

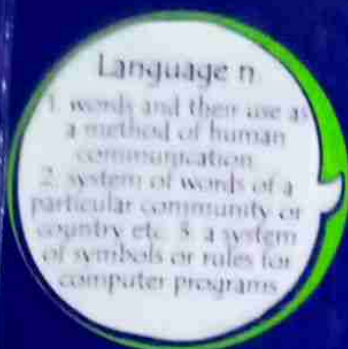
OXFORD

Language and Learning

An Introduction for Teaching

THIRD EDITION

Marie Emmitt
John Pollock
Linda Komesaroff



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FOREWORD

Language is central to education. Language is an essential part of thinking which enhances the learning process. The teacher's use of language can either facilitate or hinder learning. Therefore understanding language is essential for making learning easier, particularly literacy learning.

This third edition builds on the sociocultural constructivist view of language and emphasises critical pedagogies and issues of language and power. Given that language is used within social and cultural contexts, it is bound up with issues of power and plays a central part in the struggles and politics of cultural groups. This book was written for teachers in preservice education and practising teachers in any context who want to re-evaluate their understanding of language. Our aim is to enhance your understanding of the nature and function of language and language learning in order to assist your decision-making in the classroom. This knowledge will also help you better understand and implement the national and state curriculum documents. It is also intended to encourage you to reflect on current policy in the light of your understanding of language theory. This is not a 'how to' book, although it is hoped that the perceptions derived through reading and reflecting on the ideas discussed will inform your decision-making and classroom practices. While implications for classroom practice are suggested throughout the text, detailed development of these should be followed up in the recommended reading and/or explored in classroom discussions with teacher educators.

One of the themes running through this book is that language reflects and helps shape culture—different cultures use language differently. We want to acknowledge our cultural biases early. We think that the task of education is to develop ways of thinking and acting that extend the opportunities and choices our students will be able to take, and we see language as playing a critical role in this process. This, however may not be the position of others, in particular those from other cultural groups.

There are many theories about language and language-learning, and research provides many helpful insights. For this book we have borrowed concepts and insights from a range of theories and focused on those aspects of language that we believe are most significant for learning about teaching, in particular for literacy education. In the process we have often simplified theories, but we hope that we have not distorted them.

It has been said that there is nothing more practical than a good theory—a theory that assists you in making sound decisions about a student's learning. However the most helpful theories for teaching are

those that you construct for yourself. We hope that by working through this book you can construct a theory of language and language learning that assists your teaching, and can be used to explain your program to your colleagues, students, and their parents. Articulating your program is now seen as a critical part of a teacher's professional role.

References have been updated in this edition, though many of the original sources have been retained. It is important to appreciate that our current ideas are based on the work of many writers and thinkers over many years. We do not disenfranchise these thinkers/educators.

How to use this book

Learning is an active process that is most effective where there is some collaboration and negotiation of meanings. Hence we have tried to ensure that your reading of the text is an interactive experience, enabling you to participate and negotiate meanings.

Each chapter commences with a list of understandings that are the focus of the chapter, as well as pre-reading activities. Activities are interspersed throughout. Many of these require you to share and discuss your responses with others. Learning is often more effective and more enjoyable if we can collaborate with others and it is hoped that many of the activities can be carried out in class workshops. A list of references and further reading is provided at the end of each chapter. References that will be particularly helpful are indicated by asterisks. In case you find it difficult to remember the precise meaning and use of the linguistic terms, a glossary of some of the terms is included at the back.

The first chapter provides an overview of the concept of language and the contents of the book. It should be read first to give you a context for the other chapters, which can be read in any order that suits you.

Marie Emmitt, John Pollock, and Linda Komesaroff