as young as Susy and Stacey write in this way, that is grounds to be pleased, for they are doing well in their emergent control of the written mode, but it would be alarming if they were still to write thus by the time they reached even the middle years of primary schooling, because by then they should be able to produce texts that reveal more of the influence of the grammar of mature written language, though the task of gaining full maturity is a phenomenon of the secondary school.

Sometimes such an influence will appear as in Text 3, written by James, aged 8 years, who understood the importance of producing a multimodal text (a scientific report in fact) to build his new understandings which he had researched by consulting books and using the Internet (Christie, 2005).

Text 3 A scientific report

Insert James report here.

(See appendix to read James' text)

James was of course doing more than retelling personally lived experience: he was reconstructing researched experience and had learned a new genre to do this, as well as a lot of new vocabulary to deal with the topic. In particular, James has learnt lots of technical terms such as *arboreal*, *torpor*, *dry sclerophyll*, and *rainforests*. Significantly, and unlike Susy, writer of Text 2, he has also learnt how to compress information in written language, through the resources of the noun group, including *the Eastern pygmy possum*, *thickly timbered forests of all types*, *an agile climber* and *a cone shaped head*. By expanding his noun groups in this way, James is able to include more information in his text than is a younger writer, so that his text becomes quite *dense*. In fact, *density* is one mark of much successful written language. James has developed very well, both because he can use such density in his own writing, and because this will probably assist him to make sense of density in the texts he reads in the future.

One additional note worthy feature of James' text is that it is multi-modal, in that it uses a number of different modes of communication (e.g. headings and sub-headings, images and the verbal text itself). All of these work together in an integrated way to form a composite 'whole'. Recent rapid technological and cultural changes have meant that being literate has expanded to include being able to understand and produce texts in the multiple modes we use to communicate in the culture: written language, visual images, spoken language/sound/music and so forth. Multimodal texts are not new to education, though the contemporary range and variety is certainly new and potentially challenging for many. Students and teachers have long been engaged in understanding, responding to and often composing picture books, TV, films and radio broadcasts, as well as the visual images, charts and diagrams that proliferate in factual texts such as text books. However, students now need to be able to negotiate with electronic texts of many kinds, including chat rooms, email and search engines, as well as hypermedia and hypertext links that construct non-linear pathways through texts. Growing access to multimodal authoring software means that students are not only involved in understanding but also in composing such electronic texts. In response to these developments, being literate has been reconceived as involving multiliteracies, that is, a plurality of literacies including visual and e-literacy.

Books to consult on multiliteracies include:

- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (eds) (2000) *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*, Macmillan, Melbourne.
- Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Routledge, London and NY.
- Callow, J. (ed.) (1999) *Image Matters. Visual Texts in the Classroom*, PETA, Sydney
- Unsworth, L. (2001) *Teaching multiliteracies across the Curriculum: Changing Contexts of Texts and Image in Classroom Practice*, Open University Press, Buckingham, UK and Philadelphia, USA.

The scientific report James produced in Text 3 is a good example of the emergence of such multiliteracies as it clearly involved him in textual practices using visual and verbal modes of communication. For instance, in composing Text 3, James had to decide which information to present in writing and which to present visually. He also had to position the different elements on the page. Important decisions were also made about the comparative size, colour and script for the

heading and sub-headings. A close look at the text shows that James has chosen a centre-margin composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996); that is, he placed a large, labeled colour photo of a possum in the centre of the page, divided the written text into several sub-sections and placed these around it. One of the advantages of this choice is that the central placement of the image combines with its size and colour to make it *salient*: that is, it attracts the attention of the reader/viewer (Callow, 1999). Clearly learning to use visual texts strategically in these ways is central to the development of multiliteracies.

In the ways we have just described, the multimodal nature of literacy learning impacts on both reading practices and the production of texts. It clearly begins in the early years when Foundation literacies are laid and continues throughout all the years of schooling, growing in complexity as students are required to read and produce increasingly difficult and sophisticated texts. So it is vital that alongside teaching students how to read and write hard-copy, linear texts, classroom work throughout the years of schooling also addresses how knowledge is constructed and communicated through practices involving multiliteracies.

Teaching reading and writing: some classroom strategies

In the early years young children need to learn constantly about different kinds of literate texts and how they are constructed. They need to be read to every day and teachers should select a range of good books and other materials, selected because they are a little harder than the texts the children could read unassisted. Equally, students need to write along with their teachers, who will be able to help them go further than if they were unaided. In this sense, they are assisted to reach beyond what they can do themselves, rather as Vygotsky suggested.

To Vygotsky we owe a special debt for elucidating some of the major relations between language, thought and socialization. His basic view . . . was that conceptual learning was a collaborative enterprise involving an adult who enters into dialogue with the child in a fashion that provides the child with hints and props and allows him to begin a new climb, guiding the child in his next steps before the child is capable of appreciating their significance on his own. It is the 'loan of consciousness' that gets the child through the zone of proximal development.

Bruner, 1986: 132

Overall, in teaching early literacy, teachers should always start with the text, whether that is to be read or written, and in scaffolding what the children learn. In **teaching reading**, they should focus on these things:

- ✓ preparatory building of the meanings of the text to be read, establishing familiarity with the ideas and images, so that the children gain some confidence in their learning before they commence reading;
- ✓ at least initially, some joint reading of the text so that shared literate capacity is built up;
- ✓ both before and after reading, careful selection of sentences and phrases within the text, using these to talk about how the text is constructed;
- ✓ careful selection of words within the text, to teach the spelling of these;
- ✓ revisiting the texts, for later reading, and listening to the patterns of the written language as it is read out loud, gaining confidence in an understanding of how written English texts are sequenced.

Correspondingly, in **teaching writing**, they should focus on these things:

- ✓ preparatory building of the meanings of the text to be written, establishing familiarity with the ideas and images, so that the children gain some confidence in going about the writing task before they start;
- ✓ at least initially, joint writing of the text so that shared literate capacity is built up
- ✓ careful selection of sentences and phrases within the text, using these to talk about how the text is constructed;
- ✓ careful selection of words within the text, to teach the spelling of these, examining related and contrasting words to build a sense of the English spelling system

Some assessment practices

1. **Assessment *for* learning: from the learning paradigm,**
 - largely formative assessment
 - including self/peer assessment
 - by doing the tasks, students learn
2. **Assessment *as* learning: from the authentic curriculum/learning paradigm**
 - continuous and includes self/peer assessment
 - Rich Tasks are examples
3. **Assessment *of* learning: from the measurement paradigm**
 - largely summative
 - use of evidence of student learning to make judgements on achievement against goals and standards

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs1/assessment/assess.htm>

Assessment practices should be both *formative* in that they are used to monitor developmental progress in learners, and *summative* in that they provide some judgment on overall performance. The *formative practice*, or assessment *for* and *as* learning, for teaching both reading and writing should use the English Continua and include monitoring of children's performance, both individually and in groups, and allow observation of:

- ✓ children's willingness to engage with writing: do they take pleasure in this and do they feel adequately supported in taking their first steps?
- ✓ children's willingness to engage with reading: do they take pleasure in this and do they feel adequately supported in taking their first steps?
- ✓ emergent capacity to select texts for reading: do they show curiosity about different types of texts? Do they revisit favourite texts to read, for the confidence they gain in rereading them?
- ✓ do they initiate any writing activities of their own? Do they enjoy working with others on joint construction of texts? Do they enjoy engaging in activities and then writing about them, perhaps producing procedures re how to do something, or perhaps recounts of what was done? Do they like to work with the models of the genres they are read by their teachers?

Summative assessment practices, or assessment *of* learning, used for reporting to parents on their children's progress can include:

- ✓ collection and correction of written texts produced by the children, both individually and in groups;
- ✓ use of simple spelling texts and quizzes to determine how well the spelling system is being learned;
- ✓ use of reading activities and tests, including the Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM), to establish how well children are learning to read;

- ✓ use of teacher moderation of student work against AIM performance criteria and relevant Progression Points to establish standards of achievement.

For AIM Professional Development information see:

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/career/aimworkshops.html>

For Progression Points see:

http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs1/guidelines/progression_points/about_PP.htm

Building Breadth and Depth

The middle to upper primary years of the primary school are important because it is here that the important skills learned in the first years should be consolidated and the children should achieve greater depth in their knowledge of literacy and what it can do for them. They should be able to talk and read more widely, researching what they learn in many areas of knowledge, and learning many new registers and genres. Amy, writer of Text 4, who was in Year 5, and aged 9 years, demonstrated how much she had learned both of oral and of written language. She had researched the subject of dragons, using the school library and the family Internet, and the text was written to be presented as a talk to the Year 5 class.

Text 4 A report on dragons

Introduction

Good morning Mrs Thomas and 5T. I am here to talk about different types of dragons, where they live and what they eat. Then I will give my opinion on where the myths of dragons came from. Dragons are mythical creatures that are commonly used in European and Asian legends. European dragons are usually said to be evil and kill flocks of sheep and lots of people. Where as Asian dragons are said to bring good luck and give people valuable advice.*

Dragon's Eating Habits

Dragons will eat any type of meat except another dragon. European dragons usually eat: fish, deer and sheep. Asian dragons will usually eat: pork, fish, grains and leafy salads. It's funny how there are two creatures of exactly the same species with two almost completely different diets!

Dragon's Habitats

A dragon's habitat depends entirely on what type of a dragon it is. For eg. A frost dragon's habitat would be very different from a smoke dragon's. European smoke dragons usually live in caves, at the base of mountains. Where as the frost dragons live in smaller caves at the top of a mountain. Another example of that would be the fire dragon & the ice dragon. The ice dragon is said to live outside, near a lake. Yet the fire dragon is said to live near a volcano or in a rocky cliff kind of terrain.

Appearance & Bone Structure

The appearance of an Asian dragon is: they have long whisker-like things sticking out of their cheeks, they are long and colourful, they usually have BIG smiles on their face and they have short, thin heads. The Appearance of a European dragon is: they are very tall, they are usually one colour and they have HUGE white fangs that protrude out of them.

My Opinion

In my opinion, a dragon's skeleton is actually what the myth of dragons started with. It started quite a while ago when people where mining (I don't know what for) and they struck a large tooth like this. (points to page in book) Soon after that people were telling stories of huge beasts with giant fangs that breathe fire. Of course the large tooth they found was actually a dinosaur's tooth and so the legends were born. As you can see, this is a picture of a dinosaur and this is a dragon's skeleton. The dragon's skeleton is a lot like a dinosaur's skeleton in many ways. The first, is that the jaw is the same, the second is that the legs bend in the same way, the third is that they both have similar claws, spines and tails and the last is that they both have almost exactly the same rib cages. So as you can see, this dragon's skeleton could just as easily be a dinosaur's.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the myths of dragons are very interesting and fascinating. Thank you for listening to my talk.

* The teacher's name is fictitious.

(F. Christie 2005)

This report is unusual, in that Amy prepared it as a speech to give in front of her teacher and classmates. The need to produce a written text that will be orally delivered extends students' grasp of both oral and written modes of language use, and it is thus a very useful activity. Amy shapes her language to deal with these challenges in several ways. Primarily, aware that she and her audience can both see and hear one another, she begins by greeting them and concludes by personally thanking them for listening to her. Although these choices are not characteristic of written information reports, they signal that Amy is learning to speak in a range of contexts, including the quite formal setting of the classroom.

Amy's greeting is immediately followed by a Text Preview (included in her Introduction). Here, Amy outlines the aspects of dragons that she will be talking about, and thus demonstrates her ability to focus clearly on what she wants to discuss. Amy has included her preview in order to *guide* her teacher and classmates as they *listen* to her speech. Once again, the mode demands of delivering a speech are impacting significantly on Amy's choices for organizing her text. The relationship Amy takes towards her audience is quite a formal one: she is the expert who is to inform her listeners, and to this extent her language shows many of the features of expert written language, in which moreover, she introduces quite a degree of judgement about her topic, involving skilled use of language to suggest expression of opinion and evaluation, as shall note again below.

Having completed her Introduction, Amy uses a series of sub-headings to introduce and sequence her information, reporting on *Eating habits*, then *Dragon's habitats* and their *Appearance and bone structure*, before going on to offer her *Opinion* regarding the myths about dragons. Each section has a clear opening topic sentence: *Dragons will eat any type of meat except another dragon; A dragon's habitat depends entirely on what type of dragon it is; The appearance of an Asian dragon is:.....* Finally the concluding section starts confidently, *In my opinion, a dragon's skeleton is actually what the myth of dragons started with*. This opinion is then developed in a sequence of subsequent sentences and/or clauses within them, several of whose openings (really thematic choices to start each sentence or clause) signal that a series of clear connections is made in order to develop the opinion:

It (i.e the myth) started quite a while ago....

Of course the large tooth they found was actually a dinosaur's tooth...

As you can see, this is a picture of a dinosaur...

The dragon's skeleton is a lot like a dinosaur's skeleton in many ways....

The first is that the jaw is the same...

The second is that....

The third is that.....

And the last is that....

So as you can see, this dragon's skeleton could just as easily have been a dinosaur's.

Amy is aware that she is dealing with an issue that is problematic, even perhaps provocative to some people, and she gives evidence of reflecting on the issue, showing what Unsworth (2001) has referred to as *reflection literacy*, when she interrogates contrasting views about dragons. Thus, in the section on *Eating Habits* Amy observes: *It's funny how there are two creatures of exactly the same species with two almost completely different diets!* Here she is clearly taking a reflexive stance towards the information she has gathered. In particular, she is able to distance herself from the so-called 'facts' and 'problematise' them by critically commenting on one anomaly in western and eastern constructions of knowledge about dragons: namely the apparently contradictory statements made about dragons' diets. Amy makes good use of several language features that reveal she is aware she is expressing judgment, as in her use of *modal adverbs*: *Europeans usually eat fish...; Asian dragons will usually eat....; a dragon's habitat depends entirely on....; they are usually one colour; a dragon's skeleton is actually what the myth...*

For discussions of reflection literacy and/or critical literacy see: Unsworth 2001, and Macken-Horarik, 1998

Like James, Amy is capable of producing a text that shows density, expressed for example in the noun groups, some of which have clauses embedded within them: *dragons are mythical creatures [[that are commonly used in European and Asian legends]]; the appearance of an Asian dragon; they have long whisker-like things [[sticking out of their cheeks]].*

See Christie 2005: 60-61, for some discussion of embedded clauses in noun groups.

Overall, Amy performs well for a child of her years in the last stages of primary school, and she well prepared to progress to the secondary school, able to deal with the challenges in language and literacy that she will meet there.

The transition into the secondary school is very important for language and literacy learning generally, especially in terms of building depth and breadth. The nature of the school day changes as students must relate to several different teachers and handle a range of subjects, many of them quite new. One of these subjects, a subject all students will be studying throughout their years of secondary schooling, is English. A distinguishing characteristic of English is that it involves students in writing texts about other texts. To do this successfully, students must develop a reflective role in their writing. Consider for example Text 5, written in the junior secondary school by Grant, as part of a unit of work devoted to reading Sally Morgan's book. This is an example of a review genre, and its elements of schematic structure are shown.

Text 5 A book review

Context

'Sally's Story' by Sally Morgan is an autobiography about the life of an Aboriginal girls and her poor family, the Milroys, living in a Perth suburb called Manning during the 50's and 60's.

This is the story of Sally growing up in a close-knit family and discovering her Aboriginal heritage and being proud of her background while living in a community with racist attitudes. In the story we learn that family relationships are

very important to her, especially her maternal grandmother. We learn how her father's war neurosis and battle with alcohol deeply affect her family.

Text Description

Sally Milroy lived with her family in a small suburban house. She was the eldest of five children. Her siblings were Jill, Bill, David and Helen. Her mother Gladys and her father Bill also shared their house with Gladys' mother, Daisy.

Throughout the story, Daisy and Gladys, the 'Mothers' of the family, try to cover up, even from the children, the fact that they are Aboriginal. This was because during the 50's, being Aboriginal was an embarrassment. Sally's father had a serious case of war neurosis and had frequently to visit the hospital for treatment. Also he had an addiction to alcohol. At one stage in the book, Sally's father dies. This event changed their lives dramatically. The death of Sally's father meant that a little more money was coming in because of the fact that no more money was wasted on alcohol. When Sally reaches university, she meets a man called Paul. Soon they fall in love and get married. At the same time, she discovers that she is, after all, an Aboriginal.

Judgment

I enjoyed this book, which gives the reader the idea of what it was like for Sally growing up in a poor Aboriginal family in Perth during the 50's and 60's. This true story is written in an interesting way which helps us to understand the challenges faced by Sally and her family. 'Sally's Story' is suitable for readers that are looking for a rich, zesty, moving story to read or for those who are interested in racial and cultural issues.

(F. Christie and A. Soosai, 2000)

In the junior secondary school, reviews such as this one are most often written in response to pieces of literature or works of art, and they involve expression of opinion and judgment. The purpose of such a review is twofold: to inform the reader about the work and evaluate it in such a way that the reader will agree with the reviewer's critical assessment. Guided by his teacher, Grant makes clear and careful choices to structure his review. The Context locates the book in time and place, offering a brief synopsis of the plot and key themes explored in the novel. The Text Description provides a description of the characters, in this instance, members of the Milroy family, and one significant event in their life: the death of their father. The review concludes with a Judgment, offering Grant's assessment of the book and his recommendations for its reading.

Like students such as James and Amy, Grant draws on the potential for compressing information that noun groups provide, using several dense noun groups that 'pack in' information, some of which use embedded clauses: *an autobiography about the life of an Aboriginal girls and her poor family, the Milroys, living in a Perth suburb [[called Manning]] during the 50's and 60's*. Such language features reveal that Grant is developing good control of written language.

Each element of schematic structure is signaled with a clear opening topic sentence, around which the rest of the element is then built, while the move to personal evaluation in the last element is clearly indicated with the use of the first person and choice of a verb that reveals personal response: *I enjoyed this book*. In addition, Grant uses other language to evaluate the story: *it was written in an interesting way; it offers a rich, zesty, moving story to read*. These evaluations are all *positive*. They are also personal, highly subjective and could easily be challenged, but their function is to appeal to the reader and convince them of Harry's positive stance towards the book.

Teaching reading and writing: some classroom strategies

In the upper primary to junior secondary years, students are often asked to do important reading and writing tasks outside school as homework, but some general principles should nonetheless be followed. In **teaching reading**, teachers should focus on these things:

- ✓ guided reading of select passages of textbooks, novels, website and other print or digital materials, discussing the meanings of the texts and any vocabulary items of interest;
- ✓ guided discussion of images of all kinds, their placement in the overall texts and their significance in contributing to meaning;
- ✓ opportunity for students to hear the teacher read selected passages, building comprehension through the sound of the voice interpreting the text;
- ✓ opportunity to read factual texts and make notes and summaries for future work;
- ✓ opportunity for some students' selections of texts for reading and discussion of these.

Correspondingly, in **teaching writing**, they should focus on these things:

- ✓ guided preparation for writing, reviewing the type of text or genre to be written, and where this is new, taking time to model this for class discussion and practice;
- ✓ preparatory building of the meanings of the target text, establishing familiarity with any ideas and images;
- ✓ at least initially, joint writing of the text so that shared literate capacity is built up;
- ✓ careful selection of vocabulary items useful for writing the target, and developing familiarity with their spelling.

Some assessment practices

Assessment practices should be both *formative* in that they are used to monitor developmental progress in learners, and *summative* in that they provide some judgment on overall performance. The *formative practices*, or assessment **for** and **as** learning, for teaching both reading and writing should use the English Continua and collaboratively developed rubrics to monitor student performance, both individually and in groups, and allow observation of:

- ✓ willingness and ability to engage with writing: do students approach it with confidence, and do they feel adequately supported?
- ✓ willingness and ability to engage with reading: do students have confidence and pleasure in this, and do they feel adequately supported?
- ✓ capacity to select texts for reading: do they show curiosity about different types of texts? Are students willing to explore different texts and excited by the possibilities of new reading tasks?
- ✓ do students initiate any writing activities of their own? Do they enjoy working with others on joint construction of texts? Do they enjoy engaging in activities and then writing about them, such as reading novels, undertaking science experiments, researching history and other areas of school learning?

Summative assessment practices, or assessment **of** learning, used for reporting to parents on their children's progress, can include:

- ✓ collection and correction of written texts produced by the students, both individually and in groups, where these are sometimes written as take home assignments and sometimes written in examination conditions;
- ✓ use of spelling texts;

- ✓ use of reading activities and tests, including AIM, to establish how well students are learning to read
- ✓ use of teacher moderation of student work with collaboratively developed rubrics and relevant Progression Points to establish standards of achievement.

Developing Pathways

For secondary learning literacy becomes even more important than in the primary years because so much of what is to be learned must be found in books, websites and other resources. Research skills become very important and students need assistance in learning to identify important information for their learning. Text 6 is another example of a science report written by a small group of Year 9 students. It is an interesting text to compare with that written by James above in Text 3. The contrast reveals something of the developmental journey children must take in moving from the early literate modes of the primary school to the middle secondary school, and thence to adult life. For example, the language is rather denser than that of Text 3, for it makes considerable use of dense noun group structures to compress a great deal of information. The text is set out to show the elements of the schematic structure.

Text 6 A report on arthritis

General Classification

Arthritis is a disease which affects the joints of the body, due to a lack of lubrication in the joints. This causes friction and (it causes) the bones to rub together. The word arthritis means: inflammations afflicting the joints.

Description: causes

Many of the causes of arthritis are unknown. Some cases have been known to result from bacterial diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea or viral infections like German measles and hepatitis. They often can lead to pains in the joints. Injuries, particularly sport injuries, can cause arthritis to develop in later life.

Description: symptoms

Arthritis affects people of all ages. It can cause swelling, stiffness, soreness and sharp pains in the joints, limiting mobility and movement in the affected areas. The area around the joint may be red and (it may) feel warm, creating discomfort.

Description: treatment

Unfortunately, so far no complete cure is known for arthritis. Doctors may recommend aspirin and other anti-inflammatory drugs to help relieve pain and stiffness. Antibiotics to drain puss from affected joints may also be beneficial for cases resulting from bacterial infections. Injections of gold salts have proved helpful in some cases. A long list of other drugs are questionable. Exercises or physiotherapy may also give the sufferers relief and (they may) help to keep the joints mobile.

Conclusion

Even though signs of arthritis have been found in dinosaur fossils, very little is known about the disease. But during recent times, as the awareness of the disease has grown, more research and studies are being carried out.

(From J. McNamara, R. McLoughlin & G. Baker (1987) *Putting Pen to Paper*. Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, page 18.)

The text is well organized and written in a formal manner so that the relationship taken to the reader is that of an expert informing others. The opening element, the *Classification*, uses technical language to build a scientific definition: *arthritis is a disease [[which affects the joints of the body, due to a lack of lubrication in the joints.]]* It goes on to use a causal verb to build more information about the topic: *this causes friction and (it causes) the bones to rub together*, while the final sentence reveals the meaning of the term: *the word arthritis means: inflammations afflicting the joints.*

Subsequent elements build descriptive details, to do with *Causes*, *Symptoms* and *Treatment*, while a *Conclusion* offers a comment on the history of arthritis, as well as on the present state of research. Several instances of *modal verbs* reveal that the writers know they are building scientific information about which much is not yet known, and over which opinions may differ: *it can cause swelling, stiffness.....; the area around the joint may be red...; doctors may recommend aspirin.... ; antibiotics to drain puss from affected joints may also be beneficial for cases resulting from bacterial infection...; exercises or physiotherapy may also give the sufferers relief.* Overall, the writers have developed their report making use of language that suggests judgments about the condition involved. Capacity to express judgment is one of the many abilities in using written language that are an important feature of secondary schooling, and the writers of Text 6 demonstrate their considerable facility in handling this for the purposes of science writing. They appear well prepared for the transition to senior secondary school and for the entry to adult life.

Teaching reading and writing: some classroom strategies

In the mid secondary years, students are often asked to do important reading and writing tasks outside school as homework, much as we noted the students in junior secondary school are asked to do. However, the same general principles again apply, and we reiterate these. In **teaching reading**, teachers should focus on these things:

- ✓ guided reading of select passages of textbooks, novels, website and other print or digital materials, discussing the meanings of the texts and any vocabulary items of interest;
- ✓ guided discussion of images of all kinds, their placement in the overall texts and their significance in contributing to meaning;
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- ✓ use of spelling texts;
- ✓ use of reading activities and tests, including AIM, to establish how well students are learning to read
- ✓ use of teacher moderation of student work with collaboratively developed rubrics and relevant Progression Points to establish standards of achievement.

Some overall observations

Overall then, as students move from the early years to year 10, they must learn to handle a range of registers and genres, all of them relevant for school learning at the secondary level, but also relevant for participation in adult life. They must acquire a great deal of knowledge about language that is relevant for reading and writing the many genres they will use, and here good teaching is essential. Good teachers need to understand a great deal about language, both in speech and in writing, and they need to exercise constant judgments about the forms of knowledge they should teach their students throughout the whole of their schooling: such judgments will differ, of course, depending on whether the students are young learners in the early years, or somewhat older students in the middle years, or the oldest students approaching their last years of schooling.

This paper has traced some of the developmental changes that occur as students achieve mastery of the language of written texts, moving away from the immediacy of personally lived experience in the first years towards increasingly researched fields of experience. The challenge of dealing with the various areas of knowledge which students learn as they grow and mature requires that they develop enhanced skills in reading and writing, able to review what they read with discrimination and judgment, and able to write with authority and confidence on many topics. The nature of the written language they read and write thus changes to accommodate the complex bodies of knowledge they are handling: it becomes denser, its uses of technical language and of abstractions become more marked, its use of resources to exercise judgment and offer evaluation more

confident. The foundations of all this are laid in the early years, but subsequent schooling plays an essential role in fostering further development along the way.

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Possum Adaptations

female c. lepidus have four teats in their pouch, which limits their litter size to four young are weaned at approx 60 days once the young are half grown they are left in the nest.

The young stay in their mothers pouch for six weeks.

The breeding season is during spring.

Illustration

Habitat

The pygmy possum lives in thickly timbered forests of all types except rainforests. It favors dry sclerophyll which is a family of plants with stiff leaves.

nests are built in hollow trees using grass, leaves and sometimes old nests. It is arboreal. When it goes on the ground it goes in the scrub to avoid owls.

fact

The Little pygmy possum is the smallest in the possum family.

Introduction

The little pygmy possum has Adapted to its enviroment by developing eyes to see in the dark.

Photograph

Conclusion

The Little Pygmy Possum has some special adaptations to cope with the cold winters, its ability to go into torpor and its small size.

Diet

The diet consists of mainly insects spiders and small lizards.

It eats necter and fruits

Movement

It's body is 5 to 6:5 centimeters long and its tail is another 6 centimetres.

It weighs around 7 grms. It has a cone shaped head. Its fur is a soft brown colour with a tight grey belly and very large rounded ears eyes. It is an agile climber. Its big toe, Known as a hallax on each foot helps it to climb balanced with its tail which curls and pgrips branches Its teeth are often confused with a house mouse because of its size.

It is nocturnal. Like the Eastern Pygmy Possum it undergoes a state of torpidity especially in the colder months when food is scarce. It is like hibernation where the breathing slows and the body temperature drops so the possum is not alert. This can last up to six days at a time. In late autumn it begins to eat lots of food so it can keep going when it goes into torpidity. It keeps the fat in the end of its tail. It is wholly protected throughout Australia