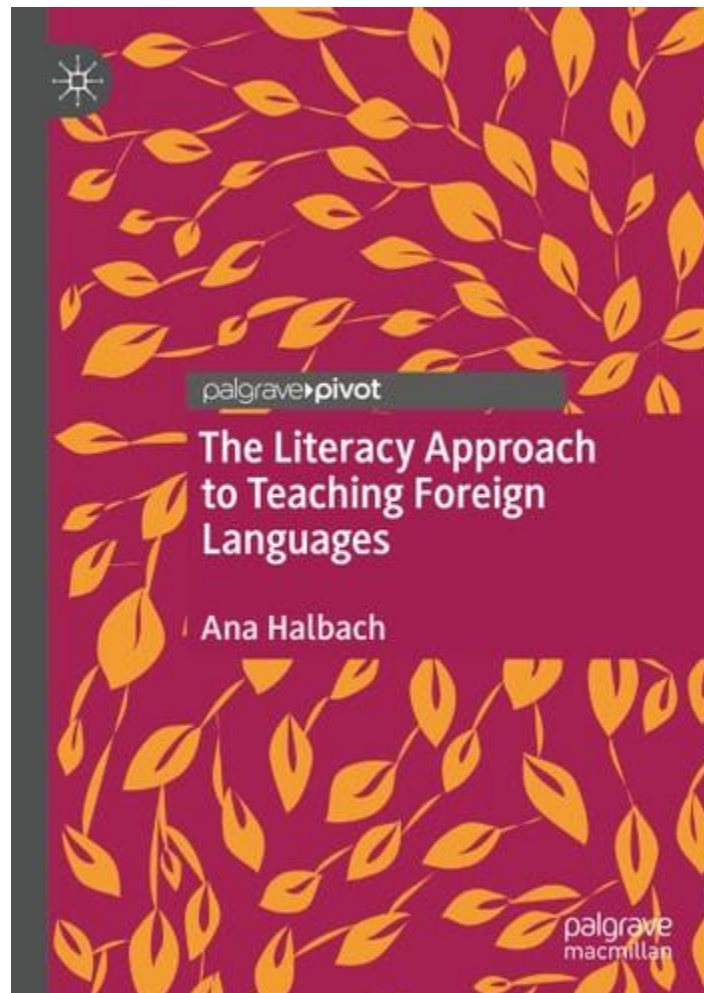


## Book Review

### The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages



**Author:** Ana Halbach

**Title of the Book:** The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages

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Foreign language teachers and researchers who specialize in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) sometimes lack a specific operational pedagogy capable of integrating both language instruction and content education. The book under review introduces a literacy approach that may assist these people in participating in this education.

A synopsis of the literacy approach can assist readers of this review in efficiently gaining a comprehensive understanding of the approach. Generally, the literacy approach is divided into two phases, which are respectively dedicated to developing two broad categories of skills: reception and production. The reception phase comprises three steps viz. understanding and enjoying, observing, and analyzing; the production phase comprises two steps viz. guided production and free production. To implement a literacy approach for teaching, the teachers will need to follow a backward design rationale (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and considers first the expected students' output for a social task, then evidence to prove that they have met that expectation, and finally activities and contents to scaffold their learning. A detailed explanation of how the approach works is provided below: 1) During the understanding and enjoying, instructors use pre-tasks to identify students' potential barriers to understanding a text as well as to engage the students in the text; 2) During the observation, the students are asked to examine a text from both a textual and linguistic standpoint and to discuss how the text draws them into it; 3) During the analysis, instructors assist students in discovering the language qualities that distinguish the text as a skilled communication product; 4) During the guided production, the instructors guide the students in producing a text that is on par with the text they first enjoyed; 5) During the independent production, instructors continue to support students by guiding them to create drafts, edit drafts, and share drafts with peers, as well as guiding them to evaluate each other's work and training them to be critical readers.

The book comprises seven chapters, which can be further divided into 3 sections. The first section (Chapters 1 and 2) introduces the theoretical underpinnings and characteristics of the literacy approach; the second section (Chapters 3 and 4) describes in detail how the approach is applied to designing a course; the third section (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) demonstrates the application of literacy approach in education reform using examples of course units, curricula, as well as how teachers overcome obstacles while implementing the approach. Readers of this book can thus choose to engage with theory or practice first. Those interested in the theoretical foundations of this approach can read the book in the normal order, paying special attention to the first section. Those interested in application can read the second section first to obtain the practical grasp of this approach, and then either return to the first section for a theoretical explanation of the approach or proceed to the third section for a more direct impression of the approach.

The literacy approach integrates the genre-based pedagogy (Rose & Martin, 2012) for literacy education and enhances this pedagogy in this application, which is a noteworthy theoretical contribution. Similar to genre-based pedagogy, the literacy approach focuses on systemic functional elemental genres that can be found in various social contexts and serve comparable purposes. For instance, "chronicles" is a type of elemental genre but can be found in both biographies and autobiographies (Martin & Rose, 2007; Halbach, 2020, p. 15). This is because literacy educators will need to guide their students through various types of texts to discover the characteristics of this genre. In addition, the literacy approach is comparable to the genre-based pedagogy in that they both begin with an explication of the text, then collaboratively construct the text with the students, and finally request the students to independently construct a text similar the model. The primary distinction between the two teaching strategies is that the genre-based pedagogy trains students to master a specific genre, whereas the literacy approach trains students to develop language-based critical thinking skills. Several characteristics of the literacy approach demonstrate this. First, in the literacy approach, text elements are selected based on the level of the students and the particular function this text can accomplish, indicating that the pedagogical focus is on literacy rather than text features. Second, in the literacy approach, the genre is not

limited to written texts, as it is in the genre-based approach. Since “enjoying” is identified as a factor in the first step of the literacy approach, the model text may be presented in audio-visual formats, which are more prevalent in modern communication and can pique students’ interest more readily. Third, according to the author, the literacy approach is not static as its teaching steps overlap in practice. For example, when beginning the first step of understanding and enjoying, students observe and analyze the features of the text. When analyzing the text, the students will observe how the text affects them. This flexibility allows teachers to better accommodate their students’ varying levels of cognitive development. The literacy approach thus demonstrates how the genre-based pedagogy can be modified to foster students’ critical thinking required for writing.

From a practical perspective, the literacy approach provides us with a viable strategy for satisfying our students’ new learning needs affected by social changes. According to Halbach (2022), modern media technology enables the students to acquire knowledge in a variety of ways, which may result in students losing interest in conventional education. Today’s students do not learn a foreign language solely from their teachers, but also from a variety of media. Teachers are thus neither input or explanation providers, nor models of good language use. In literacy education, teachers teach a foreign language as a tool for students to participate in global team and society and gain academic success, rather than an object of study. They need to develop students’ ability to acquire, create, connect and communicate in various types of contexts, as well as getting them engaged in cognitively challenging work that contributes to developing their thinking skills and learning strategies. Literacy approach is likely to provide us with an opportunity to adapt to this change by associating what we teach to what students can access outside of the classroom and by permitting more flexibility that can cater to students’ motivation. This is because the literacy approach enables us to utilize any online-accessible materials and decide on what to teach based on students’ observations and explanations of why the materials are engaging.

Despite its many admirable characteristics, this literacy approach is likely a starting point and can be developed further in subsequent studies and practice, which also prompts the following suggestions. First, further research into how literacy approaches can be implemented in tertiary contexts may be necessary. The present model is mostly focused on primary education, where school instructors may teach various subjects to the same class. However, when the gap between disciplines and language grows in tertiary education, language teachers can become confused about their responsibilities. Therefore, it will be useful to conduct research into the ways in which a literacy approach can bridge this gap. Second, in a literacy course, teachers may reinforce students’ genre awareness by reiterating various characteristics that define a genre. They can take this opportunity to scaffold their students’ cognitive development. This is especially important when the language course is integrated with disciplinary courses. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the language features of different levels of cognitive activities in order to ensure that teachers are aware of how to put these into practice. Finally, as Halbach (2022) suggests, it is necessary to investigate further what genres other disciplinary subjects can expect of students in order to know how to align literacy education with these subjects. As a result, the future may allow for the elucidation of a broader range of pathways of growth in disciplinary literacies, as there may not be an overarching framework for improving students’ literacy that can be applied to all kinds of disciplines.

**It is understood that review manuscripts submitted to AWEJ have not been previously**

**published and are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.**

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