

Part 1 -

This essay offers a reflective commentary on a video produced by a teaching practitioner, drawing upon relevant theory, research, and informed perspectives to support a balanced and critical discussion. It explores key theories of literacy development, focusing on influential contributors to cognitive development and learning, and compares how these perspectives shape educational practice, policy, and the practitioner's role in supporting literacy through approaches such as storytelling. The essay also considers literacy policy within the practitioner's setting and reflects on how pupils learn in diverse ways, informed by current research. Broader contextual factors, including poverty, deprivation, home and school environments, adverse childhood experiences, emotional needs, and English as an additional language, are examined. The essay is organised in two parts: the first presents a descriptive discussion of theory and policy, and the second reflects on the practitioner's own views on the delivery of the given task.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) made a major contribution to literacy development through his theory. His theory emphasises that children learn through social interaction and language. Vygotsky argued that literacy skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening develop first through communication with others before becoming mastered as independent skills. In literacy teaching, when adults model reading strategies, shared writing, or phonics before gradually reducing support, learners achieve more knowledgeable skills and develop scaffolding skills. The scaffolding process helps children move towards more independent reading and writing. Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of talk, communication, and guided practice in literacy learning (Wood, Burner and Ross, 1976). This shows that language in social environments such as schools are essential for children's development. Vygotsky saw language as the main tool of thinking, so classroom discussion, storytelling, and questioning help children organise ideas before writing. This supports the approach about shared reading and guided group work. Vygotsky developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in the early 1930's. Vygotsky developed ZPD through his research into how children learn in social and educational settings. Vygotsky developed the ZPD to demonstrate that children's learning potential is revealed through guided social interaction rather than independent performance alone. However, although Vygotsky's theory (1978) is highly influential, the concept of the scaffolding theory has previously been criticised for being applied too broadly in literacy teaching (Wood, Burner and Ross, 1976). This suggests that literacy is not developed in isolation but is socially constructed through guided interaction and purposeful dialogue.

B.F Skinner (1957) contributed to literacy development through a behaviourist theory, particularly operant conditioning. Skinner argued that children learn best when correct responses are reinforced, for example, in literacy this can be seen when teachers use praise, rewards, repetition and immediate feedback to strengthen reading and writing skills. For example, when a child correctly identifies a phoneme, blends sound or spells a word correctly a positive reinforcement increases the likelihood that they will repeat the skill. This has strongly influenced phonics

teaching, spelling and structured reading programmes. Skinners' ideas also support literacy by breaking into small steps, allowing learners to master smaller steps below progressing onto bigger ones. However, while Skinner's reinforcement-based approach is effective, it has been criticised for placing less emphasis on meaning-making and social interaction in literacy learning. (Skinner,1975)

The key contrast between Skinner and Vygotsky in literacy learning is their differing views on how literacy develops. Skinner's behaviourist perspective emphasises behaviour change through reinforcement and repeated practice, while Vygotsky's theory places importance on meaning-making through social interaction and scaffolded learning experiences (Skinner, 1975). Looking at the both theories, the best theory that supports inclusive practice is Vygotsky. Vygotsky best supports inclusive practice because his theory is based on scaffolding and social participation for all learners.

Frank Smith was a cognitive psychologist and educational researcher and made significant contributions to literacy. Smith often challenged traditional views of reading a series of separate skills learned by repetition. Instead, Smith emphasised that literacy is meaning – making process, deeply embedded in real – world communication and social contexts. Smith argued that reading and writing develop naturally when learners are exposed to authentic texts and meaningful language. Smith also stressed the importance of motivation and engagement in developing literacy, insisting that children learn to read and write most effectively when they are fully interested and see purpose in what they are doing it for. His work influences classroom practices such as whole-language approaches, shared reading and writing workshops which would focus on comprehension, expression, and interaction. Frank Smith helped develop literacy by emphasising that reading and writing are meaning-making processes rather than tabulated skills learned. He promoted the use of authentic texts and real-world language experiences, showing that engagement and context are essential for learners to become competent, motivated readers and writers. However, Smith's emphasis on natural meaning focused literacy has been highly influential and useable, some argue that it may neglect instruction in decoding and foundation skills which can be crucial for some struggling readers. As a result, Smith's results approach might not work effectively for all learners, particularly those learners who may need more structured guidance (Smith,1971).

The 2015 Successful Futures report by Graham Donaldson transformed literacy in Wales by embedding reading, writing, and communication across all subjects. It moved education from rule-based skill teaching to a skills focused curriculum. This encourages readers to integrate literacy into real-world contexts, promoting critical thinking, comprehension, and lifelong learning across all age groups. This policy shifted literacy education from narrow skill-based instruction towards structured and integrated approaches, emphasising early reading, progression frameworks, and broader communication.

Poverty and deprivation are linked to poor oracy and literacy because children from disadvantaged backgrounds often experience limited early language exposure, less adult interaction which delays vocabulary development and comprehension. Adverse Childhood experiences (ACE's) such as neglect, abuse, or household instability can create stress that impacts the brain, makes it harder for children to focus, process anything and engage in learning. Addressing these issues requires evidence-informed teaching, early interventions and supported literacy growth, communication, and overall literacy development. (Donaldson, 2015)

Overall, theorists and policies work together to ensure literacy and learning are developed through the most effective experiences, supporting engagement, comprehension, critical thinking, and lifelong skills for all learners. They work together by Skinner's theory emphasises the importance of reinforcements and practice in developing basic reading and writing skills, while Vygotsky highlights the role of social interaction and Smith focuses on the process of meaning-making, where learners use prior knowledge. Together, they show that effective literacy develops and involves skill-building and social learning.

Part 2 –

In the 2nd part of this essay, I will be discussing and analysing a reflective commentary on the video of myself reading 'The Hungry Caterpillar' using Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988). Gibbs reflective cycle is compulsory for students' to make reflections on their literacy work. Studies reveal that Gibbs reflective cycle is a good framework to use by its detailed and intensive structure. Gibbs' (Gibbs, 1988) reflective cycle begins with Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action Plan.

Overviewing my own personal, reflective commentary, I will look at what was good and bad, how I felt, the aim of the session, Visuals used, and what would I do differently. All using Gibbs' reflective cycle. During my session I felt there were a few good and bad points. Starting with the good points I think I was able to draw attention easily by using a colourful, fun, and well-known book. Whilst I was reading 'The Hungry Caterpillar' to pupils, I also varied my tone of voice to draw attention and build pupil focus. Using varied tones encourages children to share attention. It also supports language development and makes learning predictable and engaging. Another good pointer for my session that I delivered was that I used visual aids and eye-contact. Using visual aids you are not just storytelling; it changes the way pupils understand and remember the story. Pictures, props or diagrams help turn abstract words into something concrete and fun. Our brains are particularly good at remembering images so when a story is paired with visual aids, it tests a stronger memory link, so pupils are more likely to recall what happened later. For my visual aids I used real foods, like an Orange, a cake, strawberries, and a lollipop. I also used a banana, even though the banana is not in the book 'The Hungry Caterpillar', I chose to use a banana to see if my pupils were listening to the story. Towards the

end of the book, I asked the pupils "What day as the Hungry Caterpillar eat the banana", Immediately I had positive response and was told there was not a banana in the story. By doing this I felt it was a good pointer for ensuring I had my pupil's attention. I also felt there were a few not so good pointers during my session, for example, I wrote down the days of the week to use as templates for the story and I didn't take into account that some pupils might not be able to read just the writing that I had put on the paper, I believe I should of also included a symbol for the meaning of each day of the week just incase I have/had a pupil with ALN (additional learning needs). If I had more time to complete the session, I also might have included something a bit similar to 'Bucket Time'. Bucket time is an attention focused task, meaning I would have included a lot more sensory and ALN focused aids in. For example, I could've used a fluffy pipe cleaner or something similar in resemblance of a caterpillar, maybe something flashy to resemble a butterfly growing and instead of using real foods I would have used plastic foods, for the reason – some pupils have allergies and cannot eat the foods I provided in my video. By using visual aids, you as the teacher are bringing the story to life. Visual aids are a good, strong teaching strategy and work best when used purposefully.

Before the session began, I felt slightly nervous. I felt this way because I like to keep all my pupils 100% engaged into all of my sessions and I was not sure if this was going to happen. After the session I felt it was delivered just the way I planned it too. I also included some questions during my session to check I had the pupil's full attention. The goal of my session was to keep an attention focused, enjoyable and memorable session reading 'The Hungry Caterpillar'. I targeted an early year's key stage, all of the the visual aids and voices etc that I used could target any key stage and learners with ALN. If I were to plan an activity for after the session, such as a reflective piece, I would make a ALN targeted activity like a tuff tray or a sensory tray, some cutting and sticking and fine motor skills session and make a round robin activity so all pupils would have full attention and would get to try all activities. By having 3 different activities for after the book, pupils would more likely build a memory of the book.

If I were to repeat the session again, I would make a few changes to improve engagement and learned outcomes. I would allow more time for pupil interaction such as making paint for asking questions, focusing on 1 page at a time and going into more depth whilst reading the story.

Overall, evaluating my session, I believe my strengths included clear planning creativity and adaptability to meet different learning needs. However, I recognise that I could further develop by incorporating more differentiated styles of the session to challenge higher ability learners but also supporting those with ALN. In future sessions I would also like to build more opportunities for peer interaction like group sessions with activities such as talking and remembering tasks. This experience has helped me to understand I have to incorporate flexibility and reflective practice, and I will use this to improve all of my future sessions.

References

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