

# The missing link: How 3L builds on the Science of Reading

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The purpose of this paper is to outline the complementarities between the *Science of Reading* (SOR) and the approaches to literacy development promoted in Lexis Education's *Language and Literacy for Learning* (3L) course. In particular, it highlights how this course extends and strengthens the explicit language focus already advocated within Science of Reading approaches.

The strength of the SOR approach lies in its focus on the patterns in the sounds and letter level of the language system. We support such an approach. Its advocacy for teachers to understand and teach explicitly the phonics and phonemic awareness has come in the wake of earlier methods such as the whole-language approach, which did not have a strong emphasis on phonics. In addition, proponents of SOR have rightly identified the need to take into account other aspects of language such as fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as part of any pedagogy of teaching students how to read. In this sense, the approaches are complementary.

As writers of the 3L course, we would agree with any teaching of key aspects of language as part of an explicit language-based approach to the teaching of literacy. A central tenet of 3L is based in the understanding that language is the fundamental resource that allows us to make the meanings we want to, and need to, make across a range of contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). In educational terms, such contexts require students to be able to both comprehend and compose spoken and written texts of all kinds. So, the ability to use language as our richest meaning-making resource becomes critical to students' success in schooling.

Based on over thirty years of evidence of successful practice, we can say that the functional model of language underpinning our courses provides teachers with a systematic and theoretically sound approach to helping teachers and students understand how language works (Dare & Polias 2022 (1), Dare & Polias 2022 (2)).

## Our approach to the teaching of reading

While the 3L course covers key issues around composing and comprehending in an integrated and holistic approach (see [Lexis Education website](#)), the focus of this paper is to highlight our approach to the teaching of reading.

The course's central concern is on what resources students need if they are to comprehend the range of texts expected of them, which directly aligns with the Language Comprehension side of the Scarborough's Reading Rope.

In particular, we explore in some detail how we can build:

- background knowledge;
- vocabulary;
- language structures; and
- reasoning.

In fact, we would say these areas are the strength of the 3L, focusing as it does on the patterns in the grammar, including its role in the development of technicality and abstraction as well as important aspects such as active and passive voice, conjunctions, lexical cohesion and cause and effect, all of which are central to building a student's capacity to reason effectively.

All of these aspects are considered within the notion that the language choices made in any text are intimately connected to the social and cultural contexts in which they are made. Further, these choices are framed within what we have called the register continuum, which sees how texts can be considered along the continuum from more everyday, informal spoken contexts to highly technical formal, written contexts. This allows teachers and students to explore how the language choices we make vary as we move along this continuum.

As stated earlier, we strongly support the focus on phonics and phonemic awareness taken up by SOR. This is crucially important in the early years of schooling and for many of those students who struggle with reading as they move through schooling. As students move up through schooling and encounter texts of increasing complexity, we, as do proponents of SOR, argue that we need to be explicit about key aspects of language. In arguing that we need to be explicit about language, we need a model of language that is accessible and theoretically sound. The functional model of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, Martin 1999), underpinning the 3L course gives us strong theoretical framework for unfolding any explicit teaching around language, around teaching students how language works. In this way, our aim to build a shared metalanguage, language for talking about language, between teachers and students across all learning areas in order to support students to become successful readers.

As students move through schooling and encounter texts of increasing linguistic complexity, explicit teaching about how language works becomes increasingly important. Developing a shared metalanguage between teachers and students enables learners to recognise and use the linguistic patterns that characterise increasingly complex texts as they move through schooling.

## In summary

The 3L course takes up the notion of meaning making which is concerned with both comprehending and composing texts of all kinds. In taking this view, we would advocate an explicit approach to the teaching of both reading and listening, and writing and speaking. While Science of Reading has made an important contribution in strengthening attention to sound–letter relationships and foundational reading skills, additional tools are needed to help students understand the linguistic complexity of texts encountered in later years of schooling.

Lexis Education’s 3L course provides teachers with such tools by systematically drawing on a rich and elaborate model of language.

In this way, the 3L course complements and extends current Science of Reading initiatives by equipping teachers with a strong understanding of how language works allied with practical strategies for making the linguistic features of texts visible to students, thereby strengthening both comprehension and writing across all learning areas.

## Bibliography

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