Literacy Research – Policy and Practice

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Literacy across the curriculum in the context of new research and policy issues

Literacy in a knowledge economy – part of human capital
Social consequences of illiteracy – cannot text, tweet, use Google, or Facebook - causes social isolation.

Attainment agenda – research needs to move from ‘Does it work?’ to ‘What works, for whom, in which contexts?’

Big factors in illiteracy are social – SES and Gender (NOT just content issues) – schools need to address HOW literacy is used; time on task; Matthew Effects; social identity;

Depth and spread of policy reforms must account for adaptation, pedagogy and context.
Research: Literacy is social & cultural

• Once we are literate, we use literacy all the time, without even thinking about it, so we forget that what we do is tied up with what we think it’s for. We think our own literacy practices are *normal* – but actually they are specific, to us, our families, to the communities we live and work in and our time. Teachers have different practices and assumptions; Pupils more so!

• Some uses of literacy, some comprehension behaviours & activities may seem quite alien or unattractive to some pupils (SES? Gender?)
Turnaround Pedagogies that focus on social and cultural aspects of literacy use 
(e.g. Barbara Comber; Luis Moll)

• How literacy is position in the classroom matters. For some it may be important to illustrate the point of literacy every day, for every class.

• The ‘point’ needs to be made personal to pupils’ lives, hopes and aspirations

• Focus on where the curriculum meets the individual – co-construction of the curriculum
Implementation matters: not just WHAT to embed, but how: the case of AifL in Scotland’s writing curriculum

- AifL was well-implemented to operate across research/policy/practice tiers in Scotland
- For teachers, policy focus was on what, when, how, why feedback aids learning in two areas:
  - **Teaching**: focus on and clarity of assessment criteria; feedback during tasks to promote adaptive teaching.
  - **Learning**: focus on learning purpose and content of tasks, self and peer assessment to enhance pupils’ agency, motivation, self-esteem.
- BUT writing attainment has not increased. Why?
Tools for implementation

• Boundary objects (Star & Griesemer 1998) enable co-ordination across diverse groups and promote engagement with key ideas –negotiate around practices which are sufficiently robust to maintain focus but can be moulded/ interpreted by groups with different purposes, perspectives, histories
• Commonly-used AifL boundary objects (identified from interviews about classroom procedures & policy documents):
  – Shared success criteria
  – ‘Thumbs up’/ ‘traffic lights’
  – ‘Two stars and a wish’
  – Self/ peer assessment
AifL in Scotland’s writing curriculum

Wiliam (2010) : guard against mechanistic and narrow applications of AfL; need to consider the wider context of classroom and learning.

The operation of these boundary objects did not help Scottish writing. Writers write because they have something important to say but analysis of data showed no emphasis on this:

• HT interviews – that success criteria were explained but not negotiated; they focused on product (the structure and expression) not communicative intent (what the writer had to say).
• Teacher written feedback – 2 stars and a wish comments were also product-focused; struggling/less experienced writers were least likely to have feedback on communicative intent.
• Pupil interviews: the pupils found peer assessment performative (judging attainment) and VERY high stakes.

Scotland got the ‘big policy picture’ but implementation skewed outcomes. Writing attainment/ engagement has not increased.
What does this mean for our project?

We must remember:

• Linguistic, cognitive, socio-cultural perspectives all matter
• Literacy knowledge is not ‘portable content’ (Freebody 2007). Pupils experience literacy learning differently and construct different understandings.
• In highly performative literacy activities - less successful pupils opt out (Moss 2007).
• Engagement requires many things: coherence; intrinsic purpose; choice; social collaboration; strategy teaching (Guthrie & Humenick 2004)
• Research must document the ecology of the curriculum, not content and sequence of teaching programme to better understand:
  – Literacy socialization - both intentional and unintentional; impact of sustained and fleeting experiences
  – Curriculum: build professional knowledge to address multiple contexts and policy aims

Teaching does not equal learning
Our ‘take’ on literacy across the curriculum

• Curriculum design as shifts between teaching and learning.

• Professionalism as orchestrating attention to what becomes crucial.

• What counts as research evidence in literacy? We have a wider focus on literacy within the ecology of the curriculum - what works, for whom, in what circumstances?

• Different subject areas in secondary have subject specific pedagogies and ideas about ‘good practice’ which have to be negotiated with ideas about literacy teaching. Knowledge matters – balancing perspectives.

• Technical knowledge deserves research attention; problematize it; research that generates knowledge as implementation advice.
Strathclyde’s Genre Pedagogy project

• EU Comenius project based on ‘Reading to Learn’ (Rose, D. & J.R. Martin 2012. Learning to Write, Reading to Learn: Genre, knowledge and pedagogy in the Sydney School. London: Equinox)
• Working in 14 schools;
• pupils aged 7-15yrs;
• Primary and secondary (in geography, science, social subjects, English
• Some secondary schools are using it in all subjects.
Data

• Curriculum audit of materials to identify dominant genres in each subject
• Teacher interviews pre, post and at 8-week intervals about how literacy is used, taught, supported; how it features in the pedagogical cycle; how genre pedagogy is being used; impressions of impact on pupils.
• Lesson plans
• Pupil attainment in reading comprehension (NGRT standardized test pre & post intervention ) and writing (pre and post criterion-referenced assessment of unsupported writing)
• Pupil reading survey – pre & post self image as a reader & value of reading
Genre – a possible solution to some problems?

- Applies to NON FICTION as much as fiction.
- Applies to all types of text - spoken, written, film…
- Is NOT the same as format (e.g. poster, leaflet)
- Links SOCIAL PURPOSE with STRUCTURE (text and syntax) and vocabulary – because social exchanges tend follow routine forms
It is helpful to explicitly TEACH typical features of some genres

- Helps READING comprehension & recall
- Keeps writing on track
- Generates ideas – an overview of where the writing may be going (but NOT the content) which also helps reading
- Bring a prepared mind – understand purpose
- Link across text types oral, written, visual
## Common types of texts in schools

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Non-fiction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>Non-fiction recount</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reports</td>
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<td>Arguments</td>
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<td>Responses</td>
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Implementation issues and genre pedagogy

No pre-teaching of the key ideas in the text: reading to \textit{extract} (not confirm) meaning

- All learn to write to remember; to write more effectively; argue more convincingly; imagine worlds more powerfully

- Equity - all get opportunity to read complex texts, ideas and vocabulary

- Support - all are included in the class

- Value of reading
Why Scotland is interested...

- understand and use a common language for talking about texts
- to read and understand from a wider subject base than before
- to write more effectively; imagine worlds more powerfully
What does a lesson look like?

Paragraph reading

• Prepare for reading
  Genre
  Purpose
  Structure
  Content

• Text overview
  Content of each paragraph

• Paragraph reading
  Key terms and definitions
  (find me the word …)

• Joint construction
  Teacher led

• Individual / paired rewrite
Self concept & value of reading (1)
Self concept & value of reading (2)
Results so far: What does it take to make it work, for whom, in which contexts?

What we have found

- Teachers need support for literacy—a good start to Q of “What does a ‘teacher of literacy’ do?”
- Breaking old habits/assumptions is hard.
- Key drivers for teachers:
  - Note making
  - How to use to answer exam question
- Wider literacy / language issues than subject-specific vocab – structure of language
- Subject specific pedagogies exist and interface differently with G ped.

But we still need to know…

- How much is a ‘good enough’ genre knowledge for teachers?
- Active ingredients – is it genre awareness or features, or both?
- Academic literacy for university?
- Impact on struggling pupils? Gifted pupils?
- Reading-writing links
- When is teacher knowledge most useful – ITE? Probationer teachers? Experienced teachers?
- Impact on attainment, self concept and value of reading?
Implementation knowledge:

Choose VERY challenging texts

Think through:
  - genre/ organisation
  - content intro/background knowledge
  - overview
  - key terms to explain…

Little but often

Adapt pacing

Go with the flow
Understanding implementation….

Rolling out curriculum reform is complex. Avoiding the AifL policy/implementation trap is hard:

Researchers with useful things to say:

On rolling out initiatives:
• Amanda Datnow et al. – adaptation to context – buy-in, efficacy and survival

On staff development that works:
• Cynthia Coburn et al. - talk about programme and teaching responses in context of real learners, real situations.
Research questions remain…

- What form might this *linguistic* knowledge best take *for teachers*, and how is it effectively tailored?
- When do teachers (or student teachers?) need it?
- How is it best developed? What is a ‘good enough’ knowledge?
- Subject-specific pedagogies – case studies of how it is adapted for different subjects
- What works, for which pupils, in what circumstances?
- Impact on pupil engagement? Identity?
- How much genre pedagogy is enough to impact on pupils?
- How much genre pedagogy is enough to impact on teachers?
Follow the project on our website.

School of Education webpage, Strathclyde University - see menu banner on the left. Choose ‘Genre pedagogy – TEL4ELE’

Lesson plans available AND advice,

http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/schoolofeducation/tel4ele/
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