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

Jennifer Hammond*

Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney, P.O. Box 123, Broadway, NSW, Australia

Abstract

In this paper, I argue for a response to the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students that is both high challenge and high support. In elaborating this argument I draw on an English literature programme that was designed for a year 7 boys' class (the first year of high school) in an Australian public school. The students in the programme were diverse in terms of their socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds and although academically capable, required on-going English language support. Although all were English as a Second Language (ESL) students, they worked in a 'mainstream' class, and were expected to participate in full content instruction of all key curriculum areas.

In the paper, I focus in particular, on the ways in which the teacher, in a Unit of work on *Romeo and Juliet*, drew on socially oriented theories both of learning and of language to articulate the nature of the challenge that students faced in their engagement with academic language in the mainstream curriculum. I suggest that the ways in which the teacher wove both content and language teaching in her lessons. Her explicit teaching of language, as well as her ability to incorporate drama into the Unit, contributed to her students' successful learning of intellectually challenging curriculum content and their affective engagement with that content. The teacher's approach to ESL learning in a mainstream content classroom, I suggest, provided a constructive and positive alternative to the more common response of modifying the curriculum for ESL learners.
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*Tel.: +61 2 95143741.
E-mail address:* Jenny.Hammond@uts.edu.au.

1. Introduction

On-going debates in the Australian schools context about how best to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students have shifted from calls to modify the curriculum to an emphasis on ways of enabling students to participate fully in the mainstream curriculum. While initially, the argument goes, the curriculum may be modified to ensure access, such modification is an interim step to students' full and equitable participation in the curriculum. The challenge then for teachers is to support their students in this participation. My own view is that with appropriate support (or mediation) culturally and linguistically diverse students can and do engage fully with mainstream curricula. However, it is also my view that effective support is dependent on an understanding the nature of the challenge faced by students. In this paper, I elaborate this argument by drawing on data from an English literature programme designed for a year 7 class (the first year of high school) in an Australian public school. I focus on the ways in which the teacher of this programme conceptualised the considerable challenge of teaching a mandatory English curriculum Unit on *Romeo and Juliet* to year 7 students, the majority of whom were learning English as a second or third language. I also argue that the teacher's ability to synthesise relevant theories of learning and of language, and to draw on these to articulate the nature of curriculum challenges, including the nature of academic language of that curriculum (Bailey & Butler, 2002, p. 7), provided the context whereby effective pedagogical practices became possible.

The teacher of the English literature programme, along with a number of other teachers, had participated over a 3-year period in a research project that aimed to investigate the potential of scaffolding, and more generally, the contribution of systemic linguistic theory and neo-Vygotskian theory in articulating effective pedagogical practices for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. I begin this paper by outlining the theoretical assumptions that informed the research project, before turning to a description of the English literature programme and the students.

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

The principal aim of the research project was to address the nature of curriculum challenge and of pedagogical practices that were effective in addressing the specific needs of ESL students (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). The project itself involved a team of researchers, educational consultants and teachers in on-going analyses of classroom interaction over a 3-year period. Theoretical perspectives in the project were drawn from Vygotskian theory (Mercer, 1995, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999) and also from systemic functional linguistics (Christie & Martin, 1997; Halliday, 1978, 1994; Hasan & Williams, 1996; Unsworth, 2000).

Key starting points in the work of the research team were the assumptions that learning is essentially social in nature, and that the teaching-learning relationship is a dynamic one in which new knowledge is constructed in the interactive processes that occur in contexts of learning. Such assumptions draw directly on the work of Vygotsky and others who have worked with his theories. The argument here is that learning and cognitive development are culturally and socially based, and that learning involves a communicative process whereby knowledge is shared and understandings are constructed in culturally formed setting. Thus, in the context of schooling, the interactions that occur between teacher and

students play key roles in mediating the cognitive and linguistic socialisation of students into the 'common knowledge' (Mercer, 1995) of educational discourse.

This emphasis on the social and cultural basis of learning is especially significant for conceptualising the nature of the challenge faced by ESL students in their engagement with the academic demands of mainstream classes. It represents a significantly different view of the learner and of the teaching—learning process from that which has dominated much Western thinking about education. Traditionally here, the role of the individual has been the central focus—in terms of individual development, individual cognitive ability or individual application. Along with others, the research team argued that the social and linguistic frameworks within the context of the classroom play at least as important a role in educational success as individual development or ability (Gibbons, 2002; Hammond, 2001; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Mercer, 1994, van Lier, 1996).

Much of the literature on Vygotsky and his widely known Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) highlights the importance of effective support (Mercer, 1994; van Lier, 1996, 2001; Wells, 1999). While the work in the project clearly supported this assertion, it also highlighted the fact that effective support does not just spontaneously occur. A clear understanding of the nature of the curriculum challenges faced by students is necessary to provide the context in which effective support becomes possible.

In addition to Vygotskian theory, the research drew on the socially oriented, functional model of language developed by Halliday and others (e.g., Christie & Martin, 1997; Halliday, 1978, 1994; Martin, 1993; Unsworth, 2000). Relevant features of this model include its emphasis on language as a social semiotic and its concern with the ways in which language functions to make meanings in specific cultural, social and vocational contexts. There are important implications here. Systemic linguistics highlights the role of language in mediating the construction, rather than transmission, of knowledge in classrooms and, in doing so, it focuses attention on the nature of language interactions that occur between teacher and students, and also between students. That is, it focuses attention on the role of language in mediating learning.

The theory also provides a strong framework for the deliberate and explicit focus on teaching of language and teaching about language. An important feature of systemic linguistics, and one that distinguishes it from some other theories of language, is its emphasis on the relationship between different levels of language. Through notions of genre and register, the theory provides insights into patterns of overall text-level organisation and cohesion. It also provides insights into the relationship between rhetorical structures of specific genres and the language choices that realise different stages in the genre. It therefore addresses language choices at the level of whole text and at the levels of grammar and vocabulary. The theory claims that the choices made by speakers and writers are constrained by the contexts in which they speak and write. While specific choices cannot be predicted, patterns of language features can be predicted, and can also be taught. For students who are grappling with the demand of academic language, insights, for example, into educational genres, their patterns of rhetorical structures and predictable patterns of grammatical and lexical features are crucial.

A further implication of the theory is that academic language learning is not just a linear process of acquiring more or less language, but rather it involves a "functional diversification, an extension of the learners' communicative range" (Baynham, 1993, p. 5). Within the school context, this functional diversification involves being able to

function within, and move between, what Macken-Horarik (1996) refers to as domains of the *everyday*, the *specialised* and the *reflexive*. The everyday domain is described by Macken-Horarik as the world into which people are born and which provides them with their primary formation. In this domain, communication, which here is primarily spoken, is very much taken for granted and serves a pragmatic function of getting things done. In contrast, the specialised domain is the foundation on which school learning rests, and in which young people gain access to dominant forms of knowledge, power, or meaning-making. Macken-Horarik argues that this is not possible without formal education that initiates students into discipline-specific forms of knowledge. Here, students begin to deal with texts that construct and disseminate knowledge and, whether spoken or written, are more 'written-like' in character. As she points out, the specialised domain encourages a static and conservative view of learning and of the prevailing social order. However, arguably, access to this domain is a necessary prerequisite for access to the reflexive (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001). The reflexive is the domain where students "begin to reflect on and question the grounds and assumptions on which specialised knowledge rests" (Macken-Horarik, 1996, p. 237). Here knowledge is considered as a social construction that is open to scrutiny, challenge and change. It is in this domain that 'critical' pedagogy is located. While these domains are not mutually exclusive, they do privilege different kinds of language and different ways of knowing.

As students move between these domains, they are required to take up different roles and relationships, deal with different kinds of knowledge, move between different registers and also move between spoken and written modes of language. As they progress through high school, they are increasingly required to function within the domains of the specialised and (ideally) the reflexive. Such moves involve learning different ways of meaning, rather than just more language. In the research project, the team took the view that ESL learners' success in school is largely related to the opportunities they have to participate in meaning making within and between these domains.

In the following sections, I describe an English literature programme that provides an illustration of how one group of ESL students were supported to work across these domains. The students who participated in this programme were classified as 'second phase' students. This is a term that is commonly used in Australia to refer to students who are beyond the initial stages of learning English, but who typically still struggle with the more academic aspects of English. Such students have usually been learning English in the target language country for at least a year, and possibly for considerably longer. They have quite good control of informal spoken English but continue to need support with the more formal registers of spoken English and with the literacy demands of specific curriculum subjects (Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2002).

In Australian schools, such students make up approximately 15–20% of the total school population, and in a number of schools in major cities, they constitute 80% or more of the school population. While first-phase students, in the initial stages of learning English, are usually provided with specialist ESL classes, second-phase students typically are integrated into mainstream classes. Here, with support from ESL teachers, these students are expected to participate with their English-speaking peers in the normal curriculum. There has been debate about the merits of this arrangement in Australia as in other countries; however, most mainstream and ESL teachers in Australia believe that the needs of their 'second phase' ESL students can be better addressed when working with other English speaking students in a mainstream class, rather than in a specialist ESL class. They believe

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, & Valdés, 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 examinations 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 whereby 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 under-standings 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 with 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 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 news 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 details 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 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 here, 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. Its 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 its, 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 devises 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 f they're all harsh sounds. Right? You can use those sounds, look for words that begin with those and have a ot f 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 in 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…
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 cental 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 described 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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Jennifer Hammond is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney. She teaches in the fields of applied linguistics, language and literacy education, ESL education and research design. Her research interests lie in the areas of literacy development, classroom interaction, and the implications of socio-cultural theories of language and learning for ESL pedagogy.