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High challenge, high support: Integrating language and content instruction for diverse learners in an English literature classroom

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This study presents an argument for a high-challenge, high-support approach to meeting the requirements of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. To back up my claims, I used a public high school English literature curriculum in Australia that was created for a class of seventh grade males. Although they were competent academically, the students in the program needed continuous English language assistance due to their varied socio-cultural and linguistic origins. They were all members of a "mainstream" class and were required to engage in full content teaching of all important curriculum areas, even though they were all ESL students. This paper delves into the ways in which a teacher used socially orientated theories of language and learning to describe the difficulty students encountered when attempting to use academic language in a mainstream curriculum unit on Romeo and Juliet. The methods in which the instructor integrated linguistic and subject instruction into her classes are what I'm referring about. Students were able to grasp and emotionally interact with the Unit's cognitively demanding curricular material because of her abilities to teach language explicitly and to integrate theatre into the Unit. Instead of the usual reaction of changing the curriculum to accommodate ESL students, I think the teacher's strategy of incorporating ESL learning into the regular curriculum was a good and productive alternative.

Keywords: ESL pedagogy; Intellectual challenge; Language and literacy education; Genre pedagogy; English for Academic Purposes

1. Introduction

The focus in the ongoing discussions over how to accommodate children from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Australian schools has moved from suggestions to change the curriculum to strategies to help these students fully engage with the mainstream curriculum. Modifying the curriculum to make it more accessible is only a stopgap measure until students can fully and fairly participate in the program, the argument goes. Then, it becomes a problem for educators to encourage their pupils to take part. Culturally and linguistically diverse kids can and do participate completely in mainstream curriculum with the right help (or mediation), in my opinion. Knowing the specifics of the problem that kids are facing is crucial for providing them with appropriate assistance, in my opinion. In this study, I bolster this claim by analysing data from an English literary curriculum developed for a public school in Australia's seventh grade (the first year of high school). I zero in on how the program's instructor envisioned the monumental task of delivering a required English curriculum Unit on Romeo and Juliet to seventh graders, the vast majority of whom were ESL pupils. Furthermore, I contend that the teacher's capacity to synthesise pertinent theories of language and learning, and to utilise these to describe the curriculum's academic language and its challenges, laid the groundwork for effective pedagogical practices (Bailey & Butler, 2002, p. 7). The English literature program's instructor and several other educators spent three years studying how ESL students might benefit from scaffolding—and, more broadly, how systemic linguistic theory and neo-Vygotskian theory might inform the development of effective teaching strategies. First, I will describe the English literature program and its students. Then, I will explain the theoretical assumptions that guided the research effort.

2. Theoretical underpinnings of the research project, and of the English literature unit

The study's overarching goal was to identify successful pedagogical techniques for meeting the unique demands of English as a Second Language (ESL) students and the characteristics of the curricular difficulty that these students face (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Teachers, educational consultants, and researchers worked together over the course of three years to examine student-teacher interactions in the classroom. Christie & Martin (1997), Halliday (1978, 1994), Hasan & Williams (1996), and Unsworth (2000) are all from systemic functional linguistics, whereas Vygotskian theory (Mercer, 1995, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999) provided the theoretical foundations for the project. Learning is fundamentally social, and the teaching-learning connection is dynamic, with new information being built via interactive processes that take place in learning environments; these were important beginning points for the study team's work. Such presumptions are based on findings from Vygotsky's and others' research on his ideas. Here, we argue that cultural and social factors constitute the basis of learning and cognitive growth, and that learning is a communicative process that takes place in culturally produced settings where information is communicated and understandings are built. Consequently, in a classroom setting, the dynamics between the instructor and

As Mercer (1995) puts it, "common knowledge" in educational discourse is "mediated" by students, who play crucial roles in students' cognitive and linguistic socialisation. When trying to understand the nature of the difficulty that English as a Second Language (ESL) students have when attempting to meet the academic standards of their mainstream classrooms, it is helpful to focus on the social and cultural foundations of learning. Compared to the dominant Western perspective on education, it offers a very different picture of the student and the teaching-learning process. Here, the person has always played a pivotal role, whether we're talking about their growth, their intelligence, or their practical application. Gibbons (2002), Hammond (2001), Hammond and Gibbons (2005), Mercer (1994), and van Lier (1996) all argued that, in addition to individual development and ability, the social and linguistic frameworks within the classroom play at least as important a role in educational success. The significance of appropriate assistance has been emphasised in several works on Lev Vygotsky and his famous Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978; Mercer, 1994; van Lier, 1996, 2001; Wells, 1999). The project's output provided strong evidence for this claim, but it also demonstrated that good support did not materialise out of thin air. To set the stage for successful assistance, it is important to have a firm grasp on the specifics of the curricular obstacles that students encounter. Halliday and colleagues established a socially orientated functional model of language; this model was used in the study alongside Vygotskian theory (e.g., Christie & Martin, 1997; Halliday, 1978, 1994; Martin, 1993; Unsworth, 2000). This model's focus on language as a social semiotic and its investigation of how language serves to construct meaning in particular social, occupational, and cultural settings are important aspects to consider. This has significant ramifications. Through its emphasis on the nature of language exchanges between students and teachers as well as amongst students themselves, systemic linguistics draws attention to the mediating function of language in classrooms as a means of knowledge production rather than transmission. To rephrase, it highlights the significance of language in mediating the learning process. Additionally, the idea offers a solid foundation for the intentional and direct emphasis on language instruction and language theory. Systemic linguistics stands apart from other theories of language in large part due to its focus on the interplay between various linguistic levels. The theory sheds light on patterns of structure and cohesiveness at the text level via concepts of genre and register. Insights into the connection between genre-specific rhetorical structures and the linguistic choices that characterise their various phases are also provided. Consequently, it deals with linguistic decisions on both the grammatical and lexical levels, as well as the level of the whole text. The idea posits that the situations in which people express themselves via speech and writing limit the options available to them. Although individual decisions are impossible to forecast, linguistic feature patterns are both predictable and teachable. To help students who are struggling with academic language, it is important to provide them with insights into educational genres, such as their rhetorical frameworks, predictable grammatical elements, and lexical patterns. Academic language acquisition, according to the notion, is more than just an increase or decrease in linguistic competence; rather, it necessitates a "functional diversification, an extension of the learners' communicative range." Referenced in Baynham (1993, p. 5). This functional diversity in the classroom entails being able to

operate within and transition between the three realms that Macken-Horarik (1996) calls the everyday, the specialised, and the reflexive. From the moment of their birth and throughout their formative years, individuals are immersed in the daily realm, according to Macken-Horarik. The pragmatic role of verbal communication in this area is to get things done, and it is therefore often taken for granted. The specialised domain, on the other hand, is where students acquire the dominating kinds of knowledge, power, and meaning-making, and it is also where school learning is based. This, according to Macken-Horarik, cannot happen without a structured educational system that introduces pupils to domain-specific information. Here, pupils start to work with texts that are more "written-like" in nature, whether they are spoken or written, and that develop and spread information. The particular field promotes a rigid and conservative perspective on education and society at large, as she rightly points out. On the other hand, one may argue that in order to access the reflexive, one must first have access to this domain (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001). Students "begin to reflect on and question the grounds and assumptions on which specialised knowledge rests" in the reflective domain (Macken-Horarik, 1996, p. 237). In this view, knowledge is seen as something that can be examined, questioned, and altered as it is a product of social production. "Critical" pedagogy occupies this space. Although these fields do not exclude one another, they do give preference to distinct linguistic and epistemological traditions. As they go through these areas, students must adapt to new contexts, connections, types of information, registers, and linguistic styles, as well as verbal and written expression. They will be asked to operate more and more inside the specialist and, preferably, reflexive areas as they go through high school. Rather than merely picking up additional words, these shifts need understanding new methods of expressing meaning. The study team's stance in the experiment was that possibilities for ESL students to engage in meaning creation inside and across these domains are significantly associated to their academic achievement. How one group of ESL students were helped to operate across various areas is shown in the following sections by an English literature curriculum. "Second phase" pupils were the ones that took part in this program. In Australia, this is a frequent way to describe pupils who have progressed over the beginner level of English but who are still having difficulty with academic vocabulary and grammar. Students with this background have likely been studying English in the nation where the language is spoken for a year or more. They do OK in more casual forms of the language, but they still need help with more formal registers and the literacy requirements of certain courses (Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2002). This demographic accounts for around 15–20% of all pupils in Australian schools, and for as much as 80–100% of students in certain schools located in large urban areas. Students in the second part of their English language learning journey are often incorporated into normal classrooms, while those in the first phase get specialised ESL instruction. Here, with the help of ESL instructors, these kids are supposed to take part in the regular curriculum just like their English-speaking classmates. Similar to other countries, Australia has debated the benefits of this setup. However, the majority of mainstream and ESL teachers in the country think that their 'second phase' ESL students' needs are better met when they work with native English speakers in a mainstream class instead of a specialist ESL one. In their view

the ‘intellectual push’ that is possible in such contexts outweighs the potential benefits of the more individualised tuition of specialist ESL classes.

For North American readers, the students in this literature programme can be compared to those who may participate in ‘sheltered instruction’ and ‘‘Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)’’ (e.g., Short, 2002). While I am not fully familiar with the nuances of these North American terms, my understanding is that such programmes have been, at least to some extent, modified to make them accessible to ESL learners, and that there is debate about the value of such modification (Bunch, Abrams, Lotan, & Valde´s, 2001). It is therefore important to note that the aim in the English literature programme described in the following sections was to provide the kind of intellectual and linguistic push, as well as the necessary support, to enable the second-phase ESL students to participate fully in the mainstream curriculum. That is, the curriculum in the English literature programme was not modified for the benefit of the ESL learners; rather, the students were supported-up to enable their participation.

3. The students and the literature programme

The year 7 boys who participated in the *Romeo and Juliet* Unit were in their first year of an Australian high school, and hence were 12 or 13 years of age. They had all been involved in a competitive selection process to gain entry to the school and had therefore demonstrated their academic abilities. Although academically gifted, the majority had learned English as their second, and in some cases their third language, and most had been in Australia for no more than 1–3 years.

On entry to the school, all students in year 7 were required to complete assessment procedures that were designed to investigate students’ abilities in core curriculum subjects, especially of English and Maths. Outcomes from these procedures had indicated that a number of the year 7 students required considerable on-going support with their English language development. For that reason, these students had been grouped together in an ‘English-focused’ class. Although all students in the class were second-phase ESL students, their curriculum was based on mandatory documents that were issued by the state department of education, and that all schools in the state were required to follow.

At the end of the year, all year 7 students in the school completed the regular school examination that included a range of short answer and extended tasks. Significantly, this final year assessment indicated that the students who had participated in the ‘English focused’ literature class had in fact performed better than many of their English speaking peers. Thus, while their beginning of year assessment outcomes had indicated that they were behind the majority of their English speaking peers, their end of year assessment outcomes indicated that relative to their peers, the majority had made substantial academic gains—thereby indicating the pedagogical practices that had been used with this class had indeed assisted the students to participate in the mainstream curriculum.

At the beginning of the academic year (and in addition to the school assessment procedures), the literature teacher, who I will refer to as Kathleen, and the ESL teacher undertook a close analysis of students’ needs in relation to the demands of the English literature curriculum. This needs analysis was based on the students’ written responses to the schools’ assessment tasks, further analysis of students’ written texts, and on class discussions between teachers and students. Like many other second-phase ESL students, these students’ needs were identified as primarily requiring support with ‘literate

discourses' (Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2002, 2003). Kathleen summarised their needs as requiring help with developing critical and analytic approaches to reading in order to engage with curriculum tasks and with writing of specific academic genres. The students also required support to be able to move between informal (everyday) conversational and more formal (specialised) oral registers of English in order to discuss, argue about, and explore concepts related to the curriculum content that they were studying. To do this, they needed support across all levels of English, including grammatical features such as tense and prepositions that are typically the source of errors for ESL students.

As indicated earlier, the selected text for the Unit under focus here was *Romeo and Juliet*. While the text itself was selected by the school (within the guidelines of the mandatory curriculum), the goals of the Unit were identified by Kathleen. In this Unit, her goals were:

- to develop an understanding and appreciation of *Romeo and Juliet* itself through a reflective and analytic reading of the text;
- to provide support for students to move between informal everyday registers and more formal specialist oral registers by 'playing' with the Shakespearean language;
- to assist students develop control of news reports and diary entries, including rhetorical structure and relevant language features of these genres;
- to focus on the abstract concepts of point of view and voice with a view to assisting students in their reading of *Romeo and Juliet* and in their writing of key genres.

In sum, the overall challenge was for students to engage in the specialist domain that is at the heart of an English literature programme. The further challenge was for students to be initiated into the reflexive domain where by they were not only able to participate in the study of English curriculum, but also to begin to reflect on, analyse and play with the knowledge that they were engaging with.

In meeting this challenge, Kathleen built the content of the Unit around reading and 'appreciating' *Romeo and Juliet*. The students viewed a film of the play, and spent considerable time discussing the intricacies of the plot. As they did so, Kathleen undertook a shared reading of the text with the students. The class thus worked from an overall understanding of the plot, to details of specific scenes, and to a focus on aspects of Shakespearean language. In assisting the students to work between the registers, and to meet requirements of the mandatory curriculum, Kathleen taught the genres of news reports and diary writing. Here she drew on 'content' of events that occurred in *Romeo and Juliet*. The students analysed models of the genres that they were working on, including rhetorical structures and patterns of language features. They negotiated shared understandings of possible topics for their own independent texts, again working from the 'content' of *Romeo and Juliet*, and they completed written texts independently as homework. Since this was the first Shakespearean play that the students had studied, making the language of the play accessible to these ESL students was of central concern. To do this, Kathleen incorporated a range of drama activities that were designed to engage the students affectively in the content of the Unit and also to enable them to work back and forward across a range of genres and of spoken and written registers. The Unit itself took place over a period of about 8 weeks.

The content of the Unit was challenging in that it introduced a Shakespearean play to young ESL students and assisted them to 'appreciate' the play. A key component in

supporting-up the students was the systematic teaching of, and about, language that occurred throughout the Unit. In the following sections, I highlight just three of the ways in which this teaching of language was built into the Unit.

4. Teaching language in the *Romeo and Juliet* Unit

4.1. Weaving curriculum content and academic language

As indicated earlier, theoretical perspectives that drew on the work of Vygotsky and Halliday and their respective followers informed the way in which Kathleen and other teachers in the research project understood the nature of curriculum challenge. A key feature here was the relationship between curriculum content and academic language. Thus for Kathleen, the theory of language that informed her work meant that doing English literature was inseparable from doing the language of English literature. Further, she held the view that such language is not ‘picked up’, but, rather, needed to be identified and taught explicitly to students. A distinguishing feature of the Unit as a whole, and of individual lessons, therefore, was the interweaving of the teaching curriculum content with teaching of and about language.

In the early stages, the focus of the *Romeo and Juliet* Unit was on the play itself. As indicated earlier, students became familiar with the play through reading, watching a video and discussing the sequences of events. In those early lessons, the focus was primarily on curriculum content. Other lessons, such as those where the teacher wanted to introduce or consolidate knowledge about a specific genre, focused primarily on teaching language. However, in every lesson, teaching of both curriculum content and language occurred. The deliberate ‘double field’ focus, where both curriculum content and language were alternatively the central focus of study in the Unit, enabled the teacher not only to shift the focus of specific tasks between these two fields, but also to interweave them within and between tasks.

In what follows, I draw on a lesson that was taught relatively early within the Unit to provide an example of the way in which teaching of language was interwoven with the teaching of curriculum content. This lesson, overall, could be described as mainly concerned with the teaching of language, in that its focus was on teaching of the genre of news report. However, only two of the four tasks in this lesson were primarily language focused, with the other two being primarily curriculum focused, albeit with some teaching of language. The following summary of tasks in this lesson, and their orientation, either to teaching curriculum content or language, illustrates this point.

Weaving curriculum content and language in the one lesson

Task	Curriculum/language focus	Task features
Review of genre of news report	Language focus: rhetorical structures, major language features	Whole class task: rapid exchange of questions and answers
Identification of topics for news reports	Primarily curriculum focus: review of specific sequences of events from R&J	Whole class task, but with increasing length of students’ contributions

Analysis of model of report	Primarily language focus: building on and further revision of students' existing knowledge of genre of news report	Whole class task: reinforcement of students' metalanguage; abstract concepts grounded through focus on language choices made in model text
Brainstorm of ideas for writing news report	Primarily curriculum focus: discussion of sequences of event and their 'news value'	Pair and individual work: point of handover in lesson (students then work independently on own texts)

In addition to weaving the teaching of curriculum content and language within the one lesson, transcripts reveal that the double field focus also occurred within tasks. The following extracts, taken from the lesson that is summarised above, provide illustrations of how this occurred. In Extract 1, the focus of teaching was appropriate choice of new topic from events in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, as the discussion unfolded, there were on-going references to features of news reports (*headlines, news articles*). These served to remind students of relevant language features of the genre while they rehearsed detail of the topic that they were preparing to write about.

Extract 1: Identification of topics for news reports

- Teacher: So what are some of the things, really quickly, that we could actually write our newspaper article about? What would make headlines?
- Student: the deaths of Romeo and Juliet
- Teacher: OK, we've got the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Yes?
- Student: When Romeo is banished
- Teacher: When Romeo is banished. Okay, Now if we were going to do a newspaper article about that what else would go into that one? Yes?

In Extract 2, the major focus of teaching was also curriculum content. The students were discussing sequences of action from *Romeo and Juliet* that could form the basis for their own news reports. In this discussion, the teacher shifted between events in *Romeo and Juliet*, and identification of characters who could be relied upon to tell the 'truth' about what happened, and therefore whose eye witness accounts could be included. This enabled her to make a more general point about the role of eye-witness quotes in news reports—a point that was picked up and developed further in later discussions of the relative nature of point of view.

Extract 2: Brainstorming ideas for students' news reports

- Teacher: But in terms of chronological order in the play, that's what happened. Sometimes you will be able to write this (news report) after everything has finished, and when the truth has come out. Who might tell the truth do you think? Yes,
- Student: Friar Lawrence

Teacher: Friar Lawrence. Somebody who would have told the truth. Yes? Student:
The nurse.
Teacher: The nurse, absolutely, so you can use them as witnesses as well. You could
use both of them as witnesses, telling two different sides, because
Friar Lawrence would tell Romeo's side and the Nurse would tell Juliet's
side.

The interweaving of curriculum content and language teaching that is evident in Extracts 1 and 2 was a characteristic and recurring feature of all lessons and tasks in the Unit.

5. Developing metalanguage

In addition to the actual teaching of language, there was much talk *about* language. This talk about language became one of the on-going conversations that recurred throughout the Unit. It enabled quite detailed and explicit analysis of the language choices that had been made in the construction of the text of *Romeo and Juliet*. It also facilitated analysis of the language choices made in the students' own written texts. As lesson transcripts revealed, this talk about language ranged across all levels: specific genres (news reports, diary entries); their rhetorical structures (summary line, introductory paragraph, elaborating paragraphs); grammatical features relevant to those genres (use of appropriate tense, patterns of reference and conjunction, structure of noun group and their role in character description); meaning of new vocabulary (bias, syntax); punctuation (use of exclamation marks, appropriate use of commas); and spelling.

The following extracts from the lesson that was summarised above provide examples of this shared talk about language:

Extract 3: Rhetorical structure of news reports

Teacher: What's the first thing that we do when we're going to write a newspaper
report, just looking at the page. What would be the thing right up the top?
Student: Headline
Teacher: Headline, absolutely, And how do we know it's a headline?
Teacher: And what do you have with the picture, do you have something
underneath the picture?
Student: Caption
Teacher: You have a caption, Excellent, So we've got the picture, we've got
the headline, we've got the by-line. What happens with the first paragraph?

Extract 4: Language features of news reports

Teacher: One sentence paragraphs. Now you know, they're small columns, you
don't have great long paragraphs. Why?
Students: Less complicated for people to read in a hurry, so they don't fall asleep.
Teacher: So they keep them in one sentence paragraphs. Alright, and there's
another word that you learned last week?
Student: Syntax
Teacher: Syntax excellent. So simple syntax, the grammar's not complicated,
so people can read it easily.

Extract 5. More abstract aspects of language use in news reports

- Teacher: What's one of the things that should be talked about, actually in the headline, that we've got there, that makes it interesting?
- Students: Bruised, bewildered and boiling
- Teacher: Bruised, bewildered and boiling. We've got some rather good alliteration there. I think we're having a bit of fun with it.
- Teacher: Now one of the things we are told about a newspaper article, is that it is factual. It gives the facts as they happened. But it's also meant to be unbiased. We know what biased means. Does that read to you as if it's unbiased?

Talk about language, of the kind illustrated above, was interwoven through all tasks and all lessons. In addition to focusing on specific aspects of text organisation and language features, this talk also served to introduce students to more abstract concepts about language. The following more extended extract, taken from a lesson about midway through the Unit where teacher and students discuss the significance of 'voice', provides an example of this.

Extract 6: Discussion of 'voice'

- Teacher: You need to develop a particular voice. Now we all know what voice means, don't we? When we say we have a voice for a character, it's not how they speak aloud. What do we mean by voice?
- Student: Like personality
- Teacher: Their personality. Now how would their personality come though?
- Student: What language, like how they think, like ✓
- Teacher: How they think, so their actual choice of vocabulary ✓ Now, can you give me an example of choice of vocabulary, what might be the difference, perhaps, between Juliet's vocabulary, and Tybalt's vocabulary?
- Student: Juliet would be more formal than him.
- Teacher: Maybe more formal, yes. Anything else?
- Student: Tybalt would be, like, use a lot of slang and not ✓
- Teacher: He could be using slang, he may not because he's a high status character. Remember, don't slide into the modern idea that once it's male, it's a man of action, they all have to be swear words. But we have his language within the play, which is, although it's, formal, it's got a lot of very strong action type words. Yes?
- Student: He uses more rough language, like he's not always, like his voice doesn't sound kind.
- Teacher: He's not gentle so a lot of his language would be in commands. He could have threats, right? He could have promises of violence, so there'd be a lot more language with violence in it. What are some of the words that we can use that would make his language sound violent, there are a couple of things that we've talked about. One of the things that we used in the newspaper article would work here. What was one of the language devices we used in the headline?

- Student: Alliteration
- Teacher: Alliteration. Now if we look at alliteration, we can use alliteration in Tybalt's speech but this time, if you wanted to do it to make it sound very harsh, you can use what we call onomatopoeia do you all know what that means?
- Students: (general)yes.
- Teacher: Yeah? Sound echoing sense. So we've got a lot of plosive sounds like b, p, t, d if they're all harsh sounds. Right? You can use those sounds, look for words that begin with those and have a lot of those sounds in them, and you'll find that a lot of the thing he said sound more harsh. Short vowels and more plosive consonants.

Extract 6 occurred when Kathleen and the students had been discussing possible topics that the students could choose for their written diary entries. Kathleen's question about 'voice' at the beginning of the extract shifted the discussion from possible diary entry topics to a discussion about language. The term 'voice' had previously been introduced to the students, but here Kathleen, having reintroduced the term, revised students' understanding of its meaning. She accepted the students' response that 'voice' represents characters' personalities, but she then pushed them to ground their explanations by providing examples from the text of *Romeo and Juliet*. (*Can you give me an example of choice of vocabulary? What might be the difference between Juliet's vocabulary and Tybalt's vocabulary?*). Although the students did not offer specific vocabulary examples, the ensuing discussion was based around the kind of language that is characteristic especially of Tybalt. This discussion involved quite a high level of technicality (for example, Tybalt's language would include commands and threats; it would sound violent; students could represent such violent language with use of specific devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia and use of plosive consonants and short vowels; these devices would make the language sound more harsh).

Through such interactions, students are first introduced to a technical language that enables them, subsequently, to talk about language in precise and efficient ways. As lessons unfolded in the Unit, it was obvious that students had appropriated relevant technical terms and comfortably used them when talking both to the teacher and to their peers. Examples of technical terms from this extract include: *vocabulary*, *vowels*, *consonants*.

These rather concrete terms then provide the basis for understanding a second level of technical terms that are slightly more abstract: *slang*, *alliteration*, *onomatopoeia*, *plosive sounds*. The appropriation of such terms enables students to move beyond an 'everyday' response to literature (I liked it, it made me laugh) to be able to articulate characteristic and distinctive features of one text and to compare it with another. However, such features are not unusual in themselves. Indeed it could well be expected that any good English literature programme would systematically introduce students to technical language that would initiate them into the specialist domain of curriculum knowledge.

More significantly, the learning of technical terms was not an end in itself in this extract, or in the lessons more generally in the *Romeo and Juliet* Unit. Such learning provided a basis for exploring the meaning of more abstract concepts. The abstract concept under focus in the extract above was that of 'voice'. In an interview about the Unit, Kathleen stated that she wanted to introduce this concept to the students in year 7 as she had

previously found it continued to cause problems for ESL students right through to year 12, the final year of high school. The students' ability to talk about language at a technical level provided them with a way of developing a comprehensive understanding of this concept. The teachers' insistence that students' explanations of voice be grounded in references to specific characters and their specific choices of language in the play ensured a shared basis for the construction of understandings of that concept. A shared understanding of 'voice' then enabled a more analytic 'appreciation' of *Romeo and Juliet*. The different levels of metalanguage thereby not only enabled students' access to the specialist domain of English literature, they also served to begin to initiate students into the reflexive domain.

6. Playing with language

As indicated earlier, one of the needs of the students that Kathleen had identified was that of requiring support to be able to move between informal everyday conversational, and more formal specialist registers of English. This need was addressed in a range of ways. There was a general move across the Unit from talking about sequences of events and characters in *Romeo and Juliet* to writing about these aspects of *Romeo and Juliet*. As has been seen, there was also a move from everyday ways of talking to more specialist ways of talking about events and characters. In addition, there was a deliberate move back and forward between the specialist and the everyday, and this occurred primarily through opportunities for the students to play with language.

Kathleen was an enthusiastic proponent of incorporating drama into her teaching. Drama activities enabled a shift in roles and relationships between teacher and students. Such shifts opened spaces for students to take different and more active roles in classroom interactions, and therefore also opened spaces for different kinds of language interactions between teacher and students, and, more particularly, between students and students. They enabled a handover of responsibility for learning. In addition, drama activities were fun and encouraged students' affective engagement with curriculum content.

The drama activities in the *Romeo and Juliet* Unit had a clear pedagogical purpose and were designed to facilitate engagement with curriculum content. One such example was an 'alter-ego' activity. This was designed to assist students to read between the lines of the play and to articulate what characters were 'really thinking' but not saying. In this activity, three students were required to sit on chairs at the front of the room while three other students stood behind. The seated students read different character parts from the text of *Romeo and Juliet*, while the 'alter-egos' had to say 'in their own words' what the characters were really thinking. Another example was a 'hot seat' activity that was designed to assist students understand the point of view of different characters. One student was required to sit at the front of the room and to imagine that he was a particular character from the play (the mother, the nurse, Tybalt, etc.). Other students asked questions about actions, motives, relationships to different characters, and so on, to which the person in the 'hot seat' had to respond in character.

While the drama activities occurred throughout the Unit, they were more frequent towards the later stages of the Unit. Thus students typically undertook preparatory work over a number of weeks, with this work culminating in a performance of some kind towards the end of the Unit. One such example of this can be seen in the following extract from a lesson that was taught towards the end of the Unit. Here the students had been

asked to work in groups to re-write specific scenes from the play into their own language. The extract shows the 'performance' of one of the groups.

Extract 7: Playing with language (Juliet's parents instruct her to marry Paris) (Scene begins)

Student 1 (mother): Oh dear, oh dear, why won't they [inaudible two or three words].
Crying because of Tybalt. Are you. Well, I've got something
to cheer you up. You'll marry Paris in not four, but three days.
Isn't that wonderful.

Student 2 (Juliet): But what if I don't want to marry him?

Student 1 (Mother): What?

Student 2 (Juliet): I'm not marrying silly Paris. I don't even know him. I love you.

Student 1 (Mother): Who?

Student 2 (Juliet): Ah, nobody. [laughter from other students]

Student 1 (Mother): You'll marry Paris, you ungrateful little brat. Here comes your
father. Husband. [laughter from other students]

Student 3 (father): Daughter. What is your problem. You shall marry Paris,
whatever happens.

Student 2 (Juliet): But, but...

Student 3 (father): But no, I said no, and I when I say no, I mean no fuss. If you
don't marry, you're going down, okay.

Student 2 (Juliet): I won't marry Paris. You can't make me.

Student 3 (father): I can't. Well, then, take this.
('father' pretends to strike 'Juliet'; laughter and talking from other
students)

Student 2 (Juliet): I won't marry Paris.

Student 3 (father): You won't? You'll have to take the consequences.

(End of scene)

As this extract illustrates, the boys' script has maintained the essence of the conflict between Juliet and her parents, in that Juliet is being commanded to marry Paris against her will. However, the students have shifted from the specialist register of Shakespeare towards the more informal register of their own everyday language. In doing so, they have retained some of the dramatic flourishes that were evident in the original script. Student 3, who plays Juliet's father, for example, announces *Daughter, What is your problem, You shall marry Paris, whatever happens*. The pronouncement and language choices are not those of the everyday language of 13-year old boys, but neither are they the language of Shakespeare. The students were able to use the incongruity of young boys playing the characters of a young girl and her parents to humorous effect. They thus appeared to have taken their audience into account as they re-wrote their scene. While obviously the work of young students, such performances provide evidence of increasing confidence with their own reading of the play, and with their writing about the play, as well as evidence of their understanding of Shakespearean language. They also provide evidence of the students' developing abilities to work between registers. In addition, the drama activities encouraged students to question, argue, and play with curriculum content. By playing with content, the students were encouraged to think of curriculum knowledge as a social construction that is

open to scrutiny, challenge and change, and they were thereby nudged beyond the specialist domain of English literature towards the reflexive domain. The systematic teaching of and about language that was a central part of the Unit assisted the students to develop the necessary control of English to begin to engage with this domain.

7. Conclusions

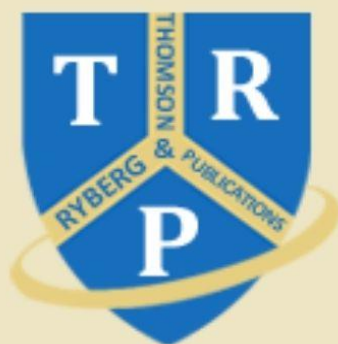
In this paper, I have argued for high-challenge and high-support approaches to meeting the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. I have elaborated this argument by describing an English literature programme where a Unit of Work on *Romeo and Juliet* was taught to a year 7 class. I have focused on some of the ways in which the teacher, Kathleen, provided both intellectual ‘push’ and necessary support to enable students to achieve the Unit goals. Key features of the Unit were the integration of curriculum content with the academic language of that curriculum content; the systematic teaching of and about academic language; and ‘playing’ with language across different registers. The nature of the challenge and support, with explicit teaching of both curriculum content and academic language, that was provided in the English literature Unit, I have suggested, served to initiate students into, in Macken-Horarik’s (1996) terms, the specialist domain of English literature, and to nudge them towards the reflexive.

In a final comment, I return to the words of Macken-Horarik, who argues (1996, pp. 242–243) that if teachers respond to linguistically and culturally diverse students by conflating educational learning with everyday learning and everyday language (that is, by modifying the curriculum), they reduce the options that are available for their students to take up in school learning, and effectively strand them in a school version of commonsense knowledge. As Macken-Horarik argues, the danger of a modified curriculum lies in the restricted access that students have to educational knowledge. Her analysis does not imply that the domain of the everyday is inferior, but rather it recognises that the kinds of intellectual concepts that are addressed in the study of key curriculum subjects require different forms of knowledge and ways of meaning and also different kinds of language. I would suggest that for the linguistically and culturally diverse students who participated in the *Romeo and Juliet* Unit, the learning possibilities that were opened up for them in accessing the specialist and reflexive domains of English literature provided a necessary basis for equitable and full participation in the mainstream curriculum. They also provided a powerful alternative to a modified curriculum.

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