

# Books! Books! Books!

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**Synopsis:** Literacy! Standards! Whole child! Child-centered! How do we fit all this into the world language curriculum? The answer is through books, books, books!

Literacy! Standards! Whole child! Child-centered! How do we fit all this into the curriculum? Research in the field of education purports that it is advantageous to “educate the whole child.” For many educators, this is a new concept. It is easy to become content- and curriculum-bound and neglect the individual aspects of each learner. Another critical focus in education is literacy in all content areas. In particular, literacy for the foreign language classroom must involve all four language skills and strategies to be implemented before, during, and after reading.

In an attempt to reach the whole child, our educational philosophy, based on Dewey and Vygotsky, is basically child centered. We believe that students learn by doing and that learning takes place when skills are scaffolded for students. In order to create a student-centered foreign language class, we need to know our students. Using the concepts of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson), we survey our students in a variety of ways. The surveys help us determine our students’ strengths and weaknesses in the four linguistic skills, their personal likes and dislikes, and their preferred learning styles.

Using the reflective practitioner model (Schön), we investigated how to connect students to the content found in literary works at all stages of language learning, from preproduction to advanced fluency (Krashen and Terrell). After studying the information gathered from the surveys and conversations with our students, we revisited the New York State foreign language standards and the ACTFL standards. As a result, we reframed our goals and outcomes.

Our plan was to develop literacy in a foreign language by designing a student-centered curriculum in which the students were authors and illustrators. In order for students to appreciate and understand an author's work, they need to become familiar with the process of writing. Each student could create something unique, personal, and at his or her personal level of second language acquisition. Then, based on curriculum materials, students could be challenged beyond their comfort zone to the  $i + 1$  level, following the natural order of language acquisition (Krashen). All the elements that we believed were important were incorporated into our revised model of instruction: the whole child, literacy, differentiated instruction, and the New York State standards.

There are a myriad of possible book forms (Zike), from those requiring one sheet of paper (accordion books) to those needing multiple sheets and a stapler (top tab books). Still others involve cutting, measuring, and binding (lift-the-flap, flip-flop-flap, 1-, 2-, 3- and 4-door books, and pop-up books). Regardless of the form of the book, the basic steps for making it are the same:

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|--|--------------------------|
| (a) provide rubrics (T)                      | (d) create/publish (S)   |
| (b) give instructions in target language (T) | (e) share/read aloud (S) |
| (c) write the book (S)                       | (f) assess (T)           |

The various book forms can be applied to different steps of the reading process. For a pre-reading activity, the top tab books function well as a personal dictionary of essential contextual vocabulary. The 3-door books provide a framework for understanding plot development and sequencing (beginning, middle, and end) during reading. The 4-door books provide a graphic representation of the entire work by allowing students to summarize, analyze, and synthesize at the end of the reading process.

Depending on the teacher's plan, any or all of the four language skills can be incorporated into the process.

### **LISTENING**

- *Language Functions:* obtaining information, receiving instructions, processing description
- Step-by-step instructions in target language provided by the teacher
  - Verbs: cut, fold, draw, measure
  - Prepositions: inside, outside, over, under
  - Nouns: scissors, markers, ruler
- Audience member for student read-alouds

### **SPEAKING**

- *Language Functions:* expressing ideas and likes/dislikes, expressing position, describing, reporting, sequencing, planning and predicting, agreeing and disagreeing, asking permission, explaining
- Creating books with partners; using the target language to negotiate for meaning
- Creating picture books without text; using symbols as a prompt to tell a story
  - Using symbols
  - Sequencing
  - Describing
  - Extending a story
  - Retelling a story
- Sharing (the author reads his or her book aloud)
  - Addressing an audience
  - Being aware of one's audience
- Oral Response to Literature:
  - Giving positive feedback
  - Expressing an opinion

**READING**

- *Language Functions*: classifying, comparing, enquiring/questioning, evaluating, inferring
- Sharing products with classmates, i.e., silently reading each other's books
- Using teacher-selected passages/texts/works as models and catalysts for writing

**WRITING**

- *Language Functions*: agreeing and disagreeing, comparing, describing, evaluating, reporting, sequencing, hypothesizing, criticizing, explaining
- Writing responses to literature: after reading a teacher-provided text, students use it as a model for writing their books
  - Point of view
  - Character Analysis
  - Main ideas
  - Plot development
- Editing – an analytical process for reviewing one's own writing and that of others
  - Self-editing
  - Peer-editing
- Publishing – creating authentic resources for future use in a reading center
  - Reading guides
  - Brochures
  - Dictionaries
  - Test-prep study aids

After implementing the creation of books in our classroom, we paused to reflect on its effectiveness. The overwhelming response of our students was positive. They reported that they felt empowered and proud of their finished products. As teachers, we realized that having students make books not only provides a product, but also inspires creative energy in the classroom– and empowers students to become independent learners.

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