

Disciplinary Literacy: Developments in the U.S. and Nordic Countries

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Presentation Overview

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 - Disciplinary Literacy: Definitional and Theoretical perspectives
- Brief historical background
- Nordic perspective
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 - What are the effects of a Disciplinary Literacy Curriculum on student engagement?
 - What are the implications of Disciplinary Literacy for Struggling Readers?
 - What is the role of authentic texts in teaching Disciplinary Literacy?
 - What is effective teacher PD for Disciplinary Literacy?
- Critical Literacy
 - Fostering critical consciousness through Content Area and Disciplinary Literacy

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Disciplinary Literacy: Definitional & Theoretical Perspectives

- To read, write, and speak proficiently about specific content topics, students must have command of the language in each discipline (Jetton & Alexander, 2004)
- Each discipline has a specific Discourse (Gee, 2008) or way of being in the world, which students must develop an awareness of in order to critically consider the topics and texts they study

Disciplinary Literacy: Definitional & Theoretical Perspectives

- Disciplinary literacy is concerned with the unique languaging, communication processes, and ways of thinking within disciplinary boundaries and subject area domains (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia 2011; Moje, 2015; Draper, 2008)
- Generic content literacy strategies fade in importance as students progress through the grades
- To maximize understanding in disciplines such as chemistry, math, or history, readers need general content area skills and strategies but also specialized ones tailored to the literacy demands unique to each discipline
- Each discipline requires a specialized set of heuristics and mental dispositions (Greenleaf, Cribb, Howlett, & Moore, 2010)

Disciplinary Literacy: Definitional & Theoretical Perspectives

- In maths, disciplinary literacy is highly specialized, requiring forms of reading and writing not routinely found in word-rich text environments
 - Typical content area literacy strategies are generally not applicable to the actual problem solving processes inherent in genuine math-related tasks
 - Generic strategies actually hinder effective problem solving by drawing students' attention away from the required mental operations needed for specific math tasks (Draper, 2008)
- In history, for example, the study of content should involve much more than the memorization of dates and facile connections between cause and effect
 - Without the ability to understand the language of historical texts, students are unlikely to learn to read critically or develop the ability to respond to what they are reading (Wineburg, 2001)

A need to look once again at the claims...

Content Area Reading

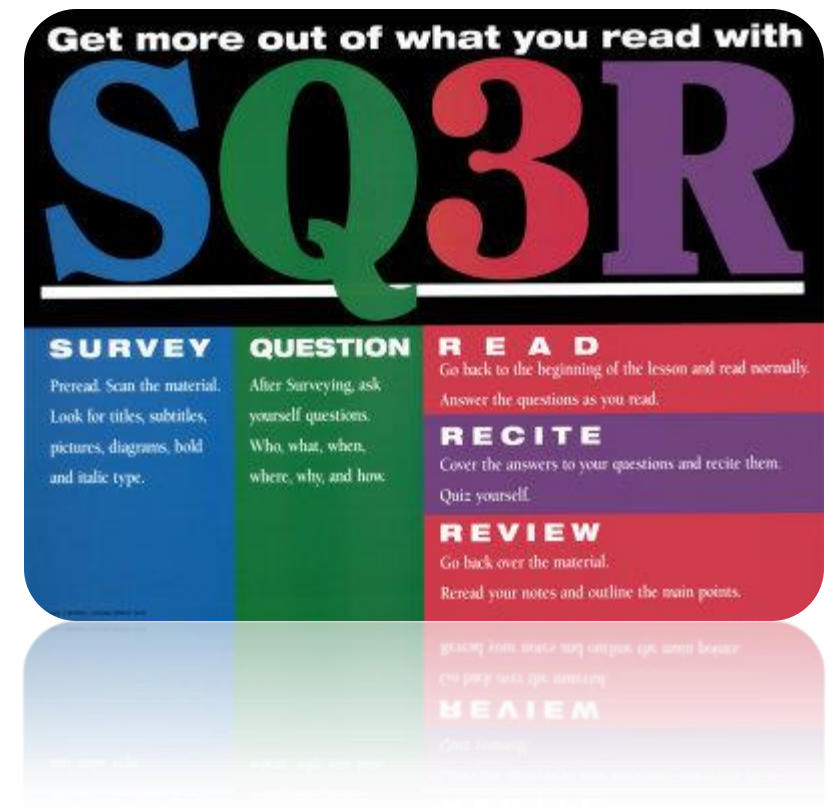
- Assumes generic reading strategies can be applied across content areas
- Assumes generic reading strategies can be adapted to the content and learning demands of various subjects
- More concerned with instruction of processes than with teaching the content
- Focuses on reading as cognitive skill(s) rather than context-dependent practices

Disciplinary Literacy

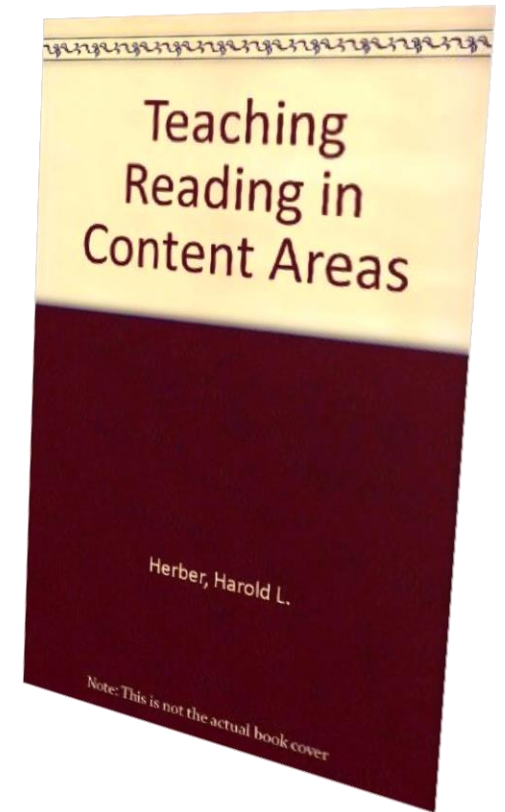
- Assumes that discipline-specific approaches are more suitable than generic strategy instruction
- Assumes generic literacy strategies are behind the resistance from secondary teachers to embrace content literacy
- Asserts expert secondary content teachers employ literacy practices that are organic to their disciplinary topics and cannot be improved upon with generic literacy strategies
- Defines literacy as culturally defined practice

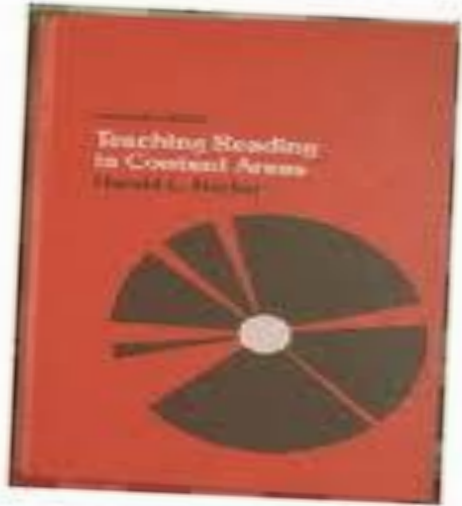
- Gray (1919) – generic reading skills would transfer to specific subject areas
- Yoakam (1928) – reading skills should be taught during subject-area instruction, because of differing reading demands

- WWII – Development of SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) by Dr. Francis Robinson at the Ohio State University
- A text processing strategy for naval officer recruits - “The reading formula that helped win World War II” (Sticht, 2002)
- Became one of the most common and favored content area reading strategies for decades after the war



- 1970s saw a rebirth of interest in content literacy
- Herber (1970) – *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas*
- Reading Research Center, Syracuse University
- Emphasis on applications of generic strategies to various disciplinary text





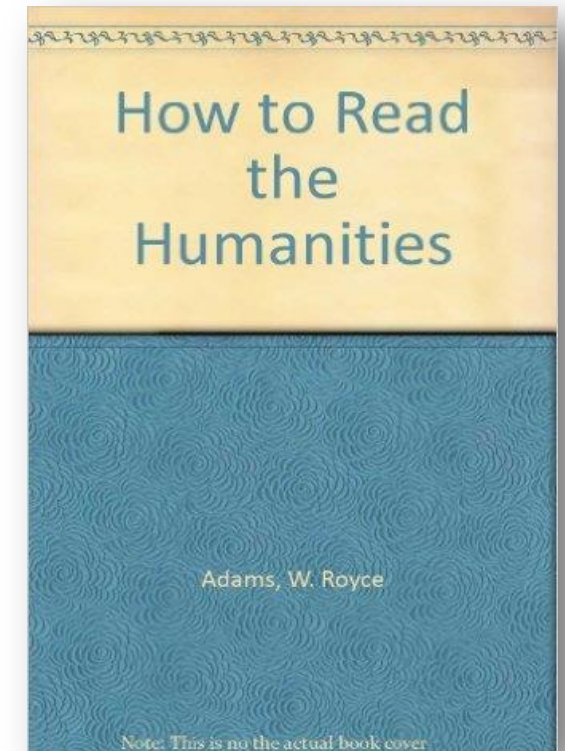
Teaching Reading in Content Areas (2nd ed.) (1978)

“Content determines process”

“Implicit in the content of what you want to be read are the skills needed to read it successfully” (Herber, 1978, p. 4)

Literacy Strategies Across the Disciplines versus Discipline-Specific Literacy

- An old and recurring debate: The question of whether generic literacy strategies can be applied to reading content text or if the reading demands in each discipline are unique necessitating discipline-specific approaches
- Content area literacy discussed since 1910's
- Royce Adams 1969 book *How to Read in the Humanities* was an early attempt to encourage specific approaches to reading that were related to specific genres in the humanities (e.g., history, literature, philosophy)
- This book pre-dated the explosion of content area reading strategies that came about after Herber's seminal book (1978)



Nordic traditions and developments: disciplinary literacy in national curricula

- In the national curricula, prominent position in the 1990's and 2000's
- In the most recent Finnish curricula (2014 & 2015), notion of multiliteracy underlines the role of language and literacy in every school subject
 - Reflects social view on literacy: literacy practices are socially defined ways of using literacy (Barton 2007)
 - Cognitive views in e.g. PISA
- Current Finnish history curriculum for basic education includes "critical stance towards historical knowledge produced by various actors", "capability to read and analyze - - source materials and make supportable interpretations of their purpose and meaning"
- Swedish history curriculum for basic education stresses the ability to "critically interpret and evaluate source materials in order to build historical knowledge"

In upper secondary school curricula:

- Finnish upper secondary education history curriculum 2015 aims at students being able to "construct historical knowledge using appropriate and purposeful source materials, evaluate knowledge critically and understand that knowledge can be interpreted in multiple ways always in relation to the context"
- Swedish history curriculum expects students "to apply the historical method - - ability to search, study, interpret and evaluate source materials from critical perspective and present results using various means of expression".

Nordic traditions and developments: recent research

- No clear or explicit distinction between Content Literacy and Disciplinary Literacy
- In Finland, several recent studies focusing on language use, literacy and learning the content in school subjects or disciplines
- Various frameworks used
 - language awareness in education (languaging) (Hähkiöniemi et al. 2015)
 - content-area reading (Merisuo-Strom & Aerila 2016)
 - disciplinary literacy (Veijola & Mikkonen 2015; Yli-Paunula et al. 2015)
 - CLIL studies: content and language integrated learning (Nikula 2015)
 - Language learners and their challenges in meaning construction (Saario 2012)

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What is a Discipline?

- “An academic discipline or field of study is a branch of knowledge that is taught and researched as part of higher education. A scholar's discipline is commonly defined and recognized by the university faculties and learned societies to which he or she belongs and the academic journals in which he or she publishes research. However, no formal criteria exist for defining an academic discipline” (Wikipedia)
- The distinctions between a “content area” or “subject” and a “discipline” are still being explored, established, and are not clear cut
- "The disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate." (Foucault, 1975/1979, p 223)

What is a Discipline?

- The meanings of subject area and discipline should not be conflated (Deng & Luke, 2008)
- Culture; communities of discourse and practice
 - Culture, content, language, and literacy are so closely braided they cannot be separated
 - Disciplinary thinking and knowledge production
- Are secondary school teachers genuinely members of disciplinary communities?
 - Do they engage in knowledge production?

What is a Discipline?

- Please take a couple of minutes to turn to a partner and discuss the following questions:
 - Are secondary school teachers genuinely members of disciplinary communities in your countries?
 - Do they engage in knowledge production?
 - Do they have the expertise to teach Disciplinary Literacy?
 - What is the relationship between a discipline and a school-subject?

What are the effects of a Disciplinary Literacy Curriculum on student engagement?

- It may be possible to increase engagement through disciplinary literacy practices – authentic and meaningful opportunities for applying knowledge through inquiry, agency, critical practice
- “Zahra” – run the risk of turning students off because they are not interested or ready to become cultural insiders, member of disciplinary communities
- For students who do not have clear trajectories, exposure to and experiences with disciplinary literacy practice may help them find their trajectory

What are the implications of Disciplinary Literacy for Struggling Readers?

- Struggling adolescent learners are in desperate need of basic, useful reading and writing tools to navigate through the texts from which they are expected to learn (Faggella-Luby, Graner, Deschler, & Drew, 2012)
- Generic literacy strategies such as questioning, summarizing, and notetaking go a long way toward helping students stay the course in school
- Language learners have additional challenges of learning language and content
- Disciplinary literacy may increase engagement for struggling readers – authentic, meaningful tasks and contexts that increase motivation; when engineered properly, provides these students tools for situated content learning

- Authentic texts one of the topics in BaCuLit model
- Included in most national BleTeach-contributions as well
- Authentic texts are usually defined as real-life texts or everyday texts
 - These are relevant, meaningful and/or interesting to readers
 - Everyday texts or genres are not necessarily authentic in this sense to individual readers
- Given that BaCuLit is a model for subject teachers' PD, what is the role of authentic texts in disciplines or content-areas?

- Please take a couple of minutes to turn to a partner and discuss the following questions:
 - What is the role of authentic texts in teaching Disciplinary Literacy?
 - What are the discipline-specific authentic texts? For instance, think of a discipline and give examples.
 - Why should all these possibly diverse texts be used in the class?

Example of authentic texts in the discipline of history

- History texts
 - cultural texts related to history (books, graphic novels, movies, online materials, games, songs etc.)
 - texts from history lessons at school (teachers' presentation, textbooks, other teaching materials)
 - academic research texts on history (articles, reports)
 - authentic source materials (as part of historical inquiry)
- Note the relationships between different types of texts & reading engagement

- How do we get teachers to become active members of disciplinary cultures/communities?
- Who is disciplinarily literate? Professors of education? Professors in science etc.?
 - Who is the expert in disciplinary literacy teaching? Disciplinary experts or literacy experts or both?
- Cultural challenges, pedagogical folkways
- Can we realistically expect students to become even novice members of disciplinary communities or cultures if they are not being apprenticed by experienced members of such communities?

- Please take a couple of minutes to turn to a partner and discuss the following questions:
 - How can disciplinary experts / subject teachers be supported to foreground the languaging of their discipline?
 - Are we capable of fostering disciplinary literacy?

Critical Literacy Practices within the study of Content and Discipline

- Possible to enact disciplinary and content area literacy practices without critical perspectives
- Moje's 4E model; engage, engineer/elicit, examine and evaluate (language use)
- Critical examination of sources through inquiry (Moje's engage in 4E, Wineberg, et al.)
 - Comparing/contrasting sources – general practices applied across contexts
 - Discipline specific critical practice – need for deep content knowledge; contextualizing sources
 - Empathy as understanding and appreciating other perspectives
 - How is historical knowledge used – representing peoples and groups, sanitizing historical events
 - Revealing power relationships and providing tools for empowerment
 - Argumentative literacy (Kiili et al. 2013)
 - Counter narratives: challenging hegemonic perspectives, ways that learners are essentialized
- Apprenticeship – teachers need critical consciousness

Disciplinary Literacy Practices Detached from Critical Literacy

Cincinnati Enquirer

We rejoice that old BROWN has been hung. He was not only a murderer of innocent persons, but he attempted one of the greatest crimes against society -- the stirring up of a servile and civil war. He has paid the penalty for his crimes, and we hope his fate may be a warning to all who might have felt inclined to imitate his aggressive conduct..

Chicago Press and Tribune

John Brown dies to-day! ...The man's heroism which is as sublime as that of a martyr, his constancy to his convictions, his suffering, the disgraceful incidents of his trial, the poltroonery of those who will lead him forth to death, have excited throughout all the North strong feeling of sympathy in his behalf, but no where, within our knowledge, is the opinion entertained that he should not be held answerable, for the legal consequence of his act.

Question:

Compare and contrast the reaction of John Brown's hanging by the two newspaper excerpts. How could these articles contribute to the tensions between the North and the South?

Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.

Moving Toward Critical Literacy Practices In Disciplinary Inquiry

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Prompts for Critical Inquiry

- What are the politics/economics of publishing? Who owns the papers and who supports them?
- What are the hidden ideologies? What are the underlying perspectives on slavery?
- What does this mean to me? How have these historical events influenced/impinged on my family, culture, identity, race?
- What critical inquiry practices can I use with tomorrow's paper?

- Please take a couple of minutes to turn to a partner and discuss what you consider to be the big ideas from this presentation
- Consider how these ideas of disciplinary literacy fit your own work in BleTeach
- Please be prepared to share your questions and comments

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