

Comptes rendus • Reviews

Bev Anderson, Wendy Carr, Cynthia Lewis, Michael Salvatori and Miles Turnbull. 2008. *Effective literacy practices in FSL: Making connections*. Toronto, Canada: Pearson Education Canada. 160 pp.

Reviewed by Pamela Marshall Gray, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Effective literacy practices in FSL: Making connections, which was developed by several leading educators in the field of Canadian French as a Second Language (FSL) literacy and pedagogy, is a professional teaching resource intended to support those currently engaged in FSL instruction. It is noteworthy that an internationally renowned scholar, Professor Jim Cummins, has lent his support by writing the foreword for the book.

This resource unites current research principles in second language literacy and pedagogy with practical classroom strategies for implementing effective second language literacy instruction. In addition, it encourages teachers to engage in active reflection in order to continuously grow as professional learners.

The resource package consists of three components: a professional development book, a companion DVD that includes an electronic version of the professional development book, and a facilitator's guide that can be used for group in-service and other learning opportunities.

The professional development book is organized into four main sections. The first section, consisting of a foreword and two chapters, introduces the resource and provides the reader with information regarding its use. In addition, the authors outline current research on FSL literacy, the literate FSL student, and the correlations between first language (L1) and second language (L2) language learning. Each of the first two chapters ends with suggestions for teachers to reflect on their practice in relation to the topics discussed within the chapter.

In the second section, the authors outline the "Five Big Ideas" that guide FSL educators to effective literacy instruction: (a) engaging and motivating students, (b) integrating oral language, (c) developing language awareness, (d) assessing and differentiating in order to reach all learners, and (e) activating strategies for making connections. Each big idea is presented in a separate chapter and linked to current research and literacy principles. Strategies and classroom examples of their implementation are highlighted for each literacy principle. Opportunities for individual reflection are again presented and encouraged at the end of each chapter.

The third section outlines comprehension strategies to assist students in understanding aural and visual cues as well as written text in French. Eight

strategies are introduced and described, and examples are given to demonstrate the implementation of each one. Reproducible worksheets are provided for each comprehension strategy.

The fourth section consists of a set of appendices. These include organizers, summaries of the strategies, and a glossary of literacy terms and strategies, as well as references and further reading.

The companion DVD contains an electronic version of the book, along with accompanying video clips of the author panel and other leading literacy researchers discussing principles contained within the resource. The DVD also features Canadian classroom examples of strategy implementation, as well as various school stakeholders (e.g., a principal, teacher, and students) reflecting on FSL literacy in practice.

The authors cite four ways of using this resource: (a) by individual FSL teachers for self-directed learning, (b) by a group of FSL teachers within a professional learning community (PLC), (c) as a tool for action research, and (d) as a resource in pre-service or in-service settings (p. 13).

The resource lends itself well to use by FSL educators who are currently teaching. The reflection modules permit teachers of varying experience levels to reflect on their practice and to develop professionally by implementing the suggested principles, concepts, and strategies. In addition, the resource provides the necessary vocabulary and supporting research that will enable teachers reflect upon and identify the literacy strategies already at work in their classrooms and to identify those they would like to implement to support their pedagogy.

The book also has the potential to facilitate and promote meaningful discussion and growth among FSL teachers in a PLC or at in-service opportunities. The combination of print and electronic versions allows for the resource to be used in various settings, including on-site learning, video conferencing, and online forums. Although the suggested teaching strategies and links to current research would make it a helpful resource for a beginning teacher, the strength of this book is its focus on reflection at every stage along the learning continuum; therefore it will be most useful to those with some experience teaching in an FSL classroom.

Because *Effective literacy practices in FSL: Making connections* emphasizes the role of the FSL teacher as a literacy leader within the school, it has the potential to empower those teaching French as an L2 to bring their expertise to school literacy panels, thereby enabling meaningful discussion and thus demarginalizing the position of the FSL teacher. The big ideas and comprehension strategies expounded in the book mirror those already encouraged in L1 literacy classrooms (see Harvey and Goudvis, 2000, 2007) but are adapted specifically for the time constraints of the L2 classroom and the varying language levels that exist within each class. The authors outline supporting

examples for each strategy, clearly indicating the manner in which each can be scaffolded for effective instruction (modeling, shared practice, guided practice, independent practice). The companion DVD further supports the written examples by linking video clips demonstrating the scaffolded implementation of each strategy in Canadian elementary FSL classrooms.

In conclusion, the professional development resource *Effective literacy practices in FSL: Making connections* is a well-developed professional tool for those teaching in Canadian FSL settings. Among its main strengths are the stress on links between L1 and L2 literacy, the implementation of research theory in the classroom in the form of big ideas and teaching/learning strategies, and the focus on reflection for professional growth as an FSL educator. Also, the companion DVD and the facilitator's guide make this resource suitable for self-directed learning by individual teachers or for group learning by school literacy teams or professional learning communities, or at FSL in-service opportunities. The resource is currently available in English only (classroom clips are in French), and therefore its usefulness might be limited in some contexts such as pre-service FSL programs. However, I understand that a French version is currently being prepared and may even be available by the time this review is published.

References

- Harvey, S. and A. Goudvis. 2000. *Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Harvey, S. and A. Goudvis. 2007. *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Laurens Vandergrift. 2006. *Proposal for a common framework of reference for languages for Canada*. Ottawa: Department of Canadian Heritage, Official Languages Support Programs Branch. 72 pp.

Reviewed by Albert Galiev, University of Calgary

Dr. Laurens Vandergrift, a researcher with the Official Languages Support Programs Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage, has developed a Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada. The work was conducted in light of the National Action Plan for Official Languages, which aims to double the number of high school graduates with sufficient functional proficiency in their second official language by the year 2013.

In his report, Vandergrift analyzes the commonly used frameworks for language assessment in Canada and suggests that in order to increase the

efficiency of language programs operated and mandated on various provincial and federal levels, it is essential to synchronize efforts by adopting a single, transparent system of describing language proficiency. Such a framework of reference for languages could provide the basis for mutual recognition of language qualifications across the country, outline the fundamental characteristics of functional proficiencies, facilitate cooperation between legislative bodies of education in the provinces and territories, and support self-assessment of learners.

After defining the purpose and importance of a common framework of reference for languages, Vandergrift examines the language assessment tools currently used in Canadian educational systems, from the aspect of their characteristics of validity. He summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the most established and widely implemented language frameworks, such as the Interagency Language Roundtable Scale, Canadian Language Benchmarks, and the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). According to him, the CEFR could suit the needs of Canadian institutions and meet most of the criteria for a valid framework, as it is theoretically grounded, empirically validated, comprehensive, and flexible enough to be considered both context free and context relevant.

The CEFR is the result of 30 years of work on language teaching/learning and assessment by the Council of Europe. The framework provides a common system of language evaluation, with specific contents organized according to the target languages of the 47 members of the Council of Europe. The model serves as a standardization mechanism for language acquisition levels, regardless of methodologies, contexts, and variations in pedagogy.

A substantial number of European language evaluation initiatives have adopted the CEFR, and it has been incorporated into the European Language Portfolio (ELP), a tool for self-assessment of language learning progress.

The CEFR validation process uses 54 different scales at each of the six levels. Vandergrift describes the language proficiency evaluation model in terms of three broad levels of language performance: Basic, Independent, and Proficient, which are further broken down into six sublevels, or *global levels*. The notable feature of such organization is that each of the sublevels could easily be tailored to the language teaching/learning specifics of diverse groups in diverse contexts. Each level is designed to provide guidelines for assessing major language skills such as speaking and writing. Level descriptors express language performance in terms of “can do” statements. Besides being reference points for teachers’ evaluation of their students’ linguistic competence, the level signifiers allow learners to estimate their proficiency range on their own. In addition to the major descriptors of global scales, the CEFR accommodates separate scales for each skill with a complete and concise outline of various language acquisition domains.

Vandergrift emphasizes that not only has the validity of the framework scales been determined empirically through an extensive analysis of teaching/learning practices of a vast number of language experts, teachers, and learners; it has also been confirmed statistically. Such methods as discourse analysis of proficiency classification interviews, questionnaires, group discussions, and complex statistical procedures were adopted for this purpose. Overall, the proposed framework possesses the strengths of a valid and coherent model. It is theoretically rooted, empirically validated, flexible, and user friendly.

However, along with the obvious advantages of the initiative, the author indicates some weaknesses as well. For instance, in his judgment, the CEFR does not differentiate enough between the basic levels to chart the progress of beginning-level language learners, although this shortcoming can be overcome through certain modifications. Vandergrift also acknowledges the criticism of Fulcher and other scholars, who claim that the framework is based on teachers' perceptions of learners' proficiency instead of on actual proficiency. In response to this point, Vandergrift mentions North's argument that the descriptors were validated in different languages with "surprisingly similar results" (p. 31).

The author concludes his proposal by recommending that provincial and federal bodies in Canada examine carefully the possibility of adopting the CEFR as an ultimate solution for standardizing language assessment that will not entail sacrificing the peculiar needs of their own contexts.

I am certainly very attracted to the idea of establishing a common framework of references. Among the major benefits of such a framework is its potential to coordinate efforts in curriculum teaching/learning, as well as its comprehensiveness and coherency in language assessment, for successful implementation of the Nation Action Plan. In particular, its context-free but context-relevant character could facilitate regulation of existing language programs and curricula across the country, without imposing rigid guidelines. As a recent immigrant to Canada, I am hopeful that the suggested plan will eliminate many of the obstacles related to language qualification assessment of immigrants among provinces, thus enhancing further diversification of the ethnocultural mosaic in all Canadian regions. I am certainly looking forward to observing the benefits of integrating this framework into practice.
