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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
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- 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.



References

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