

## REVIEW

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## RESENSIE

Diane H. Tracy and Lesley Mandel Morrow. 2006. *Lenses on Reading*. London: The Guilford Press. pp 238.

At present there is a particular concern in South Africa about the poor reading performance levels of learners in South Africa. Many argue that this highlights the need for initial literacy to be taught in the mother tongue for instruction through the mother tongue to continue for a period that is long enough to consolidate this. This is a compelling argument but it tends to leave an important factor out of account: not enough teachers have a solid grounding in theories and models of reading and the ability to apply these to meet the needs of the learners whose literacy skills they are developing. Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block and Morrow (2001) have found that effective and exemplary literacy teachers are able to provide a clear theoretical basis for the literacy strategies and activities they employ in the classroom.

The authors have taken on a formidable task in writing this book. Providing an accessible and sound succinct discussion of key models and theories which are related to the development of reading for teachers is not easy. But this is not all the authors set out to do. They aim at enabling those who do not have a background in this field to gain sufficient knowledge to be able to apply theories and models to teach reading in their own classrooms. They are concerned to encourage teachers and researchers to apply myriad perspectives and viewpoints (lenses) to the challenges they face in the classroom.

It is suggested that the more lenses through which individuals are able to see the world, the more flexible, and ultimately capable, they can be responding to and discussing it with others ... the more lenses educators possess for examining the reading process and instruction, the better equipped they will be to understand, facilitate and articulate literacy development. Knowledge of theories and models, along with their implications for practice and research will contribute to educators becoming informed decision makers. (p. xii)

Reading research draws on and has been influenced by a number of fields: psychology, cognition, sociology, neuroscience and linguistics are perhaps the most obvious ones. Tracey and Marrow have selected the theories and models that they consider have attracted scholarly attention for a long period of time and those that have had an impact on instruction or given new direction to research or practice (p. 12).

One of the difficulties in deciding on chapters is that the theories and models tend to overlap and also to affect and be affected by each other. They have decided on a broadly chronological order. Another is that there is not clear agreement on what should be regarded as a model and what should be seen as a theory. Their decision was to follow the practice of the authors concerned and use the term models or theories

where they do, and to where they use the terms interchangeably, Tracey and Morrow have followed suit.

There are 10 chapters. In the first chapter, Introduction, the authors invite a discussion on theory in general and issues related to teaching. Questions such as ‘Are people aware of the theories they possess?’ are later more specifically explored as ‘Are teachers aware of the theories they possess?’ Finally, the authors explain the rationale for selecting the theories they have included in this text. In the main body of the text, they move semi-chronologically: Chapter 2 (Early Roots: Early Theories and Models Applicable to Reading (400BC-1899); Chapter 3: Behaviorism: The Dominant Education Theory for 50 Years (1900-1950s); Chapter 4: Constructivism (1920s-Present); Chapter 5: Theories of Literacy Development (1930s-Present); Social Learning Perspective (1960s-Present); Chapter 7: Information / Cognitive Processing Perspectives (1950s-1970s); Chapter 8: Information / Cognitive Processing Perspectives, Continued (1980s); Chapter 9: Information / Cognitive Processing Perspectives: State of the Art (1989-Present). The final chapter, Chapter 10 entitled Putting It All Together attempts to give readers an overall perspective.

The strengths of the book lie in the clear and accessible way in which the theory is discussed, the contextualisation of the theory in the classroom and the demonstration of the benefits of approaching teaching situations using multiple lenses.

Generally the division into chapters and the order in which they are presented works well. However, in my view Chapters 5 (Literacy Development) and 6 (Social Learning Perspective), which should be of particular interest for South African readers, should have been more closely integrated. Another possibility would have been to present the social learning perspective first so that literacy development is framed by it. As Halliday (1975) has convincingly argued literacy development cannot be divorced from its social context. Patterns of socialisation and social interaction both within the home and in the classroom shape literacy learning.

Both chapters do, however, succeed in providing succinct and sound summaries of complex theories. Chapter 5 gives an overview of literacy development: cognitive theory, maturation theory, Holdway’s theory of literacy development, stage models of reading, emergent literacy theory and family literacy theory. In their conclusion to the chapter, Tracey and Morrow allow these theories to be read in relation to each other. Grade R and grade 1 teachers, who are encouraged to use big books and shared reading (initially introduced by Holdway) by the national curriculum, will find it interesting to consider the way in which Holdway’s theory of literacy development challenges maturation theory and its notion that children who are taught to read at 6.5 years old are most successful.

As Tracey and Morrow point out, theories within a social learning perspective are often used interchangeably, In Chapter 6 they attempt to show the distinctions between Sociolinguistic Theory, Socio-cultural Theory, Social Constructivism and Social Learning Theory/ Cognitive Theory. They have also usefully included Critical Literacy Theory. In line with the dialogical mode Tracey and Morrow adopt, readers are asked to put the following questions to themselves before reading:

- How does the social community in which students live affect their literacy learning?

- How does the social community within the classroom affect students' literacy learning?
- How do parent-child language interactions affect student literacy learning?
- How do students' interactions with each other affect their literacy learning?
- How do teachers' interactions with students affect their literacy learning?

The other chapters in the book offer teachers, practitioners and potential researchers a clear overview of the ways in which thinking and beliefs about the reading process have been shaped by theoretical perspectives. As the authors acknowledge, each of the chapters could have constituted a book in itself. I believe that the book provides a solid base for further study and would be an asset in undergraduate and graduate study. It is a timely counter to the binary thinking that has beset reading instruction and so often reduces the reading process to a strident championing of the merits of whole language vs. phonics. The major contribution is to argue the value of multiple perspectives. Teachers are encouraged to use these perspectives to become informed observers who seek to understand the needs of their learners. There is not just one correct way of teaching reading or addressing a child's difficulty.

The book could be usefully supplemented by a resource book like that of Lapp, Flood, Moore and Nichols (2005) which provides explicit suggestions and guidance for developing initial literacy teaching practice.

## REFERENCE

LAPP, D, J FLOOD, K MOORE & M NICHOLS. 2005. *Teaching literacy in the first grade*. New York: Guildford Press.

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