

BOOK REVIEW

LITERACY LANGUAGE & CULTURE: METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR MAINSTREAM TEACHERS WITH NOT-SO-MAINSTREAM LEARNERS

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With high stakes accountability impacting the focus on our elementary education classrooms it is essential for the mainstream teacher to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students, especially English language learners (ELLs). This is a truly daunting task, especially since so many mainstream teachers are not formally trained in ESOL strategies, particularly in the areas of literacy, assessment, knowledge of the native culture, and methodologies that promote language proficiency for ELL students. *Literacy Language & Culture: Methods and Strategies for Mainstream Teachers with Not-So-Mainstream Learners*, was written based on the knowledge and personal experiences of the authors who deal with these accountability issues in the mainstream classroom. It is a unique book that was designed with the **mainstream** teacher in mind, rather than the **trained ESOL** teacher.

The first part of this book addresses the range and variety of English and diverse learners that are categorized and placed in the mainstream classroom. It is essential to understand the meaning behind the “label” of each student rather than address them simply by their “category”. The authors sum this section up best when they state, “...it is impos-

sible to know where to go if we don’t know where students have been” (p. viii). The characteristics, accents, cultural background, and language acquisition process can be different for each child, even though they all have been identified with the same label (e.g. ELL). The authors help to demonstrate this reality with the introduction of a new teacher from Dade County, Miami, Florida (USA) on the first page of chapter 1. She is shocked that all of her students were born in the United States of America but none of them were proficient in English and ALL were labeled with the same category, *ELL students*. It is essential that mainstream teachers have the opportunities to learn about their students on an individual level and ascertain what characteristics have categorized each as an ELL student.

So many teachers encounter the same shock as that new teacher from Dade County when they enter their diverse classroom. As mainstream teachers they have training and background in literacy strategies and techniques when working with their students. They have a collection of ideas to develop strong phonics, grammar, comprehension and writing skills in their students. Unfortunately they may be very unfamiliar with the strategies that are appropriate to use with ELL stu-

dents, and are faced with this shocking reality. In part 2 of *Literacy Language & Culture: Method and Strategies for Mainstream Teachers with Not-So-Mainstream Learners*, the authors help mainstream teachers by itemizing which of these strategies are appropriate. The authors take it a step further and explain which approaches work with each of the language acquisition stages that exist in ELL students, ranging from speech emergence through the advanced fluency stage. They offer excellent authentic examples in the area of literacy centers appropriate for ELL students as well. This is so helpful for mainstream teachers who need meaningful activities that can be implemented right into their classroom practices. Learning these ideas from real teachers like Caitlin McHugh puts the authenticity into perspective for other mainstream teachers. It was very interesting to read how positive learning centers impacted the ELL students in Caitlin McHugh's classroom. "When students work in learning centers, they are genuinely and actively connecting to the task at hand, therefore the communication is productive and interactive. Although this is beneficial for all students, it is exceptionally helpful for ELLs" (p. 139). This example and several other anecdotal stories help the mainstream teacher feel that they are not the only teachers in the field that are struggling.

The same unfamiliarity with appropriate strategies occurs for mainstream teachers in the area of assessment. This area is an even bigger concern due to the high stakes accountability issues in the United States, as discussed earlier. When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was mandated, it sent all teachers into a panic knowing they had to demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" with

all their students. These expectations do not offer modifications or alternatives for the ELL students in the mainstream classrooms. The ELL students are expected to "...meet the same expectations of adequate yearly progress as their native speaker classmates" (p. 153). This is an impossible goal to achieve, with standardized tests rarely offered in a foreign student's native language, and the limited exposure ELL students have with American standardized tests prior to entering the United States. The authors bring up a valid point about testing and assessment: They explain that "...testing and assessment do not refer to the same thing" (p. 153). A large range of assessment tools can be used with ELL students that can measure and monitor progress more validly than the standardized test. Several examples the authors address in this section include observation logs, anecdotal records, journals, checklists, rubrics and self-evaluations. All of these tools can still be used to address accountability, but with a more authentic approach.

One of the most insightful sections of *Literacy Language & Culture: Methods and Strategies for Mainstream Teachers with Not-So-Mainstream Learners*, is the culture component. What better way to learn and understand a different culture than from someone who has experienced that culture firsthand as a native. The authors have accomplished this by asking several experts to share their insights as guest authors of each of the specific chapters that are written about their native culture. The term ELL encompasses so many different cultures and languages and this book has included over 14 different ones to spotlight. They also have addressed important cultural information necessary for mainstream teachers to know so they can help

to identify and connect with their students. These topics include a discussion about immigration to the United States, cultural considerations, cultural differences, parental considerations, educational considerations, and language considerations. Many of these chapters conclude with specific strategies a mainstream teacher can use to work with their students on an individual cultural basis, as well as discussion questions and helpful websites for furthering their information about the culture of their individual students.

The last part of this book addresses a historical variety of popular language learning methods and approaches to help ELLs gain language proficiency. It is essential to be up to date on the terminology and programs that exist and have existed over time. Education has often been compared to a swinging pendulum when it comes to effectiveness and programs. Therefore, it is important for all teachers to be aware of current and historical trends. The authors specifically focus on the more familiar methods and approaches including The Direct Method/Berlitz Method, The Natural Approach, Total Physical Approach, The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, and Content Based Instruction. The last ten pages of this text include charts of all the other ELL methods and approaches that have existed with the rationale, characteristics, further research and an explanation how the mainstream teacher can use these programs in the current classroom. Teachers can select best practices from each or all of the methods and approaches presented.

Literacy Language & Culture: Methods and Strategies for Mainstream Teachers with Not-So-Mainstream Learners, does exactly what Ariza and Lapp titled it to

represent. It is a text that delves into the literacy, language and cultural needs of ELL students in a way that helps the mainstream teacher work successfully with English language learners. With high stakes accountability looming over mainstream teachers, the push to demonstrate student success, and prove that adequate yearly progress has occurred, the educational world has become challenging for mainstream teachers with diverse populations in their classrooms. This book is a solid text offering real insight on what works with “the not-so mainstream learners”.