

Introducing the Instructional Materials Resource

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The Instructional Materials Resource (IMR) is a resource that is being developed based on some key convictions about literacy and learning. It uses many of the strategies that vernacular literacy workers have developed in the past, and many of the recommendations will be very familiar to people who have been involved in vernacular literacy work before. In this way we hope to build on past practices that have been proven to be successful. However we have also tried to ensure that we build a resource that not only conforms to current theoretical understandings about literacy acquisition and development but exemplifies them. We have therefore chosen to use a socio-cultural model of literacy practices as the underpinning foundation of our work. The model has at its heart the importance of encouraging strong development of the use of the key cueing systems used in reading and writing while acknowledging the importance of the four sets of text practices of reader-writers.

Literacy is more than decoding or alphabetization

Literacy is not just about people learning to sound out and 'name' all the words in a piece of writing or text. In the past when literacy has been reduced to this it has been referred to as decoding or alphabetization. Literacy is more than this. It is participating in the message of the text –understanding it, analyzing it, appreciating it, critiquing its messages and the agendas of the writers, and using the text purposefully as well as and at the same time as encoding or decoding a text. Therefore the focus of the IMR has been to encourage the development of rich literacy learning materials that lend themselves to analysis, critique, and complexity while being highly relevant. The materials also give opportunities to integrate sound decoding and encoding practices into each lesson. At the same time we have attempted to develop appropriately paced lessons that are not too overwhelming for new learners.

Literacy is also more than just reading. Many years ago the focus of vernacular literacy programs was mainly on teaching people to read. Writing was often covered in a limited way. But today we know that reading and writing go together, should be taught together and that each helps the other to develop. In fact many educators agree with Chomsky that teaching writing is a good way to help learners come to know the sound-symbol connections. This is because the writer must construct her own words, letter by letter. The attention of her eye and brain is focused on the elements of letters, on letter sequences and on spatial concepts. So as she writes a simple story she is caught up in a process of deciding which sounds go together to make words and sentences. This helps reading as much as writing.

Chomsky expected children to write from the start using invented spellings where needed. She expected children to try spelling themselves using their own judgment to figure out how the word sounds to them and to write it down that way.

- She provided a bucketful of wooden and plastic letters, a diary for each child and many reasons to write
- She spent a great deal of time reading to the class and discussing the sounds of words in stories

- The class did lots of work on rhyme, beginning sounds and end sounds
- She taught the idea of sequence – what comes first? Next? And so on through the word.
- The children’s names were used for this kind of game too. Names were clapped, changed and played with.
- They were given reasons for writing.
- Children were free to use plastic letters – frees up those with handwriting problems to put their energy into the message
- The children were expected to write from the start – ‘you see their mouths moving as they think their way through the words and you know they’re on to it.’

Chomsky contended that ‘children who write receive valuable practice in translating sound to print – a practice and experience with letters and sounds that will form an excellent basis for reading.’ (Quoted in Clay, 1979, p66) We too, encourage writing to be a big part of all literacy lessons and throughout the IMR provide lots of suggestions of writing tasks that are related to the themes of the lessons.

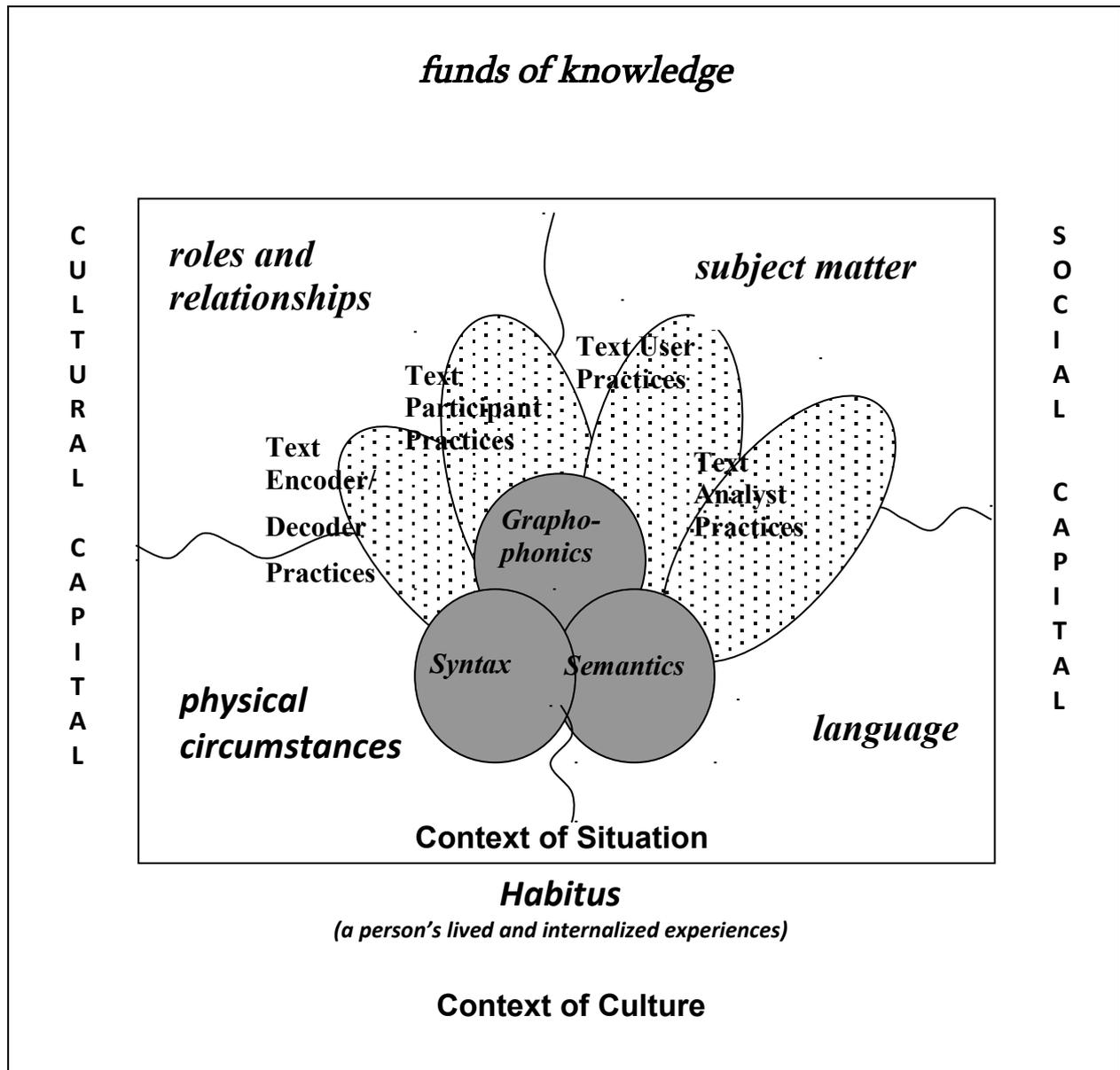
A socio-cultural model of literacy

As we have mentioned, the view of literacy that underpins the design of the instructional materials is broader and more complex than some previous models. We refer to it as a socio-cultural model of literacy practices. This view combines many good ideas about literacy learning and acknowledges that literacy is a complex process which involves interaction between the reader-writer and the language and ideas of texts, and that the process occurs in social and cultural spaces and is shaped by social and cultural understandings and practices.

At the heart of the socio-cultural model is the meanings that are being made or conveyed in a literacy text, event or practice. These meanings are constructed by readers or writers as they draw on the funds of knowledge (Moll 1995, p275-276) that are available to them – knowledge of their world, their language and the written code. Literacy is all about communicating these meanings from one person to another in print. Meaning is central.

Diagram 1

A Socio-cultural model of literacy practices



Adapted from a Social Model of Writing

Harris, P, Fitzsimmons, P & McKenzie, B 2004, 'Six words of writing, many layers of significance: An examination of writing as social practice in an early grade classroom', in *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, vol.27, [1], pp. 27-45.

When dealing with print meanings, we rely heavily on information gained from a combination of cueing systems as we struggle to establish meanings. These cueing systems are – the semantics system (knowledge of the field of currently constructed meanings), the syntax system (knowledge of the grammar of the language) and the grapho-phonetic system (knowledge of the letter [grapho-graphic] and sound [phoneme] combinations that are important for this particular language). These three knowledge bases work together to help literates build meanings from and in print (Callow and Hertzberg 2006:42). For example, Marie Clay (1979:13) talks about reading being ‘a process by which the child can, on the run, extract a sequence of cues from printed texts and relate these, one to another, so that he understands the precise message of the text.’ Thus in the diagram above, these systems surround the central meaning core.

However reading and writing practices do not just depend on a person becoming skilled at decoding or encoding, by extracting information from the print code or putting information into print code. Understanding the meanings of a text also require the reader-writer to understand the meanings being conveyed by words and phrases, concepts and sentences, ideas and paragraphs. It is more than just being able to read words and participate in reading texts. Being literate also means being able to analyse texts, to understand purposes and uses of texts and how others are using texts. And being literate also means being able to use different kinds of texts in the different situations of life. Therefore the socio-cultural model summarises the many text practices that literate people need to be able to do into four. These are often referred to as the four roles of the reader-writer and are listed as text breaker and maker, text participant, text analyst and text user. These four roles were first described by Alan Luke and Peter Freebody. Their ideas have been used and developed by educators all over the world in the last decade. Luke and Freebody say that their literacy model shifts the focus from trying to find a right method of teaching people to become literate to a focus on developing the range of practices that cover the large collection of text practices that are needed by literate people in today’s global world (Luke and Freebody 1999,p6).

But all this reading and writing doesn’t happen in an empty space. Reading and writing happens in situations which have a context and in different cultural spaces and places. The socio-cultural model also shows that the culture of the context and the learning situation itself are important aspects of learning and teaching literacy. In this way the model recognizes the importance of the knowledge that learners bring to literacy learning. Learners are not blank pages or empty brains waiting to be filled– they actually have already built an amazing amount of knowledge before they come to learn to read and write. They have social knowledge, cultural knowledge, knowledge about their world and the things in it, knowledge of how to learn about things, knowledge about their language, and they can access even more knowledge through the knowledge of their families and friends. Louis Moll (1992,p275) talks about this as learners having funds of knowledge and encourages teachers to use these funds in the teaching-learning process.

Because learners are not empty vessels and have a lot of knowledge already we need therefore to begin literacy teaching in a language that learners know well so that they can access the knowledge funds that they already have. If we start teaching in a language that learners don’t know very well they can’t use any of their existing knowledge funds and they may feel dumb and stupid. This is why educators and researchers say it is important and more effective for

learners to have a solid literacy foundation in their own language first before helping them bridge to languages of wider communication.

Literacy practices are reliant on interactive processes

In her writings Marie Clay talks about four sets of behaviours that are significant for reading progress in the early stages- attention to print, direction rules about position and movement, talking like a book and hearing the sounds in words. But she says these skills must be taught in an integrated way.

For success in reading all four types of behaviours must be related and focused in a way that allows for smooth sequential progression through the continuous message of the text. ...The teacher by what she says, by her directional movements, and by directing attention to visual cues, language and to sounds, ensures that the group integrates the four sets of behaviours correctly. (1979, p134-5)

If the reader is having difficulties with some or all of the four sets of behaviours, Clay suggests that it is consistent with current research that this should be approached through as many channels as possible so the stronger skills can support the weaker ones. The reader should not be held back in a 'developmental group' and drilled in behaviours in an isolated way but should be given more experiences and enriched experiences in the area of weakness but always in an integrated way. (1979, p149)

Likewise Luke and Freebody would argue that the four roles of the reader are 'mixed and orchestrated in proficient reading and writing. The key concept in the model is necessity and not sufficiency – each is necessary for literacy in new conditions, but in and of themselves, none of the four families of practice is sufficient for literate citizens' (Luke and Freebody, 1999, p7-8).

Therefore since literacy practices are reliant on interactivity of many different aspects and strategies, the IMR promotes the use of only those materials and activities that encourage interactivity of the key processes.

Literacy is a family concern

For literacy to become part of a culture and not just a semi-important or unimportant add on to it, it needs to become something that families, churches and schools are so convinced about that they work together to support its growth and development. Cultures that see literacy as important do not leave literacy development to just one group of people in a person's life – it becomes something that everyone encourages. So in western cultures, where becoming literate is of high importance, families, Sunday schools and schools all encourage literacy development. Teaching and encouraging literacy is not seen as just the school teacher's work. In fact research has shown that if children come to school without having played with books and paper and pencils, without knowing how to handle books and pencils, without having shared lots of books and texts with brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, they are very disadvantaged. If students only read books and write texts at school they are also very disadvantaged. And it is very hard for such students to catch up to where they need to be.

If we want to see literacy grow and develop and become part of community life, it is very important for literacy practices to be happening and supported in homes as well as schools. It is something that needs to become a family affair. If reading and writing only happen at school or in literacy classes, when students stop going to these classes, reading and writing often stops and people don't keep developing their literacy abilities. This means that books, paper and pencils need to be available in homes and people who can read and write need to be reading to others and helping others write.

The problem in many minority language communities is that there is a lack of books for people to read. But books don't always have to be fancy published volumes printed somewhere else. In fact these kinds of books are often too expensive for many families to buy. Even in wealthy countries hand made books are appreciated and loved by those they have been made for. Children love to get a story book from a friend or relative that has been especially made for them. Children love to help make story books themselves. Teens have a lot of fun making magazines for other teens – collecting and constructing texts about things that they have done together, things that people like and dislike, jokes and songs that are popular at the time. Everyone loves reading stories of the lives of the adults in their own families, or of stories that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Families can choose to write and illustrate these kinds of texts and have them in their homes along with books that they are able to buy. This helps literacy to become part of what families do and helps people become good readers and writers.

In conclusion

The IMR attempts to bring together all the ideas discussed in this paper. We have developed a set of literacy lessons targeted to adult and youth learners based upon a variety of interests and purposes. The lesson sets (topics) demonstrate how you can develop materials for use in teaching and growing literacy abilities in your communities with adults and youth. The lessons include activities that encourage learners to become confident code makers and breakers, text participants, text users and text analysts. The lessons can be translated into vernacular languages or they can be used as templates or ideas for developing similar text materials and lessons. We hope over time to expand the collection of lessons sets – and would love to include samples of the best lessons that others develop. If you have some that you would like to share, please send them to us at glenys_waters@sil.org.

If needed the lessons formats can also be adapted for use with children, although we would recommend the development of sets of children's literature that can form the basis of an accelerated literacy program or something similar. We hope to have examples of such materials available on our vernacular literacy network web site in the not too distant future.

Eventually the IMR will also include a family literature production kit that explains how your family can be part of the solution in developing books for your children and the wider community and gives lots of ideas of things you can do. We have also developed a Tutors manual which explains how you can use the materials in our lesson sets to tutor others who are becoming literate- a friend, your family or a small group of friends.

There are also many shell book resources for children's programs that are available. We hope to provide these on the website and we hope to produce a similar set for adults as well.

But nothing can compare to the sets of your own local books that you and others in your community can develop that reflect your wonderful local culture, heritage and history. We encourage you to use the resources provided as ideas and develop your own unique sets.

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Appendix 1 ‘TOK PLES EM I BUN’: The importance of community languages in early education

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Papua New Guinea can learn a lot from the world but it also has much to offer the world. It is a nation of great diversity of cultures, languages and natural environments and these are justly celebrated as part of the country’s rich assets. In identifying what other nations can contribute to Papua New Guinea, it is important that the nation’s uniqueness is not traded off. Its strength for the maintenance of its uniqueness lies in its young: a nation that commits a significant slice of its wealth to the care and nurture of its children is ensuring its own long and healthy life.

This message was central to the Matane Report of 1986. The working committee argued strongly for the development of an early childhood sector in education to provide greater access to schooling for children who were being left out of the educational process.

As well, the committee wanted an education system that promoted and maintained PNG cultures and cultural ways of doing things so that children could view their language and culture positively. The school system was to be reformed so that young children would strongly identify with their culture. They would be proud of belonging to their cultural group. They would also develop higher-level thinking skills to help them to recognise strengths and weaknesses of the values and beliefs held by their groups.

Knowing one’s culture involves knowing the language through which the culture is given shape and substance. Without doubt, the essential ingredient in the passing on of culture is the language spoken by the group. Language is the primary resource through which members of a culture pass on to its new members their unique ways of being in the world. The systems of belief and the values held by a group are predominantly passed on from one generation to the next through language. To assist communities in keeping their traditional language strong and healthy and maintaining their cultures, the language of instruction in the early years of schooling was to be the language spoken by the child and shared by the teacher who was to be selected from that same speech community. This meant that instruction in these first years of schooling would be in any one of the country’s community languages or a lingua franca, for example, Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu.

The present education reform embodies these three important factors: maintaining the diversity of cultures, building up students’ knowledge and loyalties to their cultural group through using the language in which the students have already learned to think, reason, value and believe; and building bridges between children’s knowledge of their cultural world and the broader world outside their own communities.

Now ‘education’ and ‘schooling’ are not equivalent terms. Education begins when a person is born and continues throughout one’s whole life. It is the sum total of human experiences learned and stored up over a lifetime of being immersed in the life-ways of a particular social and cultural group. This immersion makes sure that members of the group are inducted into the ways of being and doing followed by that group. This includes the systems of values, beliefs, customs and attitudes held in common, which gives them their unique identity in the world, their culture. Schooling, on the other hand, refers to formal classroom experiences that may last for ten years more or less of a person’s life and so is a part, usually but not always a significant part, of a person’s total ‘education’.

By the time children commence schooling at around age 6 or 7 they have already developed mental powers of thinking and reasoning. They are assisted in this development through interaction with more senior members of their cultural group in informal learning situations. In these interactions they observe the behaviours of those around them and follow their example. They socialise with adults and peers in their primary group and experiment with ideas and things in their surroundings. That is, they are learning their culture. They cannot do this without language: language is crucial in this process and the foundation on which their learning continues to take place.

By the time children enter classrooms for the first time, we could say that they already have a well-developed knowledge base and a strong fund of knowledge about their world and their place in it. This is what teachers build on through the processes of schooling. The enrichment of children's intellectual powers can most effectively happen – some would say can only happen – when the language through which this significant growth of knowledge and understanding has already taken place is used to open up students' full potential as human beings and as productive members of their cultural group. In Papua New Guinea this is part of the process of 'integral human development'.

Now what has been said above also confirms the conviction that schooling needs to commence in the language of the children's primary social group – the use of the vernacular in the first years of schooling as is happening in the present education process. Research conducted in other multilingual settings around the world indicates that when children commence schooling in a language they understand and speak fluently, assisted by a teacher who shares the knowledge base with them and an understanding of their prior to school learning, they make positive intellectual and academic gains. This is partly because they do not have to 'unlearn' their own culture in order to learn the new cultural system. It is also because they understand the content of the curriculum and can use their language skills and knowledge to build further knowledge through discussions with their classmates and the teacher.

In some schools around PNG where the vernacular language is used in the first years of schooling, both teachers and pupils have commented on the fact that they understand each other and know what is expected of them in set tasks. As well, the students speak freely and confidently in expressing opinions and developing ideas that lead to more learning. Further, they can discuss their learning with their extended families in out-of-school time, accessing the knowledge base of their culture, and thus taking steps to preserve the culture for the next generation.

What is more, when 'bridging' between the first and second language is effective, they outperform their peers who have been taught from the beginning of their school careers in the second language. In PNG this is usually English. We could ask: where is the sense in students spending the first three or four years of their academic lives learning a language well enough to be able to express even the most simple thoughts and ideas in and through that language? Schooling should not just be about learning a language. Schooling is about developing the whole potential of the students. Where is the sense in having students' intellectual capabilities imprisoned in their minds until enough of the second language is learned in order for any kind of academic progress to be made?

In what is written above, we have seen that learning a language involves learning the culture in which the language is embedded. One of the reasons for changing the 'English-only' policy in schooling was that graduates often related only poorly to their cultural group and were often alienated from the life of their community. Often they did not know how to use the limited knowledge they had gained from their schooling to play even a small part in their community's

life; sometimes they didn't even want to, and went to live in towns remote from their families and communities. So the investment their families had made in their schooling was largely wasted, as was their adult potential.

Now, however, after ten years of the reform there are approximately 380 languages with orthographies (ways of writing down the sounds of the language) being used in classrooms. These languages represent the biggest language groups and cover between 80-90% of the total population of PNG. This is a major achievement for the maintenance of languages and cultures, given the way that they relate so closely to each other.

But we should not overlook the importance of the remaining 400-plus languages which represent the smaller language communities. These languages are most in need of support yet least likely in a cost-benefit analysis to receive it. However, the measure of a language's viability is not only how many speakers there are but whether the community of speakers is passing it on to their children. Once the process of passing on the language to the next generation ceases, the chain of transmission may be damaged almost beyond repair.

We ask: why bother preserving vernacular languages? One argument, of course, is the educational argument explained above. Another argument lies in the interactive relationship between language, culture and the environment. The 'environment' includes not just the natural world but the spaces humans occupy alongside of others, that is, the human society they have constructed along with the worlds of thought nourished in the collective mind: religion, law, artistic creativity and science. Every time a language is lost, a whole encyclopedia of natural knowledge and learning dies with the speakers and thinkers of that culture.

We know that students need to learn English as part of their schooling. English can assist speakers to gain access to world knowledge and expertise. But we have to ask ourselves: should learning English, which is useful to some students continuing on with academic learning, be learned at the expense of languages and bodies of knowledge that have served communities for millennia?

It is possible for students to be strong speakers of their community language, identify closely with the community and still become strong in English. In a well-designed and implemented programme of bilingual education, students learn to become strong speakers and thinkers in the second language and achieve higher levels of academic success without losing anything of their community and cultural identity. There is therefore the potential for them to be strong in two (or more!) languages. Set against this is the risk of underachieving academically in a second language only partly learned and understood, at the expense of their first language(s) and cultures, not to mention their intellectual potential. Papua New Guinea's children – and their communities and cultures – deserve better than this.

In conclusion: The model selected by the Education Department for including children from a young age in classrooms where their community language is used for instructional purposes is well-supported by research findings in many parts of the world. And, it is supported by PNG's national goals and directive principles as enshrined in the Constitution which includes an emphasis on integral human development. Finally, there are clear positive educational, social and cultural benefits for students beginning schooling in their own language. For all of the reasons outlined above, parents can have confidence in the language policy of the education reform process in PNG.