



TI-AIE

## Integrating language, literacy and subject learning

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## What this unit is about

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Learning in school is usually divided into discrete curriculum subjects that are timetabled as a self-contained series of lessons. Language and literacy is usually treated as a distinct subject in this way, tending as it does to focus on the skills of reading and writing independent of other curriculum areas. But language and literacy are threaded through the learning and teaching of all curriculum subjects. When you teach environmental science, for instance, you are introducing your students to the concepts and vocabulary associated with that subject, and involving them in listening, speaking, reading and writing as they learn about it.

This unit aims to raise your awareness of integrated learning, and will guide you in planning activities that combine the acquisition of subject content with the development of language and literacy in the elementary classroom.

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## What you can learn in this unit

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- How to plan and implement lessons that integrate subject-related learning and language and literacy-related learning.
- How to engage your students in collaborative, purposeful groupwork.

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## Why this approach is important

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Language and literacy skills are essential to learning about all subjects taught in school. Students internalise knowledge by listening, talking, reading and writing and by understanding and employing the specific terms, phrases and structures that are associated with particular topics.

In science, for instance, lessons in which students plan, predict, observe, record, describe, explain and summarise will promote not only their learning of the subject but also their language and literacy development. All school subjects offer such language and literacy development opportunities. The ability to integrate these complementary aspects of learning – subject-related content and language and literacy content – is the characteristic of a skilled teacher.

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## 1 Combining subject-related teaching and language and literacy development in the primary classroom

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You will start by reading a case study of a teacher who teaches astronomy and language and literacy development at the same time.

## Case Study 1: Teaching astronomy

*Mrs Meena teaches all subjects to her Class III students in a government school in Varana. Here she describes her integrated approach towards such subject teaching in her classroom.*

My students are curious about the Sun, the Moon and the stars, and often talk about them. Many of them like to draw pictures of themselves in spacesuits or of imaginary people from different planets. Earlier this year I planned a series of lessons to develop this interest. I thought carefully about the topic and its associated language.

I started with a game to help my students remember the names of the planets in their order of distance from the Sun. In the next lesson, I then organised my class into 11 groups and gave them the following names: 'Sun', 'Moon', 'Earth', 'Venus', 'Mars', 'Jupiter', 'Mercury', 'Saturn', 'Neptune', 'Pluto' and 'Uranus'. I handed each group a science textbook and asked my students to find a picture of their respective planet or moon, and look up whatever information they could find about it. I wrote some questions on the blackboard as prompts, such as:

- What colour is your planet?
- How far is it from the Sun?
- Can people live there?
- Why, or why not?

I explained that when they had finished, they would each share one fact on their allocated planet or moon with the rest of the class. They could do this from memory or by reading it out the information from the book or their notes.

As my students worked, I walked around the classroom, listening to and observing them, monitoring their developing understanding of astronomy alongside their language and literacy skills. I encouraged the stronger readers within each group to help those who were less confident and was pleased with the supportive way they did this.

In a subsequent lesson, I invited the class to play 'Twenty Questions' about one of the planets or moons. I demonstrated the game first and then directed my students to continue play it in groups of eight. Finally, I asked my students to write a paragraph in their exercise books describing themselves as a planet, and to illustrate it with a drawing. My students seemed to enjoy this series of topic-related activities, perhaps because they involved lots of groupwork and combined a variety of elements and skills.

Whenever I can, I try to plan lessons that develop my students' understanding of a particular subject, like geography or history, alongside their language and literacy skills. I usually begin by giving groups of students some information to read before they report back to the class. If I can think of games to test their knowledge, I use these too. I generally give them a writing task at the end to consolidate their learning. I normally spread these integrated activities over two or three lessons.

