

Literacy in the Secondary English Classroom

Strategies for Teaching the Way Kids Learn

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CHAPTER

1 Learning Theories for a Literacy Learning Environment

*Focusing on how people learn...will help teachers move beyond
either-or dichotomies that have plagued the field of education.*

—National Research Council, 2001, p. 19

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Why is teaching more effective when teachers understand learning theory?
2. What conditions and principles must be in place to create a literacy learning environment?
3. How do learning, acquisition, and discourse theories contribute to a literacy learning environment?
4. How does a primary discourse differ from a secondary discourse?
5. How can teachers help students avoid the either/or discourse dichotomy?

Overview

Chapter 1 describes what we call a *literacy learning environment*—a classroom that focuses on the theory and practice of literacy learning. Using the research of Cambourne (1988, 1994, 1995), Gee (1996, 2001), Krashen and Terrell (1998), Resnick (1999), Resnick and Hall (1998), and Turbill, Butler, and Cambourne (1999 a–g), we construct a vision of a classroom in which learning is language rich, student centered, collaborative, and barrier free, and in which students embrace what Resnick and Hall describe as a scholarship of effort. We argue for a literacy learning environment in which students learn about discourse theory and how primary and secondary discourses may conflict and cause “intellectual unrest.” We advocate teaching students that discourses empower or disempower them, depending on the situation. Finally, we advocate helping students understand that power in language (and in life) often comes from knowing

many different discourses and using them effectively. This chapter is the most theoretical of *Literacy in the Secondary English Classroom*, but we illustrate the theory with specific examples from our own experiences and those of contemporary writers.

We hope to convince readers that theory and practice are equally important in establishing a literacy learning environment in secondary English classrooms. An understanding of a literacy learning environment and how it supports students' acquisition of literacy enhances the strategies detailed in Chapters 3 through 8. The strategies we present become part of a reusable pedagogical repertoire that helps students learn language and learn about language while they use language.

Acquisition and Learning in a Literacy Learning Environment

To set the context for the theories of learning on which a literacy learning environment is based, it is important to understand the terms *learning* and *acquisition*, as defined by Stephen D. Krashen (1992; Krashen and Terrell, 1998). Krashen and Terrell (1998) use the terms *learning* and *acquisition* to distinguish the different ways students learn a second language (pp. 18–19). The first term, *learning*, Krashen defines as a formal process in which the teacher or the student breaks down knowledge into parts that must be consciously learned. For Krashen this means learning the rules, understanding the grammar—that is getting the “facts of the language” under control. Learning also involves what Krashen calls a “monitor” function (p. 18). When students learn the rules of language, they consciously measure or monitor their language usage against a standard of correctness. Krashen defines *learning* as a conscious act.

The second term, *acquisition*, Krashen defines as an almost unconscious act in which the learner is exposed to knowledge without formal teaching (p. 18). Acquisition involves “picking up” the knowledge but not necessarily being conscious that learning is taking place. Krashen uses acquisition to describe how infants acquire fluency in their native language without formal instruction—they are immersed in the language, and they are forced to use the language to meet their needs. They hear it, they try to speak it, they are encouraged to speak, and everyone assumes they will learn it in time. Krashen sees acquisition as different from learning. However, a true literacy learning environment creates many opportunities for students to both learn and acquire knowledge.

Krashen's description of the differences between acquisition and learning represents the two extremes in the debate about how students learn. Those who support the acquisition side of the debate believe that students learn language mainly through immersion, exposure, and demonstration. Those who support the learning side believe that students need to be explicitly taught what and how to learn. The fact is that students learn both ways. Sometimes they acquire information unconsciously through exposure and demonstrations. Sometimes they have to be specifically taught what and how to learn. At other times, students learn and acquire simultaneously.

Cambourne's “conditions for learning” and Resnick's “principles of learning,” summarize the two sides of the debate about how students learn. Conditions for learning reflect the view that students learn mainly through immersion, exposure, and

demonstration, whereas principles of learning suggest that students also need to be taught what and how to learn. Both learning and acquisition are necessary to create a classroom environment in which students gain knowledge that empowers them. If teachers understand both the conditions for learning and the principles of learning and use them to present lessons, students have a better chance of developing literacy skills and strategies.

Brian Cambourne: Conditions for Learning

We first started thinking seriously about how students learn when we read the work of Australian linguist Brian Cambourne (1988, 1995). Seeking to understand why some students could learn very complex subjects outside school but have little success in school, Cambourne became interested in language acquisition. His research over the last twenty years (Cambourne, 1995; Meeks, 1999) shows that barrier-free learning—learning that comes easily to students regardless of the subject matter or skill—shares certain qualities. He names these qualities *immersion*, *demonstration*, *expectations*, *responsibility*, *practice*, *response*, *application*, and *engagement*. These qualities are not hierarchical; all can occur during the same lesson and are equally important, depending on the subject of study.

- *Immersion*—Students become immersed in the subject to be learned. Material to be learned is presented in a variety of ways, not just once but many times. This way students are surrounded by what is to be learned, and because the material is presented in many different ways, students who are visual or kinesthetic learners can learn the material as easily as those students who are linguistic learners.

- *Demonstration*—The teacher or a student demonstrates the concept to be learned. The classroom is a place where demonstrations are essential parts of the learning strategy. The teacher may demonstrate first, but students are then expected to demonstrate their knowledge to one another.

- *Expectations*—Teachers establish clear expectations for what and how material is to be learned. Students receive fully detailed directions about exactly what they are supposed to do or accomplish. This means that students do not have to spend time figuring out what the teacher wants; they can spend their time learning. It also means that excuses such as “I did not understand what you wanted me to do” are not acceptable. Students become accountable for their work.

- *Responsibility*—Students take responsibility for their own learning with opportunities to research, report, and teach one another. Students who are passive learners in the classroom—who take notes, read, and report information back on exams—have little investment in their own learning even if they are interested in the topic. Students become truly engaged when they set their own learning agenda (within the confines of the curriculum) and report on their learning to the class. In this way, students are not only responsible for what they learn, but they also take responsibility for teaching their classmates.

■ *Practice*—Students have time both in and out of class to practice new learning. Students need many opportunities to practice what they have learned. In every sport students play—in anything they learn outside the classroom—they practice and practice, usually with coaches. These coaches may be professionals, peers, or family members. Students take opportunities to practice their skills in a risk-free environment while benefiting from the responses of knowledgeable others. In a literacy learning environment, students apply their learning in one situation to another situation, rehearse their learning with classmates, and engage in activities that allow them to hone their expertise.

■ *Response*—Teachers respond positively but honestly and in a timely fashion to students' attempts to master new skills and strategies. Students need a great deal of feedback as they attempt a new skill. Athletic coaches offer many examples of effective response. They set up situations in which athletes can practice under their watchful eyes, and then they give the athletes feedback on how well they perform the sport or skill. Teachers can do the same thing. By allowing students to practice and by responding to the practice, teachers inform students about how close they are to meeting expectations. Students also become their own coaches. Teachers ensure students understand the criteria by which their performance will be judged and encourage them to use that criteria for self-assessment. Ultimately, learning to self-assess guides students to successful performance.

■ *Application*—Teachers give students opportunities to apply their knowledge to authentic situations, not just answer questions on an exam. When students have opportunities to apply their new learning, they practice, receive response, and judge for themselves how successfully they have learned. When the applied learning is risk free (in other words, no punishment or grade is attached if students fail to master the new learning on the first try), the opportunity for application becomes a way for students to think metacognitively about their work (Cambourne, 1988, 1994).

■ *Engagement*—Students invest time, energy, and interest in the subject to be learned. Engagement occurs naturally when a learner is interested in the subject and wants to acquire knowledge. The challenge, however, is to engage learners in materials in which they may not be interested. We have found that when all the other conditions for learning are in place, engagement often occurs naturally, and students find themselves learning a subject in which they had little interest. Cambourne's research demonstrates that most people learn more easily and thoroughly when all the conditions for learning are in place. However, Cambourne's further research (1995) on learning shows that learners are more likely to engage deeply with demonstrations if they

believe that they are capable of ultimately learning or doing whatever is being demonstrated; believe that learning whatever is being demonstrated has some potential value, purpose, and use for them; are free from anxiety; [and demonstrations] are given by someone they like, respect, admire, trust and would like to emulate. (pp. 186–187)

Cambourne's conditions for learning are not hierarchical but interactive, as can be seen in Figure 1.1. This model of an atom with electrons and neutrons constantly in motion around a nucleus best represents for us the interaction of all the conditions

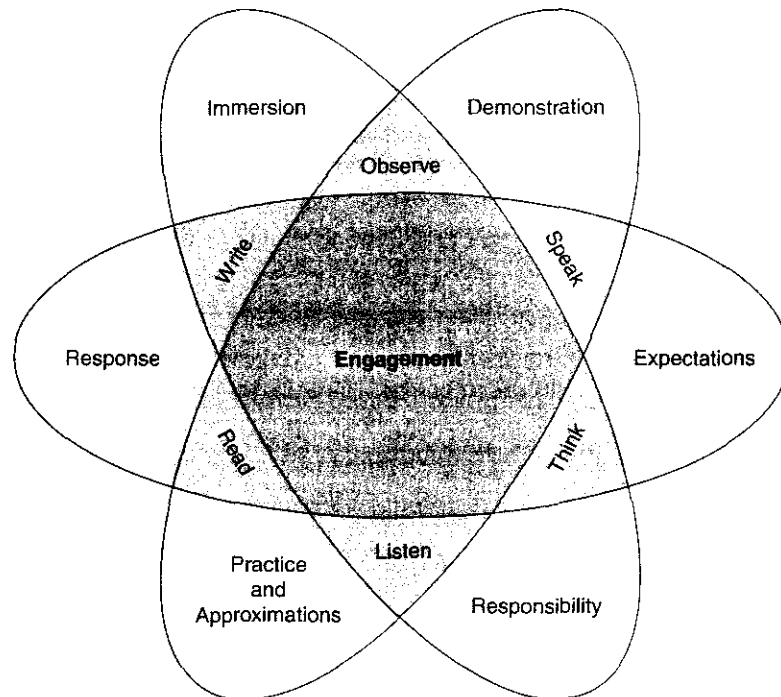


FIGURE 1.1 Conditions for Learning in a Literacy Learning Environment. This atomic model demonstrates how the conditions for learning continuously interact with one another to create a classroom environment for learning.

for learning. Cambourne's model for this continuous interaction is a washing machine agitator viewed from the top down (1995, p. 189). As the agitator works, it swishes back and forth, mixing the water, soap, bleach, and clothes. Both models demonstrate that for learning to take place, all of the conditions for learning need to be in place in the classroom and happening in conjunction with one another. They overlap and interact in many important ways as the teacher constructs the lesson. However, not all of the conditions will be equally stressed in every lesson.

As we reflect on how we learned to bake bread, scuba dive, use a computer program, or refinish furniture, Cambourne's conditions for learning make even more sense to us. When Lynn learned to scuba dive, traditional classroom learning made up less than 10 percent of the curriculum. However, Lynn was treated to many demonstrations of the skills she was expected to learn from videos, illustrations in the text, demonstrations by her instructor, and demonstrations by other students attempting the same skill. More than 90 percent of the scuba instruction consisted of practice time in the swimming pool, literal immersion, where the students were expected to practice the skills until they felt comfortable with them. The scuba instructor watched, made corrections,

and required the students to try again—all under water—until both the instructor and the students were satisfied with their skills. Only then were the students taken to open water to demonstrate mastery of their skills for the final test.

When Carol learned to bake bread, she followed much the same process. She was motivated by a desire to learn a specific skill, to bake delicious bread for her family as had her mother and grandmother before her. Highly motivated, Carol had many opportunities to practice in a risk-free environment (her kitchen). Although she had several mentors and had seen numerous demonstrations, Carol still struggled to learn to bake bread. In her journals, she reflects on her motivation, her questions, her trials and errors, more errors (disasters), her discouragement, her grandmother's recipe, her mother's recipe, and finally the recipe from the university extension service that turned out to be the best—and her eventual triumph, producing her first light, golden-brown loaf. Carol's much-sought-after golden brown loaves are another example of how learning takes place outside of school without formal instruction.

When the conditions for learning are in place, learning becomes possible for the learner, regardless of how unusual that learning might be. Because conditions for learning were present throughout her instruction, Lynn, who had never been in ocean water deeper than her knees, was able to learn to scuba dive in a potentially dangerous environment. Because the conditions for learning were present throughout her instruction, Carol, who had never previously thought about the intricacies of effective bread making, was able to learn to bake delicious, crusty loaves of bread. The conditions for learning—immersion, demonstration, expectations, responsibility, practice, response, application, and engagement—make it possible for learners to more easily acquire knowledge. These conditions are essential to creating a literacy learning environment.

John Mayher, award-winning author of *Uncommon Sense* (1990), supports Cambourne's claim that in-school learning should not be different from out-of-school learning. He also claims that teachers must give up the idea that decontextualized presentations of skills result in improved student learning. The problem, he says, is that educators

expect school learning to be the acquisition of disembedded knowledge and skills. Therefore we [educators] consistently believe that it requires a set of learning principles and activities quite different from learning how to ride a bicycle or bake a roast or order a beer or court a mate. If we believe that in-school and out-of-school learning involve different processes, then we will see little need to modify our constructs of the former in light of our experiences in the latter. (p. 83)

Mayher contends that for educators to change classroom practices, they have to change their understanding of how students learn.

Because successful learning, whether in or out of school, is the result of an environment in which learning is encouraged in every conceivable way, it makes sense to create that environment in the classroom. Such an environment can be partially created through putting the conditions for learning in place. However, the conditions for learning mainly address the *acquisition* of knowledge. To create a literacy learning environment, a classroom also needs to be a place where *learning* is encouraged. When we

found the work of Lauren B. Resnick (1999; Resnick & Hall, 1998), a cognitive psychologist, we were delighted. Resnick and Hall's work clearly focuses on learning but complements Cambourne's work on a number of levels while overlapping in others.

Lauren Resnick: Principles of Learning

Resnick and Hall's research emphasizes effort over aptitude. Synthesizing research from both cognitive science and social psychology on how students learn, Resnick hypothesizes that perceived intelligence is more a result of effort than brains. Resnick's research shows that students who are "treated as if they are intelligent, actually become so" (p. 2). Resnick (1999) rejects the concept of the intelligence quotient, or IQ, as a measure of success, pointing out that twenty years of research by social psychologists show that "what people believe about the nature of talent and intelligence—about what accounts for success and failure—is closely related to the amount and kind of effort they put forth in situations of learning or problem solving" (p. 3). Resnick has formulated a set of core principles that can guide schools, parents, teachers, and students into what she refers to as the "upward, getting-smarter spiral" (p. 3). These principles are:

- Institute effort-based learning.
- Set clear expectations for learning.
- Recognize achievement.
- Institute fair and credible evaluations.
- Join knowledge and thinking with learning.
- Require discipline-based talk while learning.
- Promote and model discipline-based thinking and learning.
- View learning as an apprenticeship.

Many of these principles of learning duplicate Cambourne's conditions for learning. Both are necessary to create a literacy learning environment. The principles of learning are as follows:

- *Institute effort-based learning.* Sustained and directed effort can yield high achievement for all students. Meaningful time on task is the key. Both students and teachers believe that "getting smart" is more a matter of hard work than aptitude, and that most learning difficulties are overcome through hard work. Students are taught not only what to learn but also how to learn. Learning strategies are made explicit to students, and the school atmosphere supports these strategies, which might include parents and students reading together for twenty minutes every evening, students taking a notebook to every class, or students doing a minimum amount of homework every night.

- *Set clear expectations for learning.* Teachers make course expectations and classroom behavior expectations clear to everyone. Parents, teachers, students, and the

community understand what is required and why. Resnick (1999) maintains that setting clear expectations is key to the getting-smarter cycle. For example, course-of-study guides, daily lesson plans, and homework hotlines make expectations clear and available to everyone. When expectations are clear, students take responsibility for meeting them. Unclear or changing expectations discourage students and give them legitimate excuses for not being prepared.

- *Recognize achievements.* Teachers, parents, and the community recognize students' achievements in a variety of ways, from special awards to names in the paper. Parents receive frequent feedback on students' progress and then acknowledge students' efforts when they meet expectations or begin the work needed to progress toward meeting expectations. Everyone is recognized for their accomplishments. The school itself sets up a variety of ways to recognize students' progress toward achieving goals. Student-parent-teacher conferences are one of many ways that "getting-smarter schools" acknowledge students' achievements.

- *Institute fair and credible evaluations.* Teachers and parents make sure that homework, tests, exams, portfolios, and other types of assessments are clearly aligned with expectations. These assessments are scored not on a curve but in a way in which student growth is measured against absolute standards. Fair and credible evaluations negate grading on the curve and tests scored with percentiles. Fair and credible evaluations are those in which students and parents know assessment standards in advance, and students' progress is assessed on the basis of how closely they meet those standards. When students do not know what is expected of them and are not sure how they will be evaluated, school becomes a nasty little card game in which the deck is stacked against any student who is not familiar with the way school works.

- *Join knowledge and thinking with learning.* Teachers and parents make sure that neither knowledge (facts only) nor critical thinking is valued more than the other. Facts and critical thinking are not separated—students need both. When students take tests in which they mark answers true or false, or choose the correct answer from multiple choices, they believe that there are always absolute answers. On the other hand, if students only give their opinion about a topic without any background knowledge, then opinion becomes little more than uninformed speculation, and students learn that it is okay to hold any opinion without data to support it.

- *Require discipline-based talk while learning.* Students learn to use the language of the discipline in accurate and relevant ways. Students use good reasoning and knowledge from the discipline to respond to and develop one another's thinking. Students take time in class to use the vocabulary and problem-solving strategies common to the discipline to address the problems of that discipline. For example, in English classes students use the language of process writing and the strategies of revision when revising their own or another's paper. In science students use the language of research as they develop a hypothesis and devise ways to test it.

- *Promote and model discipline-based thinking and learning.* Students learn that each discipline has its own expectations and requirements for research and knowledge

acquisition. Students, parents, and the community expect teachers to model and then hold students responsible for intelligent thinking and accountable talk within each discipline. This means assessing and evaluating a problem from multiple perspectives and being able to articulate a variety of points of view, whether or not one is in agreement with them.

- *View learning as apprenticeship.* The mentor–apprentice relationship is one of the most powerful types of pedagogy. When students learn as apprentices, they observe many demonstrations of what they are expected to learn, and they engage in many practice opportunities before they demonstrate mastery. The mentor–apprentice relationship is perhaps the oldest teaching pedagogy on record. Students learn their craft under the guidance of an expert who models for them, again and again, what it is they are expected to learn and who then holds them accountable for that learning (p. 9).

Figure 1.2 applies the atomic model to Resnick’s (1999) principles for learning to illustrate that these principles are not hierarchical or separate from one another. In

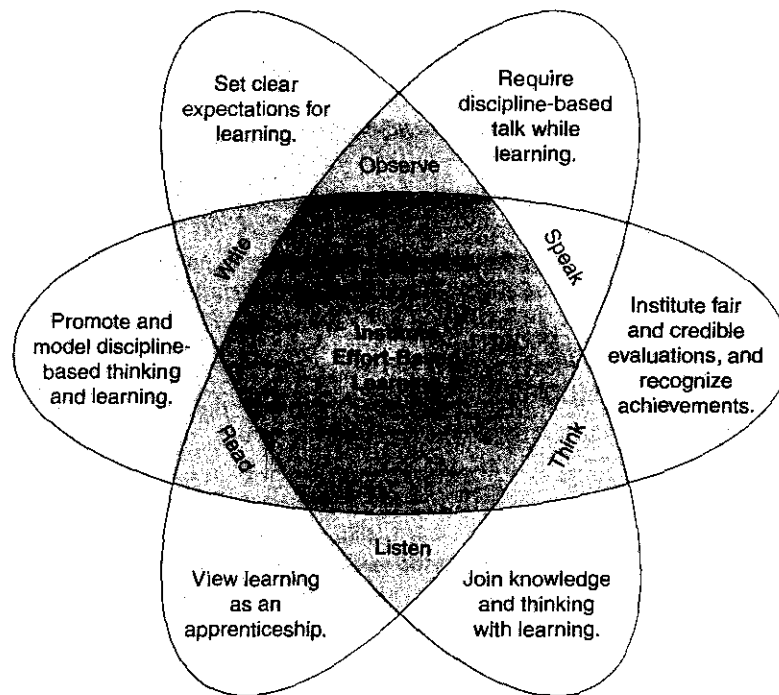


FIGURE 1.2 Principles of Learning in a Literacy Learning Environment. This atomic model demonstrates how the principles for learning continuously interact with one another to create a classroom environment for learning.

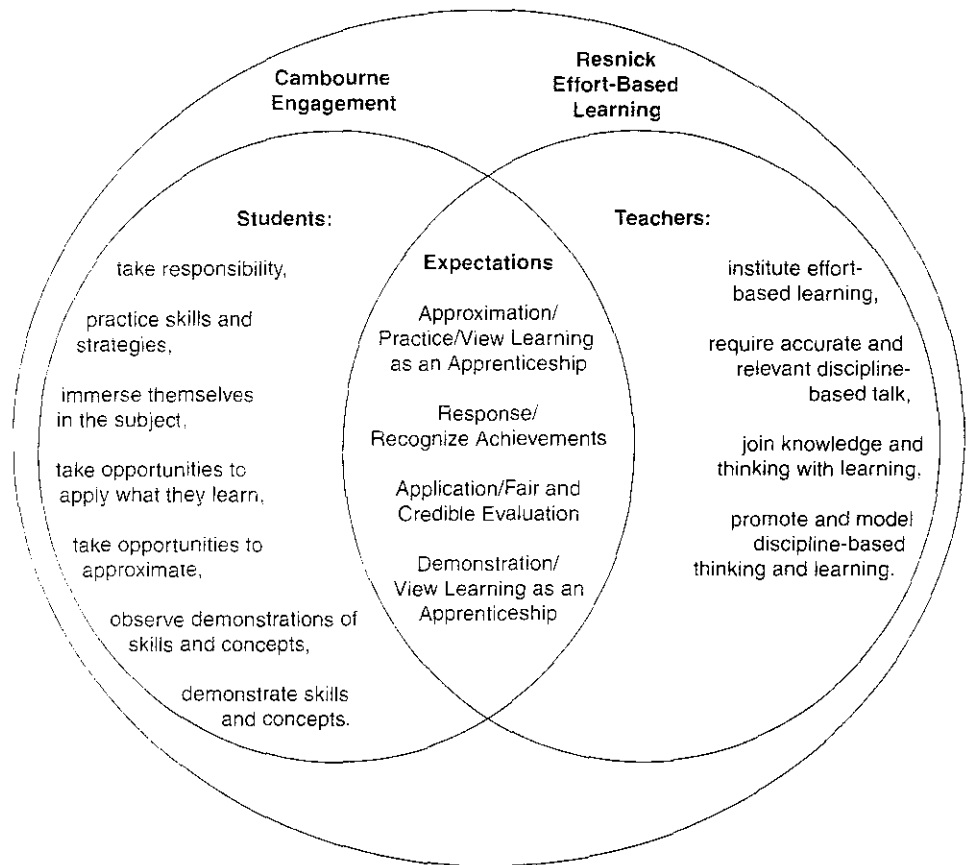


FIGURE 1.3 A Literacy Learning Environment. This Venn diagram illustrates how differences and commonalities between Cambourne's conditions for learning and Resnick's principles of learning overlap and complement one another to create an effective literacy learning environment.

a literacy learning environment, they overlap, occur at the same time, and occur in relationship to one another as students read, write, listen, observe, speak, and think critically.

Certainly, all of Resnick's principles for learning make good sense, and many of them are similar to Cambourne's conditions for learning. We find this similarity particularly interesting because the principles of learning were developed from synthesizing the research from cognitive science and social psychology, whereas the conditions for learning are the result of studying language acquisition—basically linguistic research. Figure 1.3 shows how conditions for learning and principles of learning complement and overlap. Taken together, these theories of learning describe the best of classroom pedagogy. If these conditions and principles are in place in the classroom, most stu-

dents have every opportunity to learn. However, in spite of teachers' and researchers' best efforts, some students still do not learn. They resist learning and may be hostile or indifferent to what school has to offer. This is when it becomes crucial to understand one more theory about how students learn—what we call *discourse matching*.

Primary and Secondary Discourses: Our Theory of Discourse Matching

The conditions and principles for learning, although highly effective in creating classrooms in which students learn more easily, still do not take into account other factors that support or inhibit students' learning. Like a three-legged stool that is missing one leg, a teacher cannot create a literacy learning environment by putting in place only learning conditions and principles. Successful learning is also dependent on an additional factor, the third leg of the stool: how well the discourse of school matches students' home discourses.

To understand discourse matching theory and the part it plays in creating a literacy learning environment, we cite the work of James Paul Gee (1996, p. 143) and use his definitions of primary discourse and secondary discourse. Gee defines *primary discourse* as "our first social identity: . . . [it is] . . . our initial taken-for-granted understanding of *who* we are and *who* 'people like us' are, as well as what sorts of things we ('people like us') do, value, and believe when we are not 'in public'" (p. 137). In other words, a primary discourse is a person's initial identity of what and who he or she is. Usually a primary discourse originates with culture, family, friends, and language. Gee maintains that a primary discourse is acquired unconsciously from a person's environment and significant others.

Lynn's primary discourse community is a ranch in southern Idaho where education, honesty, efficiency, hard work, thrift, large animal husbandry, and, above all, the land her grandfather homesteaded are valued. Lynn explains, "We believe that ranchers like us who sweat for every dollar and are constantly at the mercy of the weather and changing commodity prices are different from 'city folk' because they live on apartment-crowded streets, they are surrounded by crime and noise, and they get a regular paycheck—regardless of how little it rains in July." Lynn acquired her primary discourse from her parents and grandparents, all of whom were ranchers. They taught her, through demonstration and direct instruction, what she needed to know to be successful in a ranching discourse. She acquired her primary discourse easily—unconsciously—without needing to read books, attend lectures, or take examinations.

Compare this to Gee's definition of secondary discourse. He defines *secondary discourse* very broadly to mean organizations (literacy communities) such as churches, political parties, gangs, schools, offices, jobs, professions, clubs, fraternities, athletic teams, cliques, hobby groups, leagues, or, in his words, "any local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization" (1996, p. 137). For example, Lynn's secondary discourse, which she consciously learned, involves groups who believe in formal learning, research, study, teaching, books, writing, and travel. The difference between Lynn's primary discourse and secondary

discourse is that she acquired her primary discourse unconsciously as part of her family culture, whereas she consciously learned her secondary discourse.

Primary and Secondary Discourses: Understanding How Students Learn

Gee (1996) makes the point that whereas a primary discourse—one's first social identity—is acquired mostly unconsciously through something like an apprenticeship in “particular families within their socio-cultural settings” (p. 137), secondary discourses can be much more difficult to learn, depending on how far removed the secondary discourse is from the primary discourse, or how much the secondary discourse is in conflict with the primary discourse. Shirley Brice Heath (1990) underlines this point in her study of the school success of African American and White working-class children from communities in the Piedmont Carolinas. Heath's research demonstrates that some discourse communities better prepare children to succeed in a school environment. Some primary discourses predispose students toward school success because the ways in which parents relate to their children are more like the ways in which teachers typically relate to students. In other words, some primary discourse communities replicate the discourse of school. Other primary discourse communities do not. Heath found that if children's first social identity or primary discourse does not value “school speak” (information exchange as a way of socializing), they may have a more difficult time in school because what is valued in their primary discourse is not valued by school discourse.

After studying why certain groups of children do not succeed on direct writing assessments, Finn reports that since “the language of school is typically explicit, the middle class has a great advantage in school, and the working class has a great disadvantage” (Ketter & Poole, 2001, p. 382). Bernstein, another researcher who examines school success, studied white middle-class and working-class British families. He discovered that because gender and class roles are rigidly observed in working-class families and there is strong consensus about core beliefs, there is little need to elaborate or explain (Ketter & Poole, 2001). Adding details—an important part of successfully passing most writing assessments—is more difficult if a student is raised in a discourse community in which explanations and elaborations are neither needed nor valued (p. 372). Villanueva (1993) supports Bernstein's observations and points out that “elaboration marks the speech code of the middle class.... In the middle-class workplace, authority boundaries are not drawn as clearly as they are in the physical-labor workplace” (p. 111). Villanueva believes this implies that middle-class students have an inherent understanding of the nature of school discourse, whereas working-class students come to school with little understanding of school discourse conventions. Villanueva agrees with Bernstein that students from working-class backgrounds feel little need to elaborate because their discourse community shares assumptions and a restricted code based on a central authority figure. Middle-class students, on the other hand, are allowed to negotiate meaning because the authority in their homes is more person centered, and if students successfully argue their case, they can get around the

rules. Villanueva suggests that middle-class discourse assumes little commonality of experience among speakers, so more elaboration is necessary. If a student's primary discourse or social identity conflicts strongly with the secondary discourse of school, school becomes difficult, and sometimes impossible.

As another example, Ketter and Poole (2001) found that in some discourse communities adding details is perceived as cheating or lying, because to get the desired literary effect the author has to take some license and embroider on the facts. According to Ketter and Pool (2001), successful writers embroider at length on situations and details to get the desired effect, such as the student who used convincing details about the death and burial of her cousin to create a moving response to a writing prompt. Later, the student revealed that she had made up the entire scenario. Ketter and Pool (2001) cite this example to show that some students master the art of "doing school" whereas others see the manipulation of facts as lying, an unacceptable behavior in some discourse communities, regardless of the purpose.

Ketter and Pool also illustrate how discourse associated with sexual identity can interfere with a students' ability to succeed in a writing assessment. One student admitted he did not add details to an assignment because "it would make me seem like a fag, no offense" (2001, p. 373). In other words, the discourse associated with school can be, for some young men, severely compromising to their masculine identity. Therefore, when the discourse of school comes in conflict with a student's primary discourse, the primary discourse is more likely to win, unless teachers directly intervene to explain to their students the notion of school discourse being different from some primary discourses or social identities—the emphasis being on *different*, rather than *better*.

Many students become deeply conflicted when school discourse contradicts their primary discourse. These students often reject the discourse of school in favor of their primary discourse or social identity. Equally tragic, however, are the students who reject their primary discourse in favor of school discourse. Richard Rodriguez, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, journalist, and essayist, describes in his autobiography, *Hunger for Memory* (1982), the conflict he experienced between his primary discourse and the discourse of the predominately white, private, middle-class U.S. school he attended. Because school officials visited Rodriguez's home and insisted that his parents no longer speak Spanish with their children, Rodriguez believed that he had to reject his primary discourse in order to be successful in a mainstream, middle-class world. Rodriguez reports that he consciously made the choice to become a "scholarship boy" and embrace the discourse of school, which for a time alienated him from his parents, family, and culture. However, Rodriguez is an exception. When faced with such a choice, many students reject the school discourse unless the values of their primary discourse echo the values inherent in the school discourse.

Lynn, for example, believes she has few problems with the home versus school discourse conflict, mainly because her ranching discourse community embraces many of the same values that characterize school discourse. Lynn's ranching community values information exchange, elaboration, direct question-answer interactions, record keeping, maintaining strict time schedules, individual responsibility, reading for information

from technical reports, and discussions of abstract concepts such as appropriate water management techniques.

Lynn also grew up speaking a dialect of standard American English that required little modification to become the standard American English valued in her school. While living and participating in her ranching community, Lynn (unlike Rodriguez) easily, and without too much cultural conflict, embraced the secondary discourse of academics. She read voraciously (sometimes while driving a cattle truck), studied, did well on exams, and earned scholarships. For Lynn, embracing an academic life did not mean turning her back on ranch life; she could still have both to some extent, and she does. Although she no longer lives on a ranch, she participates in many of the activities and discussions valued by her ranching culture.

What happens to students who want to stay in their primary discourse communities? What happens to students for whom learning a secondary discourse means rejecting or being rejected by their primary discourse community? For those students and parents, school is a threat. As it did for Rodriguez, education for many students means having to leave their home, friends, family, and familiar lifestyle. It means alienation from beloved grandparents and community members. Students in this dilemma may value their primary discourses over school discourses. How do teachers make literacy learning possible and doable for these students? Or as Shirley Brice Heath (1990) asked, (1) how do educators make school discourses more accepting of the home discourses that might be in conflict with them? and (2) how can educators and parents help students succeed in school discourses with which they are not familiar? The answers to these questions lie, in part, in the examination of discourse theory and classroom practices that stress the differences between home discourse and the discourse of school. When the discourse of school requires students to make a choice between primary and secondary discourses, or when students think they must leave one discourse to embrace another, students often opt to stay in the primary discourse.

Teaching Students the Differences between Primary and Secondary Discourses

Students need to be explicitly taught that school is simply one secondary discourse among many that they will learn in their lifetime. Furthermore, students need to see that success in school discourse does not preclude them from being part of other discourse communities. The concept of embracing multiple discourse communities is particularly important for speakers of nonstandard English. Students who speak a nonstandard dialect or are English language learners have not been immersed in the discourse of school like their middle-class counterparts and are often at a disadvantage. When these children come to school, their job is doubly difficult because they not only have to learn the discourse of school, but they also have to learn the language in which the content is presented. Villanueva (1993) supports our claim when he says, "Since the white-collar and the professional workplace depend upon literate practices, literacy instruction takes on special importance in the middle-class house-

hold. The middle class' speech code is the school's speech code" (p. 111). When the speech code of school is not their own, some students resist learning because they perceive it as a rejection of their primary discourse communities. How do we teach students to see that embracing the discourse of school does not necessarily mean leaving or rejecting their primary discourse or disrespecting family members who still participate in the primary discourse?

One way to help students avoid the either/or attitude toward school discourse is to provide them with examples of people who successfully acquire a secondary discourse without losing touch with or rejecting their primary discourse. Students learn secondary discourses much as members of societies for creative anachronisms do. For example, individuals who like to take part in Civil War reenactments research the clothing, firearms, and language of the battlefield to become as authentic as possible. Mainstream, middle-class citizens who hold nine-to-five jobs during the week become motorcycle club members when they don leathers and ride choppers on the weekends.

People learn discourses; people assume identities. In all discourses—whether motorcycle clubs or Civil War reenactments—there are rules, specialized vocabulary, appropriate dress, and other markers by which the discourse community chooses to identify itself. As with learning any new discourse, it takes time to become credible. That is where the conditions for learning and principles of learning come into play. The combination of these learning theories creates a literacy learning environment in which students are more easily able to learn a secondary discourse. Again, this is not to suggest that learning a secondary discourse is easy—far from it. However, when the learning conditions and principles are in place in the classroom, there is a greater likelihood that a student will be able to acquire a secondary discourse.

Helping Students Understand the Differences between *Their* Primary and Secondary Discourses

To help students more clearly understand the concepts of primary and secondary discourse, in our own classrooms we ask our students to identify their primary discourse and list its rules, dress, values, specialized vocabulary, and other identifying characteristics—what students consider to be their primary social identity. We then ask students to do the same thing for the discourse of school. If any characteristics overlap, students list those as well. A three-column chart works well for this exercise. Students are sometimes startled to find that their primary discourse and the discourse of school have little in common. Others immediately see how they have been so immersed in the language and values of school from infancy that they hardly know any other way of thinking. After filling out the form (see Figure 1.4), one of Lynn's students, Mario, commented,

It's no wonder I don't do so well in school. What goes on in this school has nothing in common with what I do at home. My dad thinks reading anything other than the newspaper is a waste of time and that I should be mowing the lawn or changing the oil in my truck instead of reading a book or looking on the internet.

FIGURE 1.4 Mario's chart indicates how his home discourse and his school discourse do and do not overlap.

| Primary (Home) Discourse Rules and Values | Overlapping Rules and Values | School Discourse Rules and Values |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Reading the newspaper Doing chores Going to work Eating with the family Going to church Hanging with friends | Reading - sort of | Homework is important Listening to ideas of others Discussing a variety of points of view Reading a variety of texts is essential to success Writing about the issues, ideas, and texts is essential to success |

The discourse of school can be taught explicitly through creating a classroom literacy learning environment in which students become aware of and learn how to negotiate the secondary discourse of school. These lessons also include a discussion of the power, position, and privilege that accompany certain discourse communities. To help students understand the role of power and authority bestowed on certain discourse communities, we suggest allowing students to role-play the parts of various powerful people in their lives and the language those people use to get what they want. This helps the students make the connection between discourses of power and discourses of school.

Helping Students Avoid the Either/Or Discourse Dichotomy

In a literacy learning environment, teachers create classrooms where students are encouraged to master a variety of school discourses through a variety of literacies—print, electronic, oral, aural, visual, and written—and use that mastery to further the purposes of their lives. Students can be taught how to put on and take off a discourse in much the same way they would a particular piece of clothing. Which discourse is appropriate depends on the audience and the purpose. Deciding which discourse to “wear” is much like deciding which genre best suits the purposes of a particular piece of writing. In contrast to Rodriguez's experience, there need not be an either/or theory of discourse acquisition. Teachers should encourage students to embrace the concept of *both/and*. The idea that discourse communities can be learned and entered

into without compromising other aspects of their lives may be a liberating notion for both students and teachers.

A Literacy Learning Environment Defined

A literacy learning environment describes classrooms that focus on the study and practice of literacy in a way that makes learning accessible to students. In a literacy learning environment, students understand how their primary discourse supports or, perhaps, inhibits their learning of secondary discourses valued in school and most mainstream work. Chapters 2 through 8 demonstrate strategies that turn classrooms into environments in which students can learn secondary discourses almost as easily as they acquired their primary discourse. A literacy learning environment supports all students. The discourse of school can be learned without minimizing or rejecting home culture. This is not an easy task; however, Mike Rose (1989) offers hope with his assertion that

The long cumbersome history of relative failure...must not obscure the equally important fact that if you set up the right conditions, try as best you can to cross class and cultural boundaries, figure out what's needed to encourage performance, that if you watch and listen, again and again there will emerge evidence of ability that escapes those who dwell on differences. (p. 222)

In a literacy learning environment, both students and teachers understand and take advantage of the differences between their primary and secondary discourses. Teachers use students' primary discourse (the knowledge, understanding, and language that students bring with them from home, peers, and other sociocultural experiences) to create opportunities for them to experience and own the secondary discourse of school. In a literacy learning environment, teachers lead students to make connections with their already acquired knowledge and then build on that knowledge for an even greater understanding. All strategies in Chapters 3 through 8 emphasize the concept of building on what students already know. Rather than labeling a non-standard primary discourse as "incorrect" or trying to erase it from students' minds (the either/or point of view), a literacy learning environment embraces the concept of both/and.

In a literacy learning environment, students learn how to engage in school discourse. Teachers set high and clear expectations for students, demonstrate the concepts to be learned, and give students many opportunities to practice the concepts at home and at school. Teachers and students demonstrate expectations, model skills, and provide examples of successfully completed assignments at the onset of the learning experience.

Teachers and students soon understand that they all play important roles in a literacy learning environment. The teacher is sometimes a director who sets tasks and demonstrates what is to be learned, sometimes a facilitator who leads students to understanding by encouraging questions and creating opportunities for practice, and

sometimes a colearner who (while usually further along on the learning continuum) discovers meaning along with the students. In a literacy learning environment, the teacher fills many roles to create a rich and safe environment for instruction.

Students in a literacy learning environment undertake a variety of important roles as well. Sometimes the student is the apprentice whose responsibility it is to listen, watch, ask questions, and work hard to gain knowledge. Students see themselves as apprentices who are given many opportunities to practice and receive feedback. Students know there will be no penalty for asking questions, practicing, or making mistakes. However, students become mentors when they research and report discovered knowledge and information. Along with teachers, they are colearners who follow and lead in the discovery of meaning. Students become explorers who learn in a risk-free environment.

A literacy learning environment stresses both learning and acquisition. In the remaining chapters, we demonstrate learning strategies in which teachers give instruction and ask students to focus on parts. We also demonstrate acquisition strategies in which students are immersed in the concepts they need to learn, and they make and own meaning through discovery, use, and practice. In some strategies, students tap into their primary discourses to make connections to new learning. Some of the strategies ask students to both learn and acquire at the same time. A literacy learning environment draws on the research in language acquisition—how people acquire their primary discourses and learn their secondary discourses. A literacy learning environment empowers students in both their primary and secondary discourses. As students learn literacy skills and strategies, they acquire the linguistic tools they need to become successful users of language. We agree with Gee (1996), who points out,

The moral of a Discourse perspective is just this: no one, but no one, should feel like a loser when they have lost these Discourse wars, given the subtle, complex, and often arbitrary ways in which Discourses connected to power stack the deck in the favor of certain kinds of people. (p. 137)

In a literacy learning environment, students gain power over language and therefore in their lives by acquiring new discourses. In a literacy learning environment, students have multiple opportunities to acquire literacy as they read, write, speak, listen to, and observe their language; they use language to learn language while they use old and familiar discourses to master new and unfamiliar discourses. A literacy learning environment uses the conditions for learning and principles of learning to develop English language arts pedagogy that helps students learn a secondary discourse as naturally as they acquired their primary discourse. Within the context of discourse matching theory, the conditions for learning, principles of learning, and learning/acquisition theory interact to create a literacy learning environment. We agree with John Mayher (1990), who writes in *Uncommon Sense* that

We [educators] are in the middle of an extraordinary social experiment: the attempt to provide education for all members of a vast pluralistic democracy. To have any prayer of success, we'll need...a philosophy of language and literacy that affirms the diverse

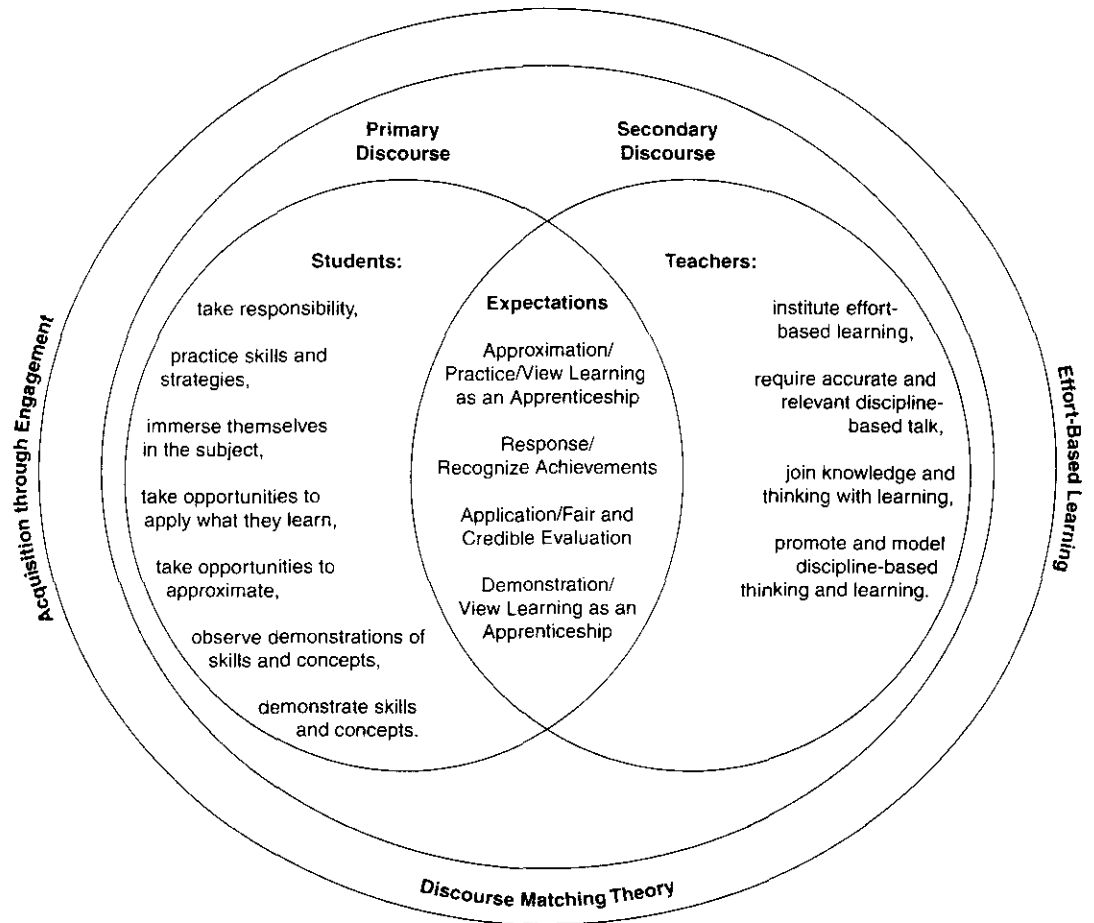


FIGURE 1.5 A Literacy Learning Environment. This super Venn diagram illustrates how learning/acquisition theory, conditions for learning, principles of learning, and discourse matching theory combine and complement one another to create a literacy learning environment.

sources of linguistic competence and deepens our understanding of the ways class and culture bind us to the richness of those sources. (p. 238)

Mayher exhorts teachers to develop a “guiding set of principles that do not encourage us to retreat from, but move us closer to, an understanding of the rich mix of speech and ritual and story that is America” (p. 238).

That is why we wrote *Literacy in the Secondary English Classroom*. Teaching within the context of a literacy learning environment means learning is easier for students because the learning conditions and principles are at work in the classroom and do in

fact make it easier for students to learn. That does not mean less rigorous learning or learning without high standards or hard work. Teachers and students present lessons in an environment that acknowledges and celebrates students' differences, and incorporates those differences into a literacy learning environment. This validates the students' primary discourse as it makes it possible for students to learn the secondary discourses connected with power and privilege. Figure 1.5 illustrates how acquisition of knowledge (conditions for learning) and the learning of information (principles of learning) create an effective literacy learning environment when presented in the context of discourse matching theory.