

Content Literacy

Query – 04.2007

Query:

Have any ITQ projects focused on providing professional development in “content literacy”? As I understand it from one of our proposers, the concept behind “content literacy” is to teach teachers how to help their students perform better in the academic area (e.g., science, social studies, etc.) by improving their reading skills. Reading and literacy support is imbedded in the content instruction, using the content-area vocabulary. Clearly this has good potential for improving student learning outcomes in the core academic areas. Does it also meet the letter and/or spirit of the ITQ requirement that the professional development focus on increasing subject-area knowledge in the core academic areas, as well as teaching effectiveness? Thoughts or feedback?

From: Arizona

Responses:

Maine	Both of my SAHE grants are focused on content literacy. My rationale was that improving the literacy skills of content teachers will make them more effective teachers and more able to convey the content of their specialized area to students. Abstracts of these projects can be found in the appendix of Maine's High Quality Teacher Action Plan on the USED website.
Oklahoma	The law identifies the core content areas as English/language arts, mathematics, science, geography, civics, government, economics, foreign language and the arts (music, theatre, dance and visual arts). So, as I reason, if literacy (English/language arts) is being taught through one of the other core contents, the grant has met the spirit of the law--double. I've heard many USDE sources make the point that content is imperative but that teacher effectiveness is not precluded just because it's not mentioned. To separate the content from the pedagogy is, in my mind, not the spirit of the law.
Nebraska	I would think that a "content literacy" project could be considered one that increases subject-area knowledge. Reading is considered a core academic subject area. Wouldn't a project like this increase a teacher's knowledge of reading? Content area teachers may not have taken classes in reading. I would think that part of learning how to teach with content literacy might include how students learn through reading, how they process the written word, etc. This aspect would seem to me to be more reading content than reading pedagogy. However, Nebraska has not funded this type of project.
Minnesota	Yes, I have funded a project that addresses the need to have teachers in content areas focus on strategic reading in order to assist students in making connections between themselves and the text. One particular project, a geography project can be described as one using “a professional development model designed to enhance teachers’ understanding of geography and strategic reading as they relate to authentic instruction and student achievement.” This project, staffed by geography faculty members and a faculty member who is a reading specialist, is going into its 6 th year of funding. Contact me if you have questions about the project.