

" literacy is far more than reading and writing; it involves critical thinking as...



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“ Literacy is far more than reading and writing; it involves critical thinking as well” Within today’s teaching practices literacy has come to be a major part of the course curriculum when teaching early years, it has numerous definitions and meanings to individual people as it continues to be developed through our rapidly changing world. The definition of literacy “ has to do with having the skills and knowledge to create, locate, analyse, comprehend and use a variety of written, visual, aural and multi-modal texts for a range of purposes, audiences and contexts”(Wing, J. L. 2009. p3).

Literacy is far more than reading and writing, it also involves critical thinking where it tests someone’s understanding of a balanced literacy program which in turn addresses the issues that promotes active and critical learners. Literacy involves important underlying principles. These principles include the cueing system also known as sources of information and the socio-cultural perspective. These principles are essential when acquiring literacy. The cueing system is used for the reading process, it is being able to construct meaning using the 4 reading cue systems or sources of information.

Grammatical information cues which relate to the reader’s knowledge of the language, the way sentences are formed and the text and words that are used to construct meaning and its purpose. This also includes the grammar of the language (Winch, G. Johnston, R. March, P. Ljungdahl, L & Holliday, M. 2001). For example you see an unknown word in a sentence and by using your knowledge of language structure, help to make it sound right. This is in reference to a structural cue (Bradbury et al. 1997).

The semantic information cues are cues that refer to the meanings in the text according to previous knowledge, predictions and use of prior knowledge and familiarity with the topic. Semantic knowledge helps them to predict what will come next and if it makes sense (Winch et al. 2001). The final reading cue system is the phonological- graphological information system which are visual cues that “ enable the reader to predict text based on the readers understanding of letters words and sound relationships and the ways theses are represented in print: what looks like and sounds write”(Bradbury et al. 997. p5) An additional principle includes the socio-cultural perspective. Literacy teaching today has developed to the stage where we need to stay open minded and must highlight the diversity of our schools and communities to teach children with a socio cultural approach which emerged from Vygotski and his socio- cultural learning theory. Vytgotski argues that a child’s development cannot be understood by the study of the individual. The social world must also be considered within the development of an individuals life (Vygotsky, L. 1978).

This shows an individuals home needs to be taken into account in order to relate to their interpretations of reading and writing. Teachers need to be aware what the children are bringing from home to the classroom in order to understand how and what we need to teach the children (Hill, S. 2006). A balanced literacy program includes teaching in all areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, communication and interaction with others and the text. It also consists the use of all the multilateralism such as computers, internet, dvds, digital cameras, digital music cd’s and any other type of multimedia, communications and technologies.

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Teachers need to know varied strategies and spend time learning about the students individual needs to design a balanced literacy program. " A Teacher may select strategies from different learning theories to provide balance" (Morrow, L. 2007. p21). Children become literate through a range of semiotic systems, strategies, tools and experiences as Bull & Anstey (2005) discuss in their composition. " A successful reader in our society needs to develop and sustain the resources to adopt four related roles: code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst"(Freebody & Luke 1990. 7). These are formally known as literacy practices and are important to use in a literacy program. The four practices help the reader achieve purpose. " In most cases readers will use all of these practices interactively as they access, use, reflect on , and respond to the text they have chosen"(Winch et al. 2001. p45). A practice in particular that is considered of high importance in a literacy program is the text analyst, which involves critical reading. Winch et al, (2001) describes text analyst as the way readers analyse and accept or challenge the authors point of view.

Working from the belief that texts contain the authors prejudices and preconceptions and that the readers therefore can read critically, taking into account the writers view and opinions. Teachers use this practice by asking pertinent questions to try and ascertain the child's interpretation of the book in question and it is up to the teacher to try and ask the student relevant questions to draw upon the child's feelings, ideas and what they think about the text. Typical teaching strategies of balanced literacy program can be vast.

Depending on what you are teaching whether its reading, writing speaking or listening each key area have a variety of different strategies to use to help the students learn. Teaching Strategies include whole/part/whole which relates to whole class focus, reading/writing this is for students to read/write together and highlight and teach the visual features in print using word prompts (Bradbury et al. 1997). Part refers to small group focus on reading/writing and whole is the whole class share time, reflecting on and sharing their learning. The use of running records helps to record a child's behaviour.

It is for the teacher to evaluate students progress, whether they require additional assistance or if what they are reading is appropriate text difficulty for the student. " These records need to be taken 3 to 4 weeks with emergent, early and fluent readers" (Bradbury et al. 1997. p14). Tuning in is another strategy teachers use to engage the students, introduction to the book cover, showing the title, author and illustrator. Demonstrating and briefly showing pictures throughout the book to allow students to predict the story, which brings us to an additional strategy, being prediction.

Prediction involves getting the students to predict the story by looking through the illustrations in the book. Students can also predict what word comes next for example when working with sentences that rhyme or repeat. Prediction can also come in to place when using the cue system. The Possum and Wattle Big book of Australian words is a great book to use when teaching the alphabet and associating words to the illustrations and meanings. Each page is filled with pictures of animals and landscapes and the words to represent it.

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Teachers can use this book to gain letter/word recognition and the awareness of the relationship between sounds and letters, Capital letters. ' Mili, Jack and the dancing Cat' picture story can help demonstrate ways of punctuation, full stops, commas and talking marks. This book can help teach students ways in which to write using punctuation, forming letters correctly and the use of grammar. Teaching text direction left to right and return sweep, reading from top to bottom, getting the students to predict ending of the story.

The Bear shadow book would be a useful story book to use to develop children's skills in listening and speaking. Teachers could read half of this story and student would have to make up and retell the story with their own ending. This will enable the student to actively listen to the story being told. Then using their understanding of the story to create their own ending, developing their choice of vocabulary, sentence structures etc. The key strategies that are extremely useful and important consist of Shared reading, shared writing, guided reading and guided writing. Shared reading and writing are used with whole classes, while guided reading and writing are key strategies while working with groups of roughly with equal reading or writing ability" (Martin, T. Lovat, C & Purnell, G. 2007. p53). Shared reading is to be used with beginner readers it involves reading aloud in front of children using an enlarged text, focussing on meaning, involving the children in the process, pausing for predictions and demonstrating " how the cue sources can be used"(Bradbury et al . 1997. p41). They then discuss the text together with personal responses, and then reread the text. Shared writing is very similar to shared reading the teacher writes in front of children involving the

students to create a piece of writing. Teachers and students discuss topics, meaning and word choices. Teachers demonstrate how the writing is formed and highlight strategies for spelling and concepts about print (Martin et al . 2007). Guided writing involves individuals attempting to write written text.

Teachers will only guide a small group at a time which helps the students on how and what to write. Guided reading is aimed for emergent, early and fluent readers. Guided reading involves the class being broken into small groups like guided writing and the teacher assists each individual one by one as they all read alone. Guided reading allows to develop appropriate strategies to construct meaning and further more, allows them to explore the structures and the features of language.

There are more than a few strategies that can be used in a literacy program and its extremely important to know how to use them and when. Literacy may be perceived by society as having an endpoint. Whereby students possess the skills of reading, writing and they are considered literate. The VELs shows that this is the way the Victorian Government perceives literacy. VELs has certain standards in literacy that need to be met and once the student has reached this level, they move on to the next.

It is a very developmental perspective in that a student must reach a certain level in order to progress to the next. This developmental approach does not take into account a socio-cultural perspective as it is a set of standards set for all children of a particular year level. Children need to be supported at times, need instruction sometimes, have influences from home and need social interactions more often than not. These views include behavioural,

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developmental, social constructivist and critical perspectives. Children are all individuals not one perspective would fit each child's learning.

However, ideas of becoming literate are, through conversation, as children begin to create meaning to words spoken, they expand their vocabulary and observe others to boost their self expression. When children read or write they begin to develop a growing understanding of how words work. They connect storybooks to real world situations and begin to understand that texts are not neutral. Children sit and listen throughout teachers discourse, and teachers scaffold children's literacy learning through pedagogy to help them become literate.

Furthermore, monitoring, accessing and reporting gives teachers an indication of what stage a child may be at in terms of becoming literate (Hill, S. 2006) There are a range of theoretical perspectives of literacy. Children learn literacy from multiple perspectives and not just one alone. These perspectives are based on the inclusion of, social constructivist, critical, and developmental perspectives best represent how a teacher could enable the child to learn within the classroom and develop to the best of their ability (Hill, S. 2006).

A behaviourist perspective as such, in a way may prevent a children from learning to their full potential as we are using repetition, and the teacher is seen as always giving instruction and directions (Hill, S. 2006). Children's development levels are not taken into account and there is no focus on their interests or their backgrounds. This could cause children to fall behind the class as children would become disinterested by the continual instructions of

the teacher and never feel they can learn what they want to learn about (Green & Campbell, 2003).

Furthermore, children need some guidance and at times instructions or ideas on where to begin. Teaching literacy would be tackled best by giving students the chance to develop as Piaget talks about, but also incorporating the use of group work, interaction and the inclusion of children's culture and networks (Hill, S. 2006). The maturationist perspective can also be viewed as negative approach, as it can be a maturation process instead that of a developmental process.

In closing we have discussed the principles and strategies that are important to utilize in a balanced literacy program that will promote active and critical learners. Literacy as you have seen can be classified in many ways and it is the individual who decides, with their own point of view. Children can become literate through a range of theoretical perspectives, and using a sociocultural approach is imperative if we want children to bring their home and community life into the classroom and their learning.

A literacy program is only balanced when we incorporate all key aspects of learning, involving reading, writing, speaking and listening and put to practise various perspectives and integrate certain strategies from learning theories to create a balanced program. REFERENCES Bradbury, J. Strong, G. Cloonan, A. Reynolds, L. Essex, G. Scull, J. Giosis, P. Sinclair, H. Preston, L. & Turpin, H. (1997). Teaching Readers in the early years. South Melbourne. Victoria. Longman Bull, G. , & Anstey, M. (2005). The literacy landscape. Frenchs Forest, N. S. W. Prentice Hall. Green, D. & Campbell, R. (2003).

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