

Rossbridge and Rushton, The Critical Conversation about Text: Joint construction

Support for the learner

Successful learners need to take risks, play with language and develop a metalanguage to discuss what works and why. Teachers need to both engage and support students in the classroom to motivate them. Freebody, Maton & Martin (2008, p. 197) state, in reference to quality teaching that ‘the generic metaphors of ‘deep understanding’, ‘higher-order thinking’, and “personal constructions of knowledge” now need to be translated into more specific, actionable ways of talking about knowledge’. These aspects of quality teaching can be exemplified during guided writing /joint construction, as oral language is the medium through which learning takes place.

It is the teacher who has the most important role in preparing for and leading the joint construction because it is the teacher who has the overview of the lessons that lead up to and follow on from it. This preparation will include the careful selection of texts for modelled reading which will help to develop students’ knowledge of field, tenor and mode not just the field or subject matter of the text but also the audience, purpose and language choices appropriate to the genre. Prior to the joint construction students should be supported to build knowledge about the field or subject matter of the text and also about the tenor and mode. The preparation before writing is key to success in writing and must include all three ways of looking at a text...

A joint construction is not modelling. The teacher is the expert but the focus is on handing control over to the students at the site of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1986). If you watch ballroom dancing the dancers are modelling the dances for you but it is only when you dance with an expert that you are participating in the way students should in a joint construction. They should take to the floor! The students should be actively engaged in composing by sharing their ideas, words and the keyboard or pen. The teacher’s role is to support the composition of the text through the use of strategies which focus the students’ attention on their language choices when expressing their ideas. While the focus of the joint construction is on composing a written text it is spoken language which is central to the activity and in this scaffolded process, as Hammond (2001, page 4) explains, the goal is to provide a high level of both challenge and support. As shown in Figure 3, the student is then enabled to use their own understandings about the subject and the text, which is being composed as both comments and questions are encouraged. Support can be provided by both fellow students and the teacher at word level by developing vocabulary through paraphrasing and recasting; providing synonyms while the students compose the text... (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2014, pp. 3-4).

Rossbridge, Joanne and Kathy Rushton. 2014. "The critical conversation about text: Joint construction". *PETAA Paper*, 196. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association Australia.

1. VIDEO: Professor Debra Myhill: "Metalinguistic Awareness"
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/Pages/expertvideos.aspx#link95>

- 2.

3. VIDEO: Joanne Rossbridge Joint-Construction of Text based on the video "My Place"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WByszvdMWm4>