

Classroom Practice and Pedagogy: using the Knowledge Framework approach in the classroom

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One of the main issues facing language support teachers over recent years has been how to enable learners to master academic content while simultaneously developing their English. The work described below is an example of a particular approach to planning adapted by an ESL teacher and a Geography department in a Hounslow secondary school.

The approach is based on work developed in Western Canada by the Vancouver ESL Pilot Project. Its aim has been to make language learning more effective by linking curriculum content and language. Many of the ideas come from "Language and Content" (B. Mohan 1986 Addison-Wesley pub). Mohan has produced an approach to learning which suggests that knowledge can be described in a framework covering six areas:

Theoretical ↻	CLASSIFICATION/ CONCEPTS	PRINCIPLES	EVALUATION
Practical ↻	DESCRIPTION	SEQUENCE	CHOICE

Table 1 The Knowledge Framework

These areas link the practical knowledge and experience needed to make knowledge accessible with the theoretical ideas which ensure that underlying concepts are understood. The framework is used to map out firstly the content focus for each area, followed then by the mapping out of the thinking skills and the language skills.

The Knowledge Framework also places emphasis on the use of visual representation of knowledge. This relates to Cummins' concern that language is more clearly understood when embedded in a meaningful context. The use of visuals is not new in language teaching, but the Vancouver key visual approach is an attempt to represent underlying knowledge structures systematically. Key visuals are seen as having three applications:

- as generative, in that they promote language
- as explanatory, in that they increase content understanding
- as evaluative, in that they help to assess what is being understood.

Just as with the thinking skills and the language skills, the appropriate visual representation is also mapped out across the six knowledge areas. Thus key visuals and the Knowledge Framework together allow consistent and coherent planning across the curriculum, and enable ESL teachers to contribute very practical strategies to mainstream teachers.

A project using this approach has recently been completed in a Hounslow school. The work took place in the Geography department, and the topic being studied was 'Local Industry'. What follows are some examples of the kind of work that took place.

Classroom Practice Example: Using the Knowledge Framework

The Knowledge Framework	Focus	Local Industry
CLASSIFICATION /CONCEPTS	PRINCIPLES	EVALUATION
Types of industry	The distribution of employment in Hounslow	The impact of redevelopment
The location of industry in Hounslow	The growth of industrial activity along the Great West Road	Choosing the location of an economic activity
DESCRIPTION	SEQUENCE	CHOICE

Table 2 The Knowledge Framework applied to a geography topic

An Example of 'The Knowledge Framework' Approach

The pupils:

The work took place in a Year 7 Geography class. The class of 30 was comprised of 5 monolingual and 25 bilingual pupils. According to Hounslow's stages of English language development, eleven pupils were designated as stage 3, ten as stage 2 and one pupil as stage 1. A total of five pupils had recently arrived from abroad, including pupils at all three stages. The range of languages represented within the class were Hindi, Punjabi, Gujerati, Somali, Russian and Cantonese.

The topic:

The topic being studied was local industry in Hounslow. The pupils looked first at types of industry in general, and then moved into looking at the location of industry and the distribution of employment within Hounslow. The topic concluded with the study of an industry along the Great West Road (the A4), which had recently closed down, and then been redeveloped.

The planning:

The content focus for each of the knowledge structures was planned by the ESL and Geography teachers as illustrated in table 2. The thinking skills, the language content and the key visuals for all six knowledge structures were similarly mapped out by both teachers. An example of the thinking skills, language and visuals produced for the "sequence" part of the framework is shown below.

THINKING SKILLS	LANGUAGE	KEY VISUALS		
Time relations between events and their causes eg. The Great West Road was built in the 1920s due to traffic congestion in Brentford	past passive eg. The Firestone Factory was built.... cause: as a result of,	Date, Event and Cause Table		
		Date	Event	Cause
		1920s	Great West	Traffic congestion in

Classroom Practice Example: Using the Knowledge Framework

	because, as		Road was built	Brentford
SEQUENCE	SEQUENCE	SEQUENCE		

Table 3 Mapping the sequence section

The Benefits of this Approach

For the pupils, the benefits were that it gave them opportunities to produce coherent texts appropriate for this curriculum area. It also ensured that the necessary vocabulary was focussed on and explicitly taught.

The main benefits for the teachers are summarised in the following points:

- the framework provided a focus for integrating language and content in a coherent and systematic way;
- it made the mainstream teacher more aware of the role played by language in learning;
- it helped both teachers focus more clearly on the strategies needed to develop academic English;
- it provided a more coherent view of the language required in a mainstream topic.

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