Implementing literacy across the curriculum – a case study of geography teachers’ change and development.

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Literacy across the curriculum

• EU; Australia; Canada; USA

• In Scotland: *Curriculum for Excellence* - first direct policy requirement that all teachers embrace literacy across learning
• Not statutory but a focus of school inspections
• Generic rather than subject specific advice
• "Every teacher in each area of the curriculum needs to find opportunities to encourage young people to explain their thinking, debate their ideas and read and write at a level which will help them to develop their language skills further." (Education Scotland 2009 p.1)
General vs Subject Specific Literacy

What matters, and how literacy is enacted, is culturally defined:

• Subject-specific literacy – purposes; what counts; strategies
• Subject specific genres required
• Subject-specific pedagogies
• Little research on subject specific literacy bringing these perspectives together
• Shanahan & Shanahan (2008 p.43) a 'minimum attainment' or 'threshold' view overlooks the "sophisticated genres, specialized language conventions, disciplinary norms of precision and accuracy and higher-level interpretive processes" that secondary school pupils must learn.
Project/Study

- Four geography teachers
- Nine month intervention
- Genre analysis of all texts used (based on genre features set out by Rose and Martin (2012))
- Four semi-structured interviews (before implementation and then every three months) – content analysis (Clark 2003)
- The genre pedagogy followed broadly the 'Reading to Learn' pedagogy (Rose and Martin 2012)
- The pedagogy was modeled with the teacher's own class
Genre pedagogy approach

- Teaching springs from the text
- Makes text structure and vocabulary highly explicit – purpose/structure explained; content overview; ‘find me the word…’
- Teachers model for pupils how to reconstruct the text, before asking pupils to do this for themselves.
- Focuses on including all pupils; comprehension and building writing skills in that genre.
- It has been suggested that this approach allows all pupils to access the meaning of the text, develops their subject vocabulary and makes socially negotiated rules explicit for all.
Teacher Goals & Pedagogies

• 4 schools; different local authorities; different catchments

• Improving geographical knowledge and results
• Social justice
• Equity
• Better understanding of the text

• Geography pedagogy can involve limited reading
• Visual aids, PPTs, discussion, group activities, interactive learning
• Reading as a 'follow-up' activity after the learning – good practice to pre-teach the content ideas
Subject specific literacy

• Reading is easy: "I just assumed if you asked them to read they just got on with it." Maggie
• Pre-teaching content ideas is best practice: "I wouldn't just give them text and ask them to read it ... I would make up a PPT about it and explain it." Jane
• Personal confidence: "English is my worst subject ... I have a bad habit of reading it out loud before they read it themselves." Monica
• Strategies focus on task completion not capacity-building "I would maybe tell them to look for words in bold type ... you will find the words in bold type." Catherine
Analysis of genres in geography

- 390 pages from 6 textbooks
- 350 pages from 14 school produced booklets
- **Sequential explanations**: describing how one event leads to another, and another (glaciation)
- **Factorial explanations**: explain how unrelated factors contribute to one particular outcome (global warming)
- **Consequential explanations**: provide information on all the consequences of an even (volcanic eruption)
- **Descriptive report**: the text describes a phenomena (structure of an urban area)
- **Argument – discussion**: the text discusses two or more points of view giving both arguments (pros and cons of tourism in a national park)
Key changes: Impact of teacher knowledge

- All of the teachers were more knowledgeable about how text structure related to content and were more noticing about how to make the readers pathway explicit – paragraph reading
- All were aware of the need to get the pupils actively engaged in reading for knowledge – underlining and reconstruction
- All the teachers said there had been an impact on struggling readers – inclusion and praise
- All teachers said that would use it next year and had used it with other classes - beyond the study group
- Pupils showed better understanding of the vocabulary
- The teachers all said they had a different awareness of the difficulty of texts and now used more challenging texts
Key changes: literacy in the pedagogical cycle

• "I think it is better to have subject specialists (geography teachers) because they will know all the little anecdotes that you will be able to understand ... if I had just been given that information I wouldn't really know how to implement it ... I think being able to see examples from geography does help you more." (Monica)

• "I thought I did this (literacy) ... you will all think you do it, but actually you don't do it. We don't teach literacy (at the moment). To me this is a really good way of embedding literacy across the curriculum." (Maggie)
Facilitating contexts

Teacher enabling features – ‘buy-in’
- School support
- Time to work on the approach
- Management encouragement
- Impact on struggling pupils
- Policy/assessment requirement

Teacher disabling features – lack of ‘buy-in’
- Anxiety about detracting from exams
- School pressures that focused on exam results
- Time
- About literacy as competing for content not a framework for geographical thinking – rethinking the pedagogical framework
Genre impact – Geography

- Teacher confidence
- Standards of pupil writing
- Pupil expectations about what a geography lesson ‘looks like’ – time to change
- Support for vocabulary development

- Time to understand
- Time to source texts
- Time to re-plan lessons
- Photocopying costs
- Text availability
Next steps

- More subject specific research is needed
- Studies need to assess how much genre knowledge is required to make a difference - pupils
- Practically - what works for whom, in what circumstances
- Implications of this for managing genre approaches across a school
- How much knowledge is needed to implement the approach, and what form - teachers
- What difference can this approach make to pupils overall achievement in the subject area and to developments in general reading and writing skills.

Rose, D. and J R Martin (2012) *Learning to Write, Reading to Learn* Sydney: Equinox


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