

Twenty Things that Great Teachers Do to Enhance Students' Learning

(we used to call this literacy)

Geoff Barton

Classrooms and corridors

1. Key words for the subject are on display
2. Annotated examples of what high quality work looks like are visible
3. Displays which are readable from a distance, eg with questions rather than statements (“Why did Hitler rise to power?”)
4. The learning objective evident for every lesson is evident: students know (a) what they are expected to learn and (b) how they will demonstrate it

Teacher Talk

5. Less use of “what?” questions and more use of “Why?” and “How?” (this is called exploratory talk)
6. Students are given time for “oral rehearsal” – briefly discussing their answers in pairs before being expected to say them aloud
7. Students are given thinking time (eg 10 seconds) before giving an answer
8. Increasing use of no-hands-up

Reading

9. Teachers teach the reading skills needed in their subject – eg skimming (gist of a text), scanning (finding key information), analysis, speed reading and research
10. Handouts are presented in a way that is attractive and accessible, with the reading age of students taken account of
11. Key words are included at the start of handouts
12. Any handout include a “big picture” question or statement that helps students to understand why they are reading it
13. Questions about a text go beyond simple comprehension to explore the “why” and “how” of issues

Writing

14. Students see their teacher modelling how to write the first paragraph of an essay / evaluation / description, etc. This is collaborative writing and has a huge impact
15. The essential connectives of writing are taught (eg however, because, as, so, although, while, despite, on the other hand ...)
16. Students are encouraged to use short sentences at the start and end of paragraphs (“This experiment was problematic.” and longer sentences in the middle “Although we added potassium, the results still proved unexpected ...”)

Speaking & listening

17. Students are asked questions based on “how” and “why” rather than just what
18. Teachers model the kind of language they expect in group discussions and answers (key vocabulary / key connectives)

Vocabulary building

19. Teachers explicitly teach the key words in their subject. DCSF research suggests that repetition of a word 4 times with a clear explanation is very effective
20. Key words are given to students as homework, put in the planner, made into tutor time quizzes, so that they are the expected discourse of all students, not just those from privileged backgrounds

Remember:

“Every teacher in English is a teacher of English” (George Sampson, 1922).

None of this is really about literacy: it’s about what great teachers do to help their students to talk, read and write like a historian / designer / scientist / critic ... etc

Geoff Barton: February 2010