

Reading and Writing in the 21st Century

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In the article, “Disciplinary Literacy and Inquiry: Teaching for Deeper Content Learning” (Spires, et. al, 2016), the authors define disciplinary literacy as, “the use of reading, reasoning, investigating, speaking, and writing required to learn and form complex content knowledge appropriate to a particular discipline” (p.151).

Likewise, the Common Core State Standards Initiative identifies Key Shifts in English Language Arts (2017) that address the need to build students’ content knowledge through the process of reading increasingly complex content area text.

The first key shift, ***Regular practice with complex text and academic vocabulary***, involves, “... the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college, career, and life” (2017). This critical focus emphasizes the importance of students’ abilities to navigate the complexities of text in order to comprehend content area concepts. In the article, “Characteristics of Literacy Instruction That Support Reform in Content Area Classrooms,” Siebert, et. al (2016), addresses the differences in text structure between disciplines:

Although there is a growing awareness among literacy educators that each discipline has its own discourses and literacies, methods of inquiry and knowledge creation, types of commonly used texts, and ways of reading and writing, many recommendations for CAL instruction do not adequately recognize, describe, and support these differences (p.28).

Since the purpose of these texts is to convey information, it’s important that the reader learns to use the various facets of the text to gain knowledge and understanding. For instance, content specific data is often shown in the form of charts, graphs, and diagrams, in addition to other

nonfiction text structures which include table of contents, indices, keys, headings, captions and vocabulary specific to the content. Key Shifts in ELA, addresses the need to give students regular experience and instruction in how to effectively employ such text structures. Students need specific instruction in order to determine the importance of what they are reading, learn to apply what has been learned in order to demonstrate understanding, and use what they have learned in other contexts whenever possible.

Aiding in the comprehension of student understanding is consistent experience and practice with academic vocabulary. This content specific vocabulary is necessary to helping students make sense of what they are reading. In the book, *Building Academic Vocabulary*, Marzano and Pickering (2005) point out that, “People’s knowledge of any topic is encapsulated in the terms they know that are relevant to the topic”(p.2) The authors advocate using a variety of strategies for direct vocabulary instruction, not only to prepare students to understand terminology when they encounter these words in their reading, but also how to apply them in real life context. Pre-teaching strategies are necessary for vocabulary understanding, particularly in complex, content area text where context clues do not always effectively lead to determining meaning.

The second key shift, ***Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational***, relates to the Common Core Anchor Standard for Key Ideas and Details:

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text (2018).

Prior knowledge and experience are no longer enough in content area learning. Students must read with care and be able to answer text dependent questions and provide evidence from the text

to support their answers. Students need to determine what information from the text is most important and be able to cite that evidence in order to craft coherent informational and persuasive writings. This requires them to learn strategies to use before, during, and after reading to successfully navigate and make meaning from content specific text.

The third shift, ***Building knowledge through content rich nonfiction***, addresses the purpose for reading nonfiction text. The document states that in order to build knowledge about the world, rich nonfiction text should make up half of the reading material that students come into contact with on a daily basis. While daily experiences with text is important for building knowledge, it is not enough to just read it. Again, students need focused instruction on making meaning before, during, and after reading.

In the Key Shifts in ELA (2017) document, reading written text is the primary mode for building content knowledge, and the need for understanding of complex texts is imperative. However, content are literature can be dense and abstract if students have no real-life experiences with which to connect their new knowledge. In the article, “Characteristics of Literacy Instruction That Support Reform in Content Area Classrooms,” Siebert et. al (2016) explains how texts and literacy, “differ across the disciplines” (p.28). Therefore students must have regular experience with different types of text in order to interact effectively within multiple disciplinary studies. In addition, the authors go on to explain that text in disciplinary contexts can be “any representational resource or object that people intentionally imbue with meaning”(p.28) In order for students to be prepared to participate in a variety of disciplines, they need to have experiences with a variety of resources from different disciplines, such as art, music, primary source photographs or artifacts, tools, technology, and other resources and objects necessary for effectively participating in the practices unique to each discipline.

Citations:

English Language Arts Anchor Standards. (2018). Common Core State Standards Initiative. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R/>

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Siebert, D. K., Draper, R. J., Barney, D., Broomhead, P., Grierson, S., Jensen, A.P., & Wimmer, J. (2016). Characteristics of Literacy Instruction That Support Reform in Content Area Classrooms. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 60(1), 25-33. Doi:10.1002/jaal.526

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