Literature-Based Instruction

Literature-based instruction is the type of instruction in which authors' original narrative and expository works are used as the principal for experiences to support children in developing literacy. The types of activities done with the literature are the ordinary types of things children and adults would do when reading and responding to any good book. Literature-based instruction is much more than giving students value literature; it is doing the authentic things with the literature that all writers and readers would naturally do, and giving students support with these activities as they need it.

As Wells (1990) indicates, children and young adults develop literacy (reading, writing, thinking) by having real literacy experiences and getting support from more-experienced individuals, who may be adults or peers. Research clearly shows that literature-based instruction helps all students become better readers, writers, and thinkers (Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989).

The Role of the Teacher in Literature-Based Instruction

The role of the teacher in literature-based instruction is one of decision maker, mentor, and coach. The teacher plans and supports activities that allow children to do those things one naturally does with literature (Routman, 1991). This role includes planning themes, helping students activate the appropriate prior knowledge, and supporting students in reading and responding to the literature in appropriate ways (Martinez & Roser, 1991). In some instances the teacher plans and teaches mini-lessons using the literature as a model for helping students learn a needed strategy or skill (Trachtenberg, 1990). As a mentor, the teacher serves as a model for reading and writing. By reading aloud to students, the teacher models language for them. Through shared writing (McKenzie, 1985), the teacher models all aspects of writing — grammar, usage, and spelling. By supporting students with such activities as shared reading, literature discussion circles, and response activities, the teacher plays the role of coach (Cooper, 1993).

Thematic Organization

Thematic units consist of a series of learning experiences that are focused on a particular topic, idea, author, or genre; each unit consists of specific learning or literacy outcomes for students. Several pieces of literature that support the theme become the basis for major reading and writing experiences within the theme.

There are several major advantages to using themes: Learning About Text Structure Across Selections

In order for students to become effective constructors of meaning, they must learn to understand the differences in narrative and expository texts (Beach & Appleman,1984; Taylor & Beach, 1984). Thematic organization makes it possible to arrange several pieces of related literature together to help students learn to use different text structures as aids to constructing meaning.

Strategies/Skills Evolve from the Literature

Students learn the strategies and skills of reading and writing by reading and writing (Wells, 1990). By placing related pieces of literature with similar characteristics together, it is possible to scaffold (Ibid. page 23) instruction and gradually release the responsibility for learning to the students (Pearson, 1985). In the first selection the teacher can provide heavy support and modeling. In the next selection students can begin to take control and model what they are learning, still under the teacher's guidance or coaching. Finally, students use the last selection to model and apply what they have learned. Reading the literature provides models for the strategies and skills. By encountering several related pieces of literature, students get repeated modeling and practice with the same types of strategies and skills. This is what Walmsley and Walp (1990) call a skills through application approach.

Building Connections and Relationships

Thematic organization helps to account for the concepts of schema theory and prior knowledge. By having related, focused literature, students are able to build connections

and relationships about a given theme, which is how one develops prior knowledge and uses it to construct meaning (Anderson & Pearson, 1984).

Provides Models for Reading and Writing

Children learn to read and write together (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). A thematic organization allows reading and writing to be taught and developed together as readers and writers naturally learn. By having themes with several pieces of the same type of literature, students have models to use in their writing. For example, if students are reading several well-formed stories with very strong character descriptions, their writing can focus on the writing of stories with strong character descriptions; the exact topic of the student's writing, however, should be selected by the student (Graves, 1983).

Efficient Use of Classroom Time

A thematic organization also makes it possible to use classroom time more efficiently by focusing on a variety of curricular areas across the theme (Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 1990; Walmsley & Walp, 1990). Teachers are constantly faced with the dilemma of having too many things to teach and not enough time to teach them. By having a strong thematic organization, teachers are better able to provide students with learning experiences that make more efficient use of their time and match the way students actually learn.

Supports Constructing Meaning

Overall, the major advantage of focused themes is that they make it possible for students to more effectively construct meaning by reading related authentic selections and building connections among them.

Responding to Literature

Responding to literature is the way in which one reacts to something that has been read or listened to (Cooper, 1993). This process begins before reading as one thinks about what is to be read and continues during and after reading (Martinez & Roser, 1991).

Rosenblatt (1938/1976; 1978) has contended for many years that individuals construct their own meanings by transacting with the text. When response activities are the natural things one does with texts that have been read or listened to, they help students develop deeper understandings and help them relate what they have read to their own personal experiences (Gambrell, 1986; Hickman, 1983). It is through this process that individuals learn to construct meaning or comprehend (Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1983).

Response activities teach children to read and write in several ways: Relates Ideas to Own Experiences

Response activities provide students with the opportunities to relate narrative or expository text to their own personal experiences (Martinez & Roser, 1991). Through this personal transaction with the text, students formulate their own meanings and develop their overall abilities to construct meaning (Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1983; Eeds & Wells, 1989). By responding to literature, students see models of writing that they will ultimately incorporate into their own writing (Dressel, 1990).

Types of Response

Researchers have found that readers respond to literature in a variety of ways — by retelling, summarizing, analyzing, and generalizing (Applebee, 1978). Very young children are able to respond in these ways on a very simple level (Many, 1991). As students become more experienced readers and writers, they develop more sophisticated abilities to construct meaning by analyzing and evaluating literature (Kelly & Farnan, 1991). Writing is one form of responding to literature (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). By giving a written response to literature, students are learning to construct meaning through writing; they are further developing their ability to think critically (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991).

Teacher/Student Modeling

It is important for the teacher to model different types of responding behaviors for students (Martinez & Roser, 1991). For example, the teacher might show students how to ask good questions about a book, make an oral comparison for students, or give an oral summary of a book. Through these procedures, the teacher is also modeling the constructing of meaning through response activities (Roser & Martinez, 1985; Cochran-Smith, 1984). When children have opportunities to discuss books that have been read, they are also modeling responding for each other as well as modeling the construction of meaning (Eeds & Wells, 1989).

Useful Instructional Strategies for Literature-Based Instruction

There are many different strategies that research has shown are effective in literature-based instruction (Cooper, 1993). These include scaffolding of instruction, modeling, cooperative learning, student choices, self-initiated reading and writing, using different modes of reading, activation of prior knowledge, and student responses to literature.

Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolded instruction is a concept that has grown out of research on how individuals learn (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). This concept is based on the idea that at the beginning of learning, students need a great deal of support; gradually, this support is taken away to allow students to try their independence. This is what Pearson (1985) called the gradual release of responsibility. If students are unable to achieve independence, the teacher brings back the support system to help students experience success until they are able to achieve independence (Cooper, 1993).

The concept of support in scaffolded instruction is much broader than the modeling and teaching of strategies and skills; this is only one part of the scaffolding process. Providing support takes place in a number of ways – the way in which the selections are organized in a theme, the amount of prior knowledge activation that is provided, the way in which the literature is read by the students, and the types of responses students are encouraged to make.

Modeling

Modeling has been shown to be a vital part of helping students learn the process of constructing meaning and of helping them learn the various strategies and skills involved in this process (Bandura, 1986). Modeling takes place first through the literature itself (Walmsley & Walp, 1990) and the way it is organized in thematic units. Modeling of specific strategies and skills is also provided by the teacher for those students who need it. This is done by using literature that has been read as models to show the use of strategies and skills (Walmsley & Walp, 1990). These lessons are known as mini-lessons and they may be formal or informal (Cooper, 1993). Modeling by the teacher is also done through reading aloud (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985), through demonstrating response activities and discussions (Martinez & Roser, 1991), and through shared writing (Cooper, 1993). Students also provide modeling for each other through cooperative learning.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is also a very effective instructional strategy that works well in literature-based instruction (Slavin, 1987). Students learn to read, write, and think by having meaningful engagements with more experienced individuals (Wells, 1990). Many times these individuals may be their peers.

Having Choices

Having choices in learning to read and write helps students meet their own individual needs (Johnston & Allington, 1991). By giving students options to choose from in what they read, how they read, and how they respond to a piece of literature, we allow them to actively construct their own meanings (Martinez & Roser, 1991).

Independent Reading and Writing

Self-initiated or independent reading and writing are also important instructional strategies to use in literature-based instruction.

Modes of Reading

The term *modes of reading* refers to the different ways literature may be read — aloud by the teacher, shared, guided by the teacher, cooperatively, or independently (Cooper, 1993). By changing the modes of reading used for different students, we are able to scaffold instruction and provide different levels of support for students in order to make them successful in reading a piece of literature (Cooper, 1993; Cullinan, 1992; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989).

Prior Knowledge Activation

Activating prior knowledge is another instructional strategy that is important in literature-based instruction (Cooper, 1993). Many different strategies can be used in activating prior knowledge; most of these strategies help students become independent in activating their own prior knowledge. Research on schema theory and prior knowledge has clearly shown that students construct meaning by using their prior knowledge to interact with the text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). A thematic organization in which themes are carefully developed with related pieces of literature also supports the activation and development of prior knowledge; by reading several related selections, students build on their prior knowledge from previous selections as they read the next selection.

Responses to Literature

Responses to literature are also important to literature-based instruction (Martinez & Roser, 1991). By encouraging and allowing students to respond to literature, we promote the active construction of meaning.

Literature-Based Instruction Approaches

Literature based instruction (LBI) approaches brings back the need for high-quality texts in the classroom. In classroom that use an LBI approach students select their own high interest text to read independently. When using LBI it is critical that teachers offer choice and a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. Students often feel more investment and

increased enjoyment in their independent reading books if they are able to personalize book choice to their interests. Another aspect of the LBI approach is that teachers meet one on one with students to discuss their independent reading in order to get students thinking deeply about the text. The goal of these meetings is not to question whether or not students are completing reading assignments but rather to ask them to think about the text by making predictions, making inferences or to perhaps share an interesting fact or excerpt of their independent reading book.

 LBI approaches can start in kindergarten and be used through the 12th grade. It is appropriate for students if varying abilities. LBI allows for flexible grouping in which teachings can move students from group to group or students can work independently according to their own strengths, interests and needs. In addition LBI has a strong focus on reading comprehension but as with almost all reading strategies it can encourage predicting and can increase a student's vocabulary through independent reading and in class activities.

 In most cases LBI approaches are used as part of a school wide program. Schools might have guided reading selections or sets of leveled books that teachers can checkout and use with their students. Teachers can create flexible groups based on student need. By using frequent and ongoing formative assessment teachers can increase their students decoding skills and reading comprehension through effective use of LBI approaches. In other cases teachers might use LBI approaches in their own classroom and not as part of a school wide initiative. For example, a middle school teacher might have students select a book based on a topic or theme. Students might analyze different text structures or character development through stories they have selected based on their own interests.

 LBI is a very effective approach in reading instruction. It accounts for student choice and allows students to select books that also interest them. In addition students are able to work with a variety of genres and structures. For one unit students might be working independently whereas in another unit they might be working in a small group or as a

whole class. By using LBI approaches teachers are constantly changing their instructional practices and the dynamics of their classrooms. It is important that students can work in a variety of different structures and this approach creates that type of learning environment. LBI encourages students to read for both enjoyment and educational purposes. As educators we have a responsibility to foster a love of literature in our students and this approach helps to foster that appreciation. In order for LBI approaches to be completely effective in a classroom the teacher must be constantly assessing each student and is also requires that teachers are knowledgeable and familiar with all of the texts their students are reading. LBI really encompasses many of the aspects of teaching that we know to be best practices for educators.

Inspire Students With Literature-Based Teaching Strategies

It's quite possible your students enjoy reading and just hate doing reading assignments that have little value. Increase the amount of each student's average participating by whetting their enthusiasm.

Busywork Learns from Youngandfun

"Literature-based instruction is the type of instruction in which authors' original narrative and expository works are used as the core for experiences to support children in developing literacy. The types of activities done with the literature are the natural types of things children and adults would do when reading and responding to any good book."

Busywork is Transformed

Here are specific activities Mr. Youngandfun (who learned them from Mr. Oldandgood) shared with Professor Busywork.

- **Group Discussion** - Instead of assigning questions 1-10 to be answered in complete sentences, assign questions 1-10 to be answered thoroughly in a group. Be specific on the requirements. For example, require each question to be answered with 1 fact and 2 commentaries/analysis/insights/opinions (fans of Jane Schaeffer call these cms or commentaries). Then go to a class discussion. Hold contests for the best answer and other motivational tricks.

- **Group Discussion, Part 2** - Have small groups come to a consensus on a value judgment. Examples include ranking the adventures of Odysseus in

the *Odyssey* based on danger or assigning blame for Romeo and Juliet's death. The best group discussion of all time is the world-famous <u>context clues challenge</u>, which helps students develop vocabulary skills before they engage in literature.

- **Debates** - Warning: some students aren't mature enough to debate properly. Most, however, will do so if given specific boundaries and rules. Choose an issue from any fiction or non-fiction work and hold a debate. Make students sit on a specific side of the room depending on which side of the issue they are on. Those who are undecided stay in the middle, but must eventually make a choice. Students may switch sides at any time. At first, you will need to generate discussion and ask questions to specific students. Never let a student switch sides without asking him or her for the reason.

- **Literary Response** - A response to literature can take the form of one of the above, a traditional essay, or something creative--a movie poster, CD cover, poem, Facebook profile, baseball card, or anything else you can think of.

- **Class Discussion with Trashcan** - Modeling learning is a good strategy. So is modeling teaching. Grading papers aloud or asking the class what grade a specific assignment should get--and why--is instructive. Reading answers to study questions or paragraphs and throwing bad ones in the trashcan is memorable. If you feel your students aren't putting enough effort into their literary responses, do the following: (1) give a small assignment to the class; (2) collect it; (3) read each answer anonymously to the class; (4) those that follow the assignment requirements will get an A; those that don't will have their paper thrown in the trashcan; (5) give the trash canned paper owners an opportunity to redo the assignment (otherwise, you'll have a mess on your hands).

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