31

Teaching literacy

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Introduction: teaching literacy or teaching reading and writing?

In an era when we talk about digital literacy, emotional literacy, and visual literacy as well as linguistic literacy (Ravid and Tolchinsky, 2002), we need to clarify ways in which we understand the term 'literacy' and how it might differ from its traditionally conceived constituent parts, 'reading' and 'writing'. This chapter will therefore attempt to tease out these connections with particular reference to those who are learning to read and write in a second language. We begin by defining the field, moving on to consider general issues which are currently of concern to teachers and identifying key areas of debate. We conclude by outlining the main implications for practice of recent developments, and set out some possible future directions in literacy studies with reference to second language learners.

Defining the field

While 'reading' and 'writing' are conceptualised as individual, cognitive skills, 'literacy' is indexed to particular societies at a particular time in history: literacy is seen in terms of what it allows you to do, that is, what social roles you are able to play in your community and the wider society. Thus Brice Heath (1991) talks of "the sense of being literate (which) derives from the ability to exhibit *literate behaviours"* (1991:3; italics in original). Brian Street and his associates (see Street, 1984; Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009) within the field known as New Literacy Studies have continued to emphasise this view of literacy as social practice rather than the learning of specific skills.

A view of literacy as embedded in social and cultural life is clearly relevant to those reading and writing in English as a second or additional language, as learners may have experienced different values and attitudes (tied to their L1 literacy) about what it means to be literate. These attitudes and experiences are likely to impact on their acquisition of L2

literacy. In addition, there are different contexts of literacy learning in a second language and different kinds of learners, representing a wide range of needs and resources. The assumption in most EFL contexts (in contrast to contexts where learners have settled in English-dominant countries) has normally been that the learners are literate in their L1. However, current global migration patterns have led to a situation where many migrants need to achieve some sort of L2 literacy without being literate in their L1 (see also Simpson, this volume). In addition, with the growing focus on EFL for young learners (see Enever, this volume), L1 literacy may not be firmly in place before pupils are introduced to L2 literacy. The range of L2 literacy learners is therefore wide, and might include: a child or young learner who is already literate in L1; an adult literate in L1; a child or young learner learning English literacy without being literate in their L1; or an adult learning English with no L1 literacy. Within these broad groups are many special cases, such as learners in post-colonial contexts who receive most of their education through a colonial language such as English; for example, learners in a Zambian school learning all their school subjects through the medium of English are in a very different position from young Italians learning English as a foreign language in school.

In the EFL world, the 'four skills' approach has tended to predominate (see Waters, 2012; Paran, 2012; Newton, this volume) - that is, we teach listening, speaking, reading and writing. The difference between teaching literacy – a view we argue for here – and teaching reading as a language skill is that, in teaching reading, we are taking a limited view of the process, often focusing on decoding and comprehension, but no more. In teaching literacy, we are assuming a purpose or reason for reading; we are looking at reading as communication and at what the reader will *do* with what they read - or what writers do with writing.

Our approach is a broad-based view of literacy as both practice and process. To the work on literacy as practice we add an important missing dimension, namely, a discussion of the pedagogies which might support literacy more effectively. In short, while favouring the term 'literacy', and viewing literacy as sociocultural practice, we believe that it is still helpful to talk about reading and writing as specific processes which can be learned and developed to high levels of expertise (see Wallace, 2005).

Current critical issues

The internationalization of English presents new challenges, purposes and practices in the teaching of literacy. We identify five key areas particularly relevant to literacy in English as a second/foreign language: digital forms of literacy, literacy as part of language learning and cognitive development, biliteracy, literacy as part critical literacy, and access to literacy through extensive reading.

Digital literacy: new literacy forms

Quite apart from the wide range of concepts with which the word 'literacy' is aligned (concepts referred to in our introduction), the way in which communication is now increasingly mediated by screens rather than the printed page has impacted on our engagement with the written language, and on traditional literacy behaviours. Even 'the screen' has shown itself to be a shifting concept, as users move from computers to tablets and mobile devices. New technologies are opening up literacy opportunities not just in wealthy countries but also in the nations of the South, as, for example, through a scheme providing kindles for Ghanaian children (Hirsch, 2013) or through Plan Ceibal, a scheme providing every Uruguayan child with a laptop (Woods, 2015).

However, even within an increasingly digital world, skill with print literacy remains an essential tool to take full advantage of new, cutting edge literacy resources. The world of paper and tools for writing such as pens is still with us and remains relevant for many L2 learners, especially if they aspire to education through the medium of English, where the need to process text in a linear manner (linear literacy) still prevails. In an educational world which takes a celebratory view of technological advances, it is important both to continue educating for linear literacy and to take a critical literacy approach to digital literacies (see below for discussion of critical literacy).

Literacy as part of language learning and cognitive development

Discussion of the cognitive consequences of literacy has a long and contentious history. Olson (1994) concludes that literacy is best seen as linked to the cultural and economic needs and development of societies, and not as necessarily enhancing individual cognition through the mere fact of learning to read and write. Other researchers suggest that literacy

does result in cognitive differences. These are the result of: the differences between oral and written language in terms of syntax and vocabulary, as well as morphology in some inflected languages (Ravid and Tolchinsky, 2002); enhanced metalinguistic awareness of formal aspects of language as a result of acquisition of grapheme-phoneme correspondence (Tarone, 2010); and the large quantity of exposure to language which literacy enables (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998). Indeed, many professionals working with learners new to literacy in any language have observed a washback effect by which access to print makes features of the language visible in ways that accessing oral English alone does not. Wallace (1987) shows how the spoken language of an illiterate adult became more fully structured as her reading developed, and as she became aware how written English worked.

One development in the last two decades has been the focus on the learning of second languages by low-educated adults and adolescents, known as LESLLA (used as the acronym for both the process and for the organisation focusing on researching it). This has been sparked by a rise in immigration and changes in immigration patterns, resulting in large numbers of low-educated migrants arriving in Western Europe and the USA. Although many of these migrants are multilingual, integration into the new society requires not only learning an additional language, but also becoming literate in that language, with little or no support from previous L1 literacy. Learning L2 literacy will be different for these learners, and LESLLA teachers may therefore need a different knowledge base from that of other ESL/EFL teachers (Vinogradov, 2013; see also Simpson, this volume).

Biliteracy

Cummins (1979; 2000), in a well-known conceptualisation of second language proficiency, describes how learners are advantaged by a high level of literacy in the first language. This allows what he calls the 'threshold level' to come into effect, by which L1 literacy can support L2 literacy, even when the languages are linguistically dissimilar, and literacy skills established in the first language will transfer into the language being acquired (see also Carroll and Combs, and Newton, this volume). Other scholars have pointed out that where the first language is very different syntactically and graphically, as in the use of different writing systems such as the logographic system of Chinese, there may be greater difficulties than with transfer between alphabetic systems. Nonetheless the process of making meaning, whether as readers or writers, involves similar strategies across

languages. Yet learners are rarely invited to discuss and compare the use of strategies across the language repertoires which they operate. We would argue that learners should be encouraged to work between their respective languages in reading and writing, rather than keeping them distinct in the language classroom (see also Levine and Reves, 1985).

The role of critical literacy

One aspect of literacy which strongly differentiates it from 'reading' or 'writing' is 'critical literacy' (sometimes called 'critical thinking' or 'critical reading'). Table 31.1, based on Macknish (2011: 447), provides an overview of different approaches, putting them on a continuum from critical thinking to critical literacy.

[INSERT TABLE 31.1 HERE]

Paran (2003) provides examples focusing on the left of the table, looking at ways of developing the constituent elements of critical thinking, such as in-depth knowledge, intellectual skills and dispositions of thoughtfulness (Onosko and Newmann, 1994). Increasingly, these skills (sometimes divided into 'Lower Order' and 'Higher Order' Thinking Skills) appear on curricula and syllabuses, and sometimes are even tested in national exams. Wallace's (2003) approach, on the other hand, is located on the right hand side of the table, and focuses on critical literacy, drawing on Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Grammar. This involves asking students to consider how the choices of structure and lexis in texts work to privilege some sets of participants over others, often the more powerful (such as men, white people, the native speaker) over the less powerful (such as women, black people or the L2 learner). Practically, this involves students exploring textual features at the level of what Halliday (1994) calls field (the topic of the text), tenor (how the reader is addressed and positioned) and mode (how the text is put together as a cohesive and coherent artefact). Such analyses enable learners to reach conclusions about the ideological impact of texts in their contexts of use, alerting them to the ways in which texts may marginalise the 'Other'. As Cooke and Simpson (2008:110) note, "a critical take on literacy recognizes that literacy practices are far more than cognitive processes and relate to other social constructions such as class, gender, ethnicity and political status".

Fundamental to a critical literacy approach is the work of the Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire. In the UK, his approach has been taken up by a number of colleges who have taken an overtly political approach to the teaching of literacy to adult migrants. An example of this work is the REFLECT project (www.reflect-action.org), which uses texts as 'codes' (Freire, 1972) to aid conceptualisation of social issues which might affect the daily lives of participants. Examples might be discussion of strikes, action to support local initiatives, or organisation of protest movements. Freire's problem-posing approach has also informed work in the US (Auerbach and Wallerstein, 2004) and in EFL contexts (see Schleppegrell and Bowman, 1995, for an example from Guinea-Bissau).

Extensive reading

Extensive reading (ER) has assumed increasing importance in the last three decades. It is now commonly seen as a major source of L2 input, with benefits in all areas of language learning (Day and Bamford, 1998). There is widespread evidence for the effectiveness of ER, including the 'book flood' studies in Fiji (e.g. Elley and Mangubhai, 1983) and Lightbown, Halter, White, and Horst's (2002) study of young ESL learners in Canada.

Although much of the earlier research was problematic (e.g. groups were not sufficiently differentiated, or the ER groups were exposed to additional input), Grabe (2009) suggests that the quantity of research from different contexts amounts to substantial evidence for the importance of ER activities. The picture is now more nuanced, and a clearer picture is being developed of the way ER interacts with other pedagogies, the way in which different types and levels of ER may be suited to different learners (Al-Homoud and Schmitt, 2009), and the amount of ER that needs to be done for benefits to be noticeable. One area where ER has clear benefits is in improving reading rate, thus making an important contribution to the development of reading fluency (Grabe, 2010). From a literacy point of view, it is important to note that ER is a prime example of learning literate behaviours through engaging in the literacy behaviour itself.

Key areas of debate in EFL/ESL literacy

The English writing system

The issues involved in learning to read and write English are crucially linked to the location of the English script on the continuum of orthographic depth. Orthographically shallow scripts present a consistent 1:1 relationship between the written and the spoken form, so that the mastery of a set of rules allows the reader to read any word in the language. Common examples of orthographically shallow languages are Spanish, Hungarian and Korean. In orthographically deep languages, on the other hand, the relationship between written and spoken forms is opaque, and the written form gives little or no clues to the spoken one. Logographic scripts such as Chinese are the most extreme example: the characters provide nearly no clues to the sound. Many languages are situated between these extremes: Hebrew, for example, normally represents only the consonants in the written form, but not the vowels. English orthography, which is basically morpho-phonemic, is also midway on the continuum: the grapheme-phoneme correspondences are often complex.

However, English has more consistent patterning than is commonly acknowledged, as argued long ago by Albrow (1971) and by Stubbs (1980). Albrow claims that if one views the English writing system as consisting of different subsystems within the larger system, "many of the so-called irregularities of our writing system can be regarded as regular" (Albrow, 1971:7). Pedagogically, we might propose making literacy learners aware of three related key principles, as flagged by Albrow and Stubbs:

- English retains the spelling of morphological units, e.g. 'electric' and 'electricity'; 'right' and 'rightly'; 'rite' and 'ritual'.
- English shows its grammar in its *writing*, and this aids the making of analogy, e.g. 'cats', 'dogs'; 'jumped', 'managed', 'wanted'. In each case the inflectional ending is pronounced differently but is consistent in spelling.
- We relate words through connections to *meaning*, not to sound similarities, e.g. a likely new word for a learner reader such as 'scholar' can be related to 'school'; 'knowledge' to 'know'.

Of course, there is no doubt that English presents more difficulties for absolute beginners to the language than many other orthographies. However, it is helpful to draw learners' attention to some key principles about the writing system to facilitate literacy development.

This metalinguistic knowledge helps learners become aware of the patterns in the English writing system which become evident to them when they engage in a larger variety of literacy behaviours and read more widely.

Becoming a reader

The phonics debate

We have argued that understanding how English works as a system, grammatically, morphologically and lexically, is helpful to the emerging L2 reader. However, how this understanding operates in learning to read is disputed. Some scholars, notably Goodman in his classic paper 'Reading: a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game' (1967), have argued that all the levels of language are in play right from the beginning of learning to read: there has to be an interaction between syntactic, lexical and graphophonemic levels of language which readers draw on variably as they process text (see also Newton, this volume). A counter view is that the initial stage of learning to read should focus on developing the ability to decode the printed word and the ability to connect the written symbols with the meanings stored in the reader's mental lexicon. Many current early reading approaches favour this second view, which is based on what is known as 'the Simple View of Reading.' From this perspective, reading comprehension is conceptualised as the product of word recognition (decoding) and general comprehension (see Stuart, Snowling and Stainthorpe, 2007; for an L2 view, see Verhoeven, 2011). This has sometimes been interpreted as focusing only on decoding, taught through what is known as 'phonics'. Two points are important, however. Firstly, advocates of the Simple View of Reading agree that comprehension processes also need to be focused on in classrooms (see Stuart, Snowling and Stainthorpe, 2007). Secondly, for L2 readers, who come with limited comprehension of the second language, merely focusing on decoding may result in learners who are skilled in sounding out words but unable to attach meaning to them (see Gregory, 2008; Wallace, 1988; Wallace, 1992), resulting in what is sometimes known as 'barking at print'.

Regardless of the differing perspectives on the sequence of acquisition of the language elements involved, ultimately skilled reading can only develop in a context of use. This context of use must be linked to purpose, implying a literacy approach to teaching reading. This applies to both L1 and L2 readers. Reading needs to be linked to a purpose determined

by context, which may be academic, personal or professional. This context-sensitive view of reading also means that we read different things for different purposes in different ways.

Teaching reading in the classroom: classroom literacy events

Classrooms worldwide vary widely in the manner in which literacy is taught, the way in which texts are used, and, indeed, in what counts as a classroom literacy event. In some classrooms, the main literacy event is reading aloud. For example, one class of young adults in a London ESOL class centred around a simple story about a child encountering a burglar at night (Wallace, 2013). The teacher read the text aloud a total of 4 times; students, nominated by the teacher in turn, read the text sentence by sentence a total of 5 times. The text was then used as a vehicle for grammar teaching and plundered for discrete grammatical items (in this case the simple past tense): a clear case of the 'Text as a Linguistic Object' (TALO; Johns and Davies, 1983). In some classes in Taiwan, reading lessons involve students listening to a recording of the text while following it in their book; later the teacher plays the recording sentence by sentence, with students engaged in choral reading of the text (Chen JenYu, personal communication). Williams (1998, 2007), in research into the teaching of reading in Zambia and Malawi, also describes classes where the main activity was pupils reading aloud in turn along with a fair amount of choral reading. Though reading aloud in various forms appears in many literacy events (see Duncan, 2015) and may have a role to play in teaching reading, what is important to note in these examples is how reading aloud in these classrooms, with its focus on phonological form, becomes more dominant than reading for meaning.

In stark contrast to the ESOL classroom described by Wallace (2013, and above) is a strategy favoured by another teacher in the same institute. The teacher gave a considerable amount of time to preparing the learner-readers for the text, through pre-reading activities which prompted background knowledge in advance of the presentation of the text. Here we see him introducing the topic of the text:

1 T: have you been reading newspapers this week?
2 S: no
3 T: news on television?
4 S: yes

(…)

8 T: all right. Does this ring any bells, anti-social behaviour, the news this week?

This brief exchange leads to an extended discourse which frames the presentation of an authentic topical text, taken from the internet, which deals with anti-social behaviour. The teacher draws on his learners' everyday knowledge of cultural behaviour, as well as language use, to frame the text to be introduced. He taps into his learners' knowledge of what might constitute anti-social behaviour, so 'bringing the outside in' (see Cooke and Wallace, 2004).

Differences between classroom literacy events persist at other levels of instruction as well. Paran (2002) describes how two teachers, using the same unit of an EAP textbook, emphasised phases of the lesson in different ways. He characterises one teacher's approach as product-oriented, in which the aim was to reach 'the right answer' about the meaning of the text. The other teacher organised activities so that the students re-read the text a number of times and then discussed it in different group combinations, attempting to understand not only the text, but also what their peers had made of it. This teacher emphasised that students would not get definite answers to queries and questions, and connected class activities to the discussion of texts in academic life, thus highlighting the contexts within which texts are read and discussed. The two teachers thus produced very different literacy events.

Importantly, the differences between the lessons discussed in this section is not merely technical: they go to the heart of what teachers believe the purpose of the lesson is, and the way in which the teachers conceptualise their lessons as *literacy events*, rather than reading lessons.

Beyond the comprehension view of reading

The lessons described above lead us to consider the question of whether it is useful to talk of comprehension or whether we should use the term *interpretation*, thus privileging the sense the reader wishes to make of text over any inherent meaning within the text. In EFL textbooks worldwide, the default position continues to be that of the text as 'container' of

meaning and of the reader as a 'comprehender' who extracts meaning from texts. This view is evident in the comprehension questions (often multiple choice or True/False) which typically follow reading texts in EFL textbooks, in effect testing how far learners have understood what is 'contained' in the text. This contrasts with literacy views which focus on the reader as interpreter (Kress, 2014), and with reader response theory which argues for different roles of the reader (Iser, 1978; see also Hall, this volume). The pedagogic implications of literacy views are represented in a variety of approaches, sometimes described as DARTS (Directed Activities Related to Texts). Here, rather than being invited to take meaning from texts, readers are encouraged to bring knowledge and experience to the text and to make sense of texts in different kinds of ways (see Barr, Clegg and Wallace, 1981; Paran, 1991. This also reflects the differences between the teachers discussed above as well as in Paran, 2002).

Here we would like to reaffirm that effective reading always involves interpretation as much as comprehension, though clearly we acknowledge that learners need to understand what they read and to take meaning *from* text. Indeed, what is taken from or brought to texts, and the balance between interpretation and comprehension, will vary depending on the genre, which in turn is linked to reader purpose. In reading a train timetable or a recipe, for instance, most readers aim to get reliable factual information in ways that are different from the information taken from an academic article.

Becoming a writer: first and second language learners

Product-, process-, and genre-oriented teaching

A common way of looking at the teaching of writing is to conceptualise it as embodying one of three approaches: focusing on the *product*, often narrowly reproducing models and templates provided by a textbook; focusing on the *process* of writing and its stages, including brainstorming, drafting, editing etc.; and focusing on the *genre*, involving a consideration of the way in which "the features of a similar group of texts depend on the social context of their creation" and taking into account that "those features can be described in a way that relates a text to others like it and to the choices and constraints acting on text producers" (Hyland, 2003: 21; see also, this volume: Starfield; Basturkman and Wette; and Newton). Thus a genre-focused pedagogy will focus on the way in which

textual linguistic elements reflect writer choices made with the purpose of conveying the writer's intent, and will involve an understanding of why texts are produced in the way that they are. Of the three, viewing the teaching of writing as genre is clearly the one best aligned with a view of literacy as socially situated.

In our experience, the most prevalent approach in EFL contexts is still the product approach, with teachers and textbooks providing linguistic models which students are encouraged to work from and base their own writing on. Neither the process approach nor the genre approach have made real inroads into mainstream teaching of writing (partly because the focus has often been on writing to learn rather than learning to write; see below). Although, in L2 contexts, process writing received a great deal of attention in the 1980s and the 1990s in academic circles (e.g. Zamel, 1983; Raimes, 1985), in teachers' handbooks (White and Arndt, 1991) and in some cases in coursebooks (White and McGovern, 1994), this move was not widespread, and was probably mainly confined to EAP situations. Likewise, genre-based pedagogy has spread in very specific contexts - at university level, or in L1 (see for example, Hyland, 2009) and in some ESL contexts. In many EFL contexts, discussion of genre has mainly paid lip-service to this notion. For example, in many coursebooks, the genres that learners are asked to produce are taught through modelling exemplars of the genre, which then in effect serve as frames, scripts or indeed models which learners then learn to complete with their own content. There are, however, notable exceptions. Tribble (2010) shows how a genre-approach can be adapted to test-taking situations at Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) (i.e. an upper-intermediate) level; Firkins, Forey and Sengupta (2007) adopt a genre approach for work with low proficiency learners; and de Oliveira and Lan (2014) describe the way a teacher working with English language learners in the US incorporates a genre-based pedagogy into teaching science in elementary school

There have, over time, been attempts to bring together the different approaches, acknowledging the strength of each (e.g. Badger and White, 2000; Hyland, 2011). Within EFL, this balance is particularly important: genre-based approaches may be less successful in EFL contexts where the genres learners need to produce are poorly defined and where it is important to focus on the crucial enabling skills that are needed for the production of a written text by a learner (see Atkinson, 2003).

Learning to write and writing to learn

An important distinction that has recently come to the fore is the distinction between 'learning to write' and 'writing to learn'. This goes to the heart of the purpose of writing: what and who do we write for?; in particular, who and what does the L2 writer write for? The act of writing presupposes a reader and a purpose for writing. Indeed, Hyland (2011) has suggested a different tripartite conceptualisation of the teaching of writing from that offered above: focusing on the *writer*; focusing on the *text* (subdivided into focusing on text as 'product' and on text as 'discourse'); and focusing on the *reader*. In many EFL classrooms, the only purpose of writing is to learn the language, and writing "often means little more than learning to demonstrate grammatical accuracy and clear exposition with little awareness of a reader beyond the teacher" (Hyland, 2011: 22). Little wonder, for often there is no other reader than the teacher, and in many cases there is no reader at all. Writing in this situation becomes a way of gaining overall proficiency in the language.

One liberating element which has enabled L2 writing to focus on genuine communication has been technology (see Gruba, Hinkelman, and Cárdenas-Claros, and Kern, Ware and Warschauer, this volume). The near-ubiquity of the internet and the development of mobile learning mean that it is possible to create situations where writing has a purpose and has a reader. This can be achieved through pairing between classrooms around the world (see an extended example in Kern, 2000), or by encouraging learners to contribute to blogs and online discussion forums. Learners are also much more likely to be motivated to use electronic media than to use pen and paper (though teachers point out that this has downsides when it comes to exams).

Implications for ELT practice

Shifting from 'reading' and 'writing' to literacy

We see a number of broad practical implications for taking a literacy approach, as opposed to a skills one, in L2 learning and teaching.

Firstly, teachers can promote activities which encourage learners not just to read widely in their personal time beyond the classroom, but to be literacy researchers. They may carry

out simple literacy ethnographies, noticing who reads what kinds of things in public and personal spaces, for instance on the street, in people's homes, on public transport, and within the home cultural context. In ESOL contexts learners could carry out literacy ethnographies in the target cultural setting. In many EFL contexts, too, such ethnographies can also be carried out online. In school, teachers may institute whole-school and whole-class reading where pupils document and share their responses to their reading and discuss ways of reading, sometimes in study groups. Whole-class writing exchanges with classrooms in other countries can extend this approach to writing as well. In this way, reading and writing are configured as shared social practices which are jointly constructed. It also means that talk frames literacy activity. Talk around text is an inherent part of the reading experience, particularly in classrooms which centre around critical reading (see Wallace, 2003). In the same way, talk around text should be an integral part of teaching writing: in fully developed genre-oriented writing classrooms, understandings of genre are developed through analysis and discussion of the context, the purpose, and so on. Descriptions of genre-oriented writing classrooms (e.g. Myskow and Gordon. 2010; Tribble, 2010) clearly indicate the way in which understanding and researching genre is discussed at length within the teaching sequence.

A second implication is the importance of providing rich opportunities to *practice* literacy – in the case of reading to engage in extensive reading of many different genres, as argued above. In the case of writing, this means an active engagement with genre, an understanding of the way genres function in social contexts, and the opportunity to produce a variety of genres. Literacy is thus viewed as sociocultural practice.

Finally, in moving away from a discrete skills teaching approach, we see reading as supporting writing and writing as leading learners back to the reading of favoured texts in order to reshape and refine their own texts. Readers are potential writers and writers are necessarily readers – first and foremost readers of their own work. Experienced readers and writers read with a 'writerly' eye, imagining how they themselves might craft a similar passage; however, they also write with a readerly eye, imagining a reader in the course of writing. For second language learners, much of this understanding is derived from experience of literacy in a first or in other languages, which is why we argue here for a bilingual/biliterate approach, which we turn to next.

Working between languages

There has been an ideological tension between communicative language teaching (see Thornbury, this volume), which emphasises the target language exclusively, and bilingual approaches which legitimise a role for the learners' home language/s and advocate the active use of learners' bi- or multilingual resources (see also Carroll and Combs, and Kerr, this volume). There are few examples of bilingual approaches in ELT classrooms, partly because the global textbook is an artefact which is marketed across contexts and continents (see Gray, this volume). However, interesting use can be made of dual language texts in multilingual settings. This is even more productive when these texts are created by the learners themselves as is the case with the English/Albanian texts described by Sneddon (2009) in the UK and the 'identity texts' produced by young people working in both the heritage language and English in Canada (Cummins et al., 2005). Cummins et al. (2005) describe how pupils may share their linguistic resources; one case recounts how a recently arrived pupil from Pakistan advises on the Urdu version of a dual language text while her English dominant peers are responsible for the English language version.

With the growth of linguistically diverse teaching and learning contexts world-wide, it becomes increasingly important to draw on learners' linguistic repertoires. Learners with literacy in a language other than English can become literacy experts as they present and explain different writing systems to class members. Teachers can make use of the enhanced metalinguistic awareness of bilingual students to invite explicit discussion of the way in which language systems make different choices about, for example, tense and aspect, linked to ways of looking at the world. Working between languages brings cognitive advantages as well as motivational ones, linked to learner identity. It allows bi- and multi-lingual learners to observe differences between languages at the level of the sentence and the overall text, including different generic conventions, and contributes to the development of language awareness (see Svalberg, this volume).

Working analytically with English

Carefully selected and designed reading and writing tasks can support L2 learners to see patterns in English grammar at different stages of their literacy development. These include, for early learners, using versions of sentence makers which allow learners to

physically (and nowadays, electronically as well), manipulate sentence structure and are thus helpful in drawing attention to syntactic possibilities. Once learners are reading and writing, whole-text activities (referred to above as DARTS) draw learners' attention to the way in which texts are put together. Included in these are a range of predicting and cloze activities, and the ordering of textual elements. Analytical reading can in this way be taught in conjunction with contextualised grammar and vocabulary teaching.

This kind of analysis might include discussion of the interface between written and spoken language; learners can be asked to redesign and reassemble texts accompanied by what we call 'literate talk', that is literacy-influenced talk, which is one potential outcome of this kind of close work with text. One goal of a literacy-based programme of study is to help learners see the connections between written and spoken language, and to make them aware of "the multiple relationships among all levels of text structure and how they interact" (Kern, 2000: 93).

Future directions: literacy in ELT

The changing map of literacy

We have argued in this chapter that, in a globalised world, assumptions about literacy instruction in a second language, many of which are entrenched in ELT practice, may need to be challenged. As a result of recent migration patterns, homogenous groups of learners are a phenomenon of the past in many countries. English language classes now often consist of new immigrants with rich language repertoires but little formal education, learning alongside students with a low level of English but who are highly educated through the medium of their first language. This means that profiles of learners will vary, and that learners' English language and literacy immediate and longer term needs will vary. This is true not only of ESOL classrooms, but also of urban classrooms in many countries in Europe and beyond, where EFL learners come from a large variety of language backgrounds.

There is also an ever wider number of literacy resources, many technological. The challenge for many learners may be to understand the culturally located ways in which these resources are used. How does one phrase an email message to one's professor? On

what occasion is a written letter still a culturally appropriate form of communication? In short, a changing landscape relates to new technologies, a wider range of second language learners with different needs and resources and educational histories, and the role of English language literacy in international settings.

The importance of critical literacy in ELT

One overriding need in a globalised world where English, for the immediate future, serves as the global language, is for critical literacy. If L2 learners are to be active interpreters and creative designers of English language texts, they need an understanding of the manner in which texts, both academic and everyday, invite us to adopt certain views of the world. They need both to 'read back' and to 'write back'. The ESOL world in the UK has given strong attention to critical literacy, as discussed above; however, the EFL world has remained much more cautious about engaging with politically sensitive issues. This is partly because the use of the global textbook tends to favour a safe, sanitised set of discourses which minimises the risk of offence to particular cultural, religious or ethnic groups (see Gray, 2010; also, Gray, this volume). This caution may be misplaced. In many countries where English is taught to a high level in secondary education, the objectives of a critical approach align with those of the educational system. Many of our own international students, studying in the UK before returning to their own home contexts, are keen to adopt a more critical pedagogy for the 21 Century, to take part in the debates of our age which are global debates and which, for the foreseeable future, will be by and large conducted though the medium of English. The intersection between literacy and criticality is likely to assume additional importance in years to come.

Discussion questions

- How do you react to the suggestion that literacy is more a 'cultural practice' than a 'cognitive skill'? If you agree, can you think of examples in your own context?
- Do you agree with the characterisation of 'mainstream' ELT as not recognising the changing context for learners' L2 literacy? If that is the case, what is the cause of this phenomenon?

- How do you teach L2 literacy in your context? In what ways does it resemble or differ from the examples provided in this chapter?
- How far do you agree with the authors' conclusion that critical literacy plays a particularly important role in an era when English functions as the major world language?

Related topics

Bilingual education in a multilingual world; Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; Computer-mediated communication and language learning; ELT materials; English for academic purposes; English for speakers of other languages; English for specific purposes; Teaching language skills.

Further reading

Wallace C. (2013) *Literacy and the Bilingual Learner: Texts and Practices in London Schools*. Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (This book looks at the literacy practices of English language learners in London schools. It discusses children and young adults learning literacy in English, and explores the way in which literacy is linked to learner identities and aspiration.)

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