Beyond reading: Developing foreign language literacy through literature

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BEYOND READING: DEVELOPING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LITERACY THROUGH LITERATURE

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CELT A Workshop – October 20, 2010
Workshop Outline

• Exploring beliefs

• Literature
  ◦ Definitions, characteristics and goals

• Literacy-based instruction
  ◦ Rethinking CLT
  ◦ Definitions and instructional framework
Exploring Beliefs

- Beginning language courses should focus only on developing students’ language skills (grammar, vocabulary, etc.)

- Advanced language courses should focus only on developing students’ content knowledge (e.g., literature, culture, history, etc.)
Exploring Beliefs

- Learners should master foreign language grammar and vocabulary before interpreting and producing meaningful messages in the target language.

- Learners should be encouraged to interpret, analyze and reflect critically about target language texts from the very beginning of language study.
Beginning language learners are not proficient enough to access the intellectually challenging content (e.g., literary, stylistic, cultural, linguistic) of literary texts.

Beginning language learners do not have the cognitive skills to access the intellectually challenging content (e.g., literary, stylistic, cultural, linguistic) of literary texts.
Defining Literature

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com):

1. writings in prose or verse; especially : writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest
2. an example of such writings
3. the body of written works produced in a particular language, country, or age
4. the body of writings on a particular subject <scientific literature>
5. printed matter (as leaflets or circulars) <campaign literature>
Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes (1991) distinguish between “serious” and “entertainment” literature:

- **serious** = literary in style; more conventions; non-formulaic (e.g., canonical prose, poetry, theater)

- **entertainment** = formulaic, more predictable; less dense (e.g., westerns, science fiction, romances)
Defining Literature

- **Narrow Definition** = the *literary canon*; a group of literary works that are generally accepted as representing a field (www.dictionary.com); a collection of works and authors who have a general *seal of approval* from academic and cultural establishments

- **Broad Definition** = “short and full-length works of fiction, poetry, and drama, regardless of a particular work’s popularity with readers or stature in the eyes of literary critics and scholars” (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p. 244)
Defining Literature

Under our “broad” definition, literature includes many genres or sub-genres. Examples include…

- Adventure novels
- Children's literature
- Comedy / Comic novels
- Crime / Detective / Mystery fiction
- Fables / Fairy tales / Folklore
- Fantasy
- Gothic / Horror fiction
- Historical fiction
- Medical novel
- Poetry
- Philosophical novel
- Political fiction
- Romance novel
- Satire
- Science fiction
- Tragedy
Characteristics of Literature

- authentic representation of both language and society (Schofer, 1990)
- compelling, evocative, creative and memorable (Shook, 1996)
- feeds creatively on every possible style and register (Lazar, 1993)
- unique in its purpose, approach, and use of language (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009)
- characterized by specific devices such as metaphor, imagery, alliteration, double-entendre, etc. (Widdowson, 1975)
- has multiple meanings, a density of ideas (Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes, 1991)
Benefits of Using Literature

- Increased cultural knowledge
- Rich, contextualized language exposure
- Content-rich input
- Enjoyable, motivating material
- Improved student confidence in L2 reading
- Personal, intellectual growth
- Stimulating writing topics
- Critical thinking skills
Challenges of Using Literature

- Teacher discomfort
- Student resistance
- Time constraints
- Text difficulty
## Maximizing Benefits, Overcoming Challenges: Literature & Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional / Historical View of Literature &amp; Instruction</th>
<th>Literacy-Based / Contemporary View of Literature &amp; Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reading literature as the ultimate goal of language learning</td>
<td>• Reading literature to foster language learning and cultural literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Literary text as a fixed object of study, cultural artifact</td>
<td>• Literary texts as multidimensional, interpretatively realized</td>
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<td>• “Readable” (Barthes, 1970)</td>
<td>• “Writable” (Barthes, 1970)</td>
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Characteristics of CLT

- Focus on interactive, functional, oral communication
- Reading and writing as support skills
- Relating forms to functions
- Fluency over accuracy
- Real-life classroom activities & materials
- Opportunities to share attitudes, opinions, feelings
“I take the stance that communicative competence is neither a realistic nor a sufficient goal for the general education FL requirement ... unrealistic because neither time nor instructional context is sufficient or appropriate to develop a meaningful and lasting level of proficiency. It is insufficient because short-lived communicative survival skills are taught without intellectually challenging content…” (Schulz, 2006, pp. 252-254)
Critiques of CLT

“because of [CLT’s] propensity to separate language and content, particularly literary-cultural content, such a focus may unintentionally sustain the long-standing bifurcation of FL programs into language courses and content courses with all the attendant negative consequences” (Byrnes, 2006, p. 244).
## CLT, Literature & Bifurcated FL Programs

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Introductory / Intermediate FL Courses</strong></th>
<th><strong>Advanced FL Courses</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Development of functional abilities to communicate everyday needs, thoughts</td>
<td>Development of analytical and critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on language forms &amp; conventions</td>
<td>Focus on cultural &amp; literary sensibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of personal opinions and familiar ideas</td>
<td>Expression of new ideas, analysis and synthesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom organized around language</td>
<td>Classroom organized around content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional texts (ads, weather reports, stories, menus, etc.)</td>
<td>Literary texts (poetry, prose, drama, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative, supportive, small group environment</td>
<td>Serious, lecture- and discussion-oriented learning environment</td>
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Discuss with a partner:

1. What do you associate with the word *literacy*? Write down the first five words/expressions that come to mind.
2. What does being *literate* in a language mean for you? What abilities does it entail?
3. In your opinion, what are the major challenges to developing FL literacy in a classroom setting for students? For teachers?
Defining Literacy: Traditional Views

*Literacy* =

- the ability to read and write

- “general learnedness and familiarity with literature”
  (Kern, 2000, p. 3)

- “the ability to read, write, spell, listen and speak”
  (Moats, 2000, p. 3)

- “the ability to read and write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners” (Curriculum Framework for Adult Literacy in Scotland)
Defining Literacy: A Broader View

Literacy is the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use, and ideally, the ability to reflect critically on these relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic – not static – and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge (Kern, 2000, p. 16).
Defining Literacy: A Broader View

7 principles of literacy:
1. Interpretation
2. Collaboration
3. Conventions
4. Cultural Knowledge
5. Problem Solving
6. Reflection & Self-Reflection
7. Language Use
## CLT vs. Literacy-Based Approaches

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<th>CLT Approach</th>
<th>Literacy-Based Approach</th>
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<td>Focus on language: practicing vocabulary and structures</td>
<td>Focus on language: the interrelationships between words, phrases, discourse, and the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressing personal experiences</td>
<td>Personal readings (interpretation) of texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; writing as separate linguistic skills</td>
<td>Reading &amp; writing as complementary processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use relative to specific functions</td>
<td>Language use relative to specific contexts, communities, or practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning is fixed</td>
<td>Meaning shifts and is context-dependent</td>
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A Literacy-Based Instructional Framework

Available Designs
= content
= *what* to teach

Principles of Literacy
= design process
= *how* to teach

Curricular Components
= instructional activities
= application of *what* and *how*
A Literacy-Based Instructional Framework

4 curricular components:

- Situated Practice
- Overt Instruction
- Critical Framing
- Transformed Practice
Situated Practice

- Immersion in language use
- Spontaneous, experiential learning without conscious reflection
- Focus on learners’ expression of thoughts, opinions, feelings
- Students learn on their own to figure out what they need to do and know to accomplish something
- No right or wrong answer
- *Examples*: directed reading; reading journals; debates; games; reader’s theater; note taking; watching videos
Overt Instruction

- Intentional, systematic practice of skills and knowledge needed for competent participation in activities
- Explicit learning/instruction
- Opportunities to mindfully abstract, reflect upon, and practice the use of conventions and other relevant features
- Leads students in development of a metalanguage for describing knowledge

*Examples:* pattern analysis; semantic webs; comprehension questions; outlining; textual/genre comparisons; dictionary work; sequencing text elements
Critical Framing

- Reflective dimension of learning

- Understanding the historical, social, cultural, political, and ideological contexts of texts and how these converge and diverge with learners’ own world views

- “Through critical framing learners can gain the necessary personal and theoretical distance from what they have learned, constructively critique it, [and] account for its cultural location” (New London Group, 1996, p. 87)

- *Examples:* summary writing; self-assessment of skills, strategy use, attitudes; text analysis; reader response journal; genre comparison; critical focus questions
Transformed Practice

• Application of new understandings, knowledge and skills to create new contexts and to transform familiar ones in creative and insightful ways

• Explorations of language use, discovery, invention

• Allows learners to take the lead and use what they know to create something original and personal

• Examples: reformulation/redesign of existing texts; summary writing; dialogic transformation; teaching others
Wrap Up

• What is the most interesting or surprising thing you learned today?

• What is one thing you learned that can apply to your instructional context?

• What is something you’d still like to know about literature and literacy-based instruction?
Thank you!

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