

My race 😊. Keep your lane 😊

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Basic literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate (DBE, 2011). To accomplish this skill, learners can use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. This can be achieved through developing speaking, listening, reading and writing skills (Venketsamy, 2021:254).

Brown, an anthropologist of the Socratica Foundation, asserts that literacy has been deemed one of the strongest predictors of individual success, and it allows people to finish schooling and secure jobs worldwide. Furthermore, literacy also has the power to impact individual well-being and increase life satisfaction. In line with the foregoing view, Venketsamy (2021:254) posits that Literacy skills help learners develop their knowledge and potential and participate fully in their community and broader society.

It stands to reason that every institution of goodwill, every department of education, and every country which looks to claim its place in the globe, should focus its resources on ensuring that its future leaders and citizens are literate.

The concept of literacy has progressed from the ability of a learner just to read and/or write to include activities such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and symbolising, with a variety of supplementary texts including, but not limited to print, digital, video, images and conversations (Kennedy et al., 2012). Furthermore, Brown posits, the meaning of literacy quickly transforms into something more complex when we consider how its meaning changes from one culture to the next. In other words, *being literate in one culture does not necessarily mean you are literate in the other – consider Us against our learners 😊; us versus technology*] How we choose to teach learners to read and write has an immediate impact on how an entire culture's values and traditions will grow and change. Reading and writing have a major impact on individual lives and can propel people to success. Small changes over time will ultimately lead to large cultural shifts in the future—and it all starts with literacy! [Brown]

It is incontestable that teachers have a significant role to play in literacy development. The teacher plays a crucial role in supporting literacy development (Bracefield et al., 2020). What teachers do and say influences their learner's literacy development, even the language they use determines what is learnt and how it is learnt (Mielonen & Paterson, 2009). Teachers need to know several approaches to developing literacy skills among learners and providing flexible instructive feedback (Persaud, 2019). The Victoria Department of Education (2020) agrees that the teacher's role is to ensure that learners develop fundamental literacy skills. We need to encourage learners to practise their literacy skills as often as possible. We must ensure that learners are making sense of what they read (Pretorius et al., 2016). How? Informal assessment; learners sharing what they have read; Drop All and Read? Learners should be able to summarise the main ideas in a text and respond using appropriate language.

It is the teacher's responsibility to use "different approaches to develop literacy skills among learners whose mother tongue is not the same as the language of learning and teaching in schools" (Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2021). While this study was based on learning in the Foundation Phase, and with a focus on EFAL, it makes a relevant recommendation for this talk, that a "literacy text should be contextualised and that there should be continued support from the school heads of department, curriculum advisors and subject specialists." Contextualised texts are likely to attract and hold learners' attention for much longer than contact time

The issue of learner engagement in literacy learning is not peculiar to us in South Africa. The difference could be that other countries have already made headway while we are looking at enhancing literacy. As far back as 2008, Kamil et al (2008) had this to say:

Instructional methods should interest students in reading and encourage them to learn. Teachers need to support students in developing reading comprehension skills, thereby increasing student confidence levels and learning abilities. The classroom environment should encourage students to embrace a growth mindset, independent learning, and a transfer of knowledge between assignments and contents. Literacy experiences should be focused on real-world applications and high-interest topics.

In the foregoing quotation, we, as teachers, are urged to create an enabling atmosphere for literacy and learning. The message here is that once we have created an appropriate atmosphere, learners will bite and take up the literacy crusade to heart. The question, and concern for me, is that we who are decades older than our learners, are expected to do so without any intimation of their involvement in the process. The bigger question is, which of the literacies do we focus on? For us, I argue, literacy refers mainly to the ability to read the printed text...*Add pace setters and curriculum coverage and our focus wavers not from the printed texts...The Life of Pi, The Crucible, and Othello*...whereas our learner's context is that of digital literacy (Weninger, 2023). Could this disharmony have contributed to non-engagement with literacy?

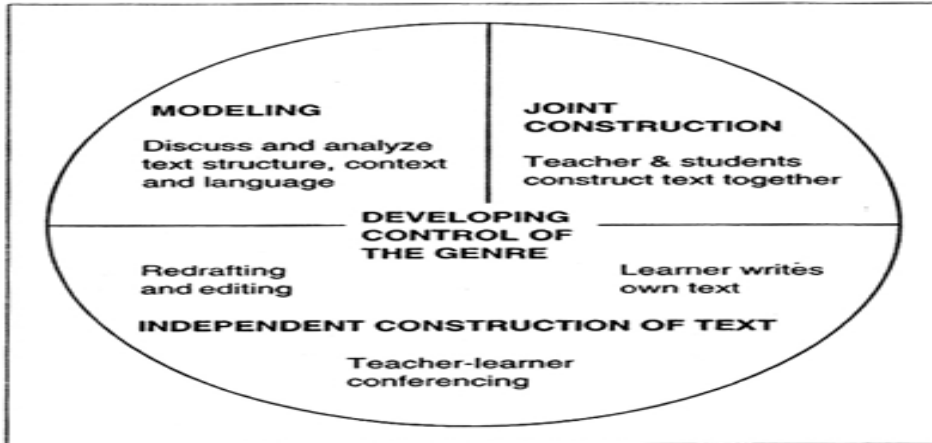
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: ANOTHER CATCH-22 SITUATION BETWEEN WHAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF DOING AND SHOULD DO, WHICH WE CANNOT DO BECAUSE OF CURRICULUM COVERAGE AND SUCH DEMANDS.

The aspect of context is also upheld by Brown who posits the view held by anthropologists that literacy is a way of thinking which is deeply intertwined with both social and cultural practices around the world. In other words, we must study literacy "in context" and remember that literacy depends on the relevant culture.

The question you and I have to address is how we should enable learners to engage with literacy.

The premise of the presentation is that there can be no talk of 'learner engagement' in learning unless the learner's perspective is one of the core considerations. This refers to the learner's interests, context and preferences which may vary from ours, and from those of other learners as well. This presentation seeks to build bridges from the perspective of the learner. Acquiring literacy skills is the learner's RACE. Our LANE is that of the coach, cheerleader and supporter.

I submit to you colleagues, that learner engagement with literacy is a possibility. A genre approach to literacy, I submit, has a great possibility of enhancing learner engagement with literacy. According to Dirgeyasa (2016:48), when a set of texts share the same purpose, they will often share the same structure, and thus, they belong to the same genre. The teacher and the learners then analyse it in order to know the nature of its features in terms of linguistic features, structures of the text and the communicative purpose. It is important to know because each type of genre has its own linguistic features, structural patterns and communicative purpose as well. In the second phase, the learners do the exercise by manipulating and modifying the text given in terms of relevant language usage. Finally, the students try to produce a certain genre type by using their previous understanding and knowledge (Dirgeyasa, 2016:48). While the author is referring to a writing genre, the same can be done with the reading texts. For the record, this practice is already in use in the EHL with learners responding to an unseen poem in the literature paper. What this practice teaches us is that learners should be taught poetry as a genre and NOT a poem. Our success in teaching the genre will enable learners to go beyond the prescribed texts.



Hyland's (2003) model of genre teaching and learning cycle, in Dirgeyasa (2016)

IRONY: NEW POETRY TEXTS FOR 2023. Why irony?

The new poems are drawn from the same anthology. The implication here is that if learners are taught the genre, they would have read all the poems in the anthology. While this may be in the distant past, many of us were exposed to Shakespeare and without any further prompting, were exploring the tragedies and the comedies he penned. Reading the works of Shakespeare became OUR RACE, and our teachers KEPT THEIR LANE.

The same can be done with our learners. In Grades 10 and 11, we can teach the novel as a genre, poetry as a genre, and drama as a genre. We can even link the read texts to the produced texts. Shouldn't we address dialogue and interviews when we teach drama? Is the structure not the same? What about novels and essays?

In conclusion, I have attempted to lift the importance of our roles as teachers in enhancing learner engagement with literacy. What stands out clearly is that while we are hamstrung by the policy stipulations, we can unleash the literacy potential in learners by creating excitement around it. We can thus keep our LANE and let the learners run their RACE.

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