Five Curriculum Guidelines

A Second Language Literacy Framework for Mainstream Teachers (Part B)

The second part of the Second Language Literacy Framework for Mainstream Teachers articulates five curriculum guidelines that further improve student opportunities to use literacy to learn vital academic content.

Guideline 1: Teach to the Next Text

Teach to the next text means preparing learners to deal with the next text the class will read or write, whether that is a paragraph, a page, or a chapter. Unlike native speakers, SL learners may need to learn new structures and many new words as they also learn to decode the words. Teachers prepare for the next text by using pre-, during-, and after-reading/writing activities. These activities should simultaneously activate and build oral and written vocabulary, appropriate background knowledge, cultural schemata, or the specific literacy skills needed to comprehend the next text. Over time SL students become less and less reliant on teacher scaffolding to comprehend grade-level texts.

Guideline 2: Provide for Broad Extensive Reading

Theoreticians and practitioners alike have observed that one learns to read by reading. Provide for broad extensive reading means that teachers frequently give students time to read, write, and discuss texts from a wide range of genres and about a broad spectrum of ideas. Stanovich (1986), among others, has said that learners who find reading and writing easy and fun tend to read and write a lot, and students who struggle to read or write tend to avoid literacy activities and fail to improve. SL students need significant and successful reading experiences each day. Teachers support such success by acquiring an abundance of reading materials, at various levels of readability, tied to their curriculum concepts and themes. Teachers should be able to recommend magazine articles, web sites, books, novels, poetry, editorials, or newspapers to read based on what they know about student experience, interest, and skill in reading. Extended periods of reading, when paired with opportunities to discuss and write responses, promote students' general vocabulary knowledge and build literacy skills in word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

Guideline 3: Support Narrow Reading of Academic Texts

Support narrow reading of academic texts (expository texts) refers to the strategy of focusing content instruction so that the learner gets repeated, intensive, and in-depth exposure to a limited range of needed concepts, ideas, and vocabulary. It requires that teachers make critical decisions about which vocabulary, concepts, writing, and thinking skills are essential for students to develop and build upon across time. Arranging course content thematically allows students to read several texts and write several assignments on the

same or related subjects repeatedly over a relatively short period of time. Through narrow reading of academic texts, SL students learn how to read for information and in the process are more likely to learn the content knowledge and academic vocabulary needed for academic achievement.

Guideline 4: Focus on Academic Vocabulary

Focus on academic vocabulary means that teachers provide multiple opportunities in multiple contexts for students to understand and communicate using the critical academic vocabulary of a discipline. For SL students, fluency and flexibility in the use of academic vocabulary are often the gatekeepers for academic success. Focusing on academic vocabulary does not mean presenting endless lists of vocabulary. Instead, it means the teacher determines what vocabulary is essential, what activities would naturally elicit student production of target vocabulary, what definitions might be added, and what concrete presentations (realia—objects, pictures, illustrations) would help make meaning clearer for the SL learner.

Guideline 5: Use and Produce Both Expository and Narrative Texts

Use and produce both expository and narrative texts means teachers engage students in reading and writing both types of texts from the beginning of their development. Narrative (short stories, novels, poetry, biographies) and expository (descriptions, news reports, opinions, cause/effect, thesis/proof, etc.) texts generally differ in purpose (to entertain vs. to inform), in structure (chronological vs. hierarchical), in sentence-level grammar (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999), and in vocabulary. If learners are exposed to narrative texts alone, there will be major gaps in their general

academic vocabulary knowledge and in their knowledge of domain-specific vocabulary (Gardner, 1999). As teachers plan activities, they should remember that narrative texts can frame and position expository ones. Expository texts can provide rich descriptive detail to inform students' production of narratives. Using both types of texts helps learners develop the ability to read and write for different purposes and adjust strategies accordingly.

Conclusion

Mainstream teachers play a vital role in the academic success of SL students. This two-part framework for second language literacy has been developed with the mainstream educator in mind. It is comprised of three concepts, six principles, and five curriculum guidelines that help teachers promote literacy development in service of content learning. This framework represents what we know about second language literacy development and highlights what we as ESOL professionals need to share with our public school colleagues.

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