

LEARNING SNAPSHOT

Content Literacy and Disciplinary Literacy

- Content-area literacy instruction refers to the use of generic activities such as brainstorming prior knowledge, K-W-L charts, or structured note-taking across the curriculum. A disciplinary perspective of literacy refers to the use of specialized language in the disciplines, text structures, and habits of thinking within particular subjects (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).
- The Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy (2010) and Lee and Spratley (2010) encourage educators to distinguish between reading across the content areas and disciplinary literacy instruction.
- McConachie and Petrosky (2010) state, “Disciplinary literacy involves the use of reading, reasoning, investigating, speaking, and writing required to learn and form complex content knowledge appropriate to a particular discipline” (p. 16).
- Each discipline or subject area has its own specialized language, text structure, and habits of thinking. Adolescents require reading and writing instruction embedded within and part of a specific discipline to support learning through the use of texts and literacies valued by professionals within these disciplines (Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, Nokes, & Siebert, 2010; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).
- Adolescents will develop deeper understanding in different content areas when they know how to think, read, and write in the ways experts in that discipline think, read, and write (Jetton & Shanahan, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Instructional Practices

- Teach generic and discipline-specific strategies, and ensure students are reading, writing, and discussing text daily in a variety of subject areas.
- Create an instructional framework depicting ways experts in various disciplines approach literacy and how they structure text.
- Model and explicitly teach the knowledge, practices, and methods of discourse within disciplines.
- Utilize collaborative opportunities for students to read, write, think, and discuss as members of a discipline (e.g., Determine what was happening historically when this speech was written).
- Ensure aspects of the Illinois Learning Standards are taught and understood by students (e.g., Using evidence from text to support construction of knowledge or to evaluate arguments).
- Scaffold instruction using complex text, so students learn how to navigate texts within the disciplines.

Content Reading Strategies

- Pre-read and re-read text.
- Ask questions and make predictions.
- Monitor comprehension.
- Summarize the text using a variety of techniques.

Disciplinary Literacy Strategies

- Build prior knowledge and specialized vocabulary.
- Use knowledge of text structure and genres to predict main and subordinate ideas.
- Pose discipline-relevant questions.
- Compare claims and propositions across texts.
- Use norms for reasoning within the discipline to evaluate claims.

Resources

Disciplinary Literacy Video with Elizabeth Birr Moje helps educators think about how current research provides a framework for disciplinary teaching, including critical components of the Common Core State Standards.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fMncjLc1iQ>

National Writing Project Website provides resources with specific examples of what disciplinary literacy looks like in math, English, science, and social science.

<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3019>

What is Disciplinary Literacy? Video with Hiller A. Spires and Timothy Shanahan explains what disciplinary literacy is, why it is important for deeper learning, and how it might look in various subject areas using the Common Core Standards.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNSzK31V5lg>

References

Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy. (2010). *Time to act: An agenda for advancing adolescent literacy for college and career success*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Draper, R. J., Broomhead, P., Jensen, A. P., & Siebert, D. (2010). Aims and criteria for collaboration in content-area classrooms. In R. J. Draper, P. Broomhead, A. P. Jensen, J. D. Nokes & D. Siebert (Eds.), *(Re)Imagining content-area literacy instruction* (pp. 1–19). New York: Teachers College Press.

Jetton, T., & Shanahan, C. (2012). *Adolescent literacy in the academic disciplines: General principles and practical strategies*. New York: Guilford.

Lee, C. D., & Spratley, A. (2010). *Reading in the disciplines: The challenges of adolescent literacy*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

McConachie, S., & Petrosky, A. (2010). *Content matters: A disciplinary literacy approach to improving student learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Moje, E. B. (2008). Foregrounding the disciplines in secondary literacy teaching and learning: A call for change. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(2), 96–107.

Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2008). Teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents: Rethinking content-area literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(1), 40–50.