Why “Both” Content Area and Disciplinary Literacy?

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Content area literacy and disciplinary literacy strategies assist one another in developing a deeper level of understanding. When combined, these literacy strategies guide students to the level of understanding that allows learning achievement meeting the rigor of the demands of the CCSS and NGSS. This paper will describe the differences of content area literacy and disciplinary literacy and provide evidence and examples of its importance.

Content area literacy differs from disciplinary literacy because it teaches necessary skills that can be used across content to develop understanding. It is the learning to read and write in the content area. Whereas disciplinary literacy, according to Chauvin and Theodore (2015), uses strategies specific to gaining knowledge of the discipline. Disciplinary literacy is a way of utilizing reading and writing to develop a deeper understanding of the discipline; it is reading and writing to learn. Content area literacy teaches strategies to aid in reading. These are pre-reading skills, setting a purpose/goal for reading, activating prior knowledge, making predictions, asking/answering questions, making inferences, summarizing, and re-reading. Disciplinary literacy builds on those strategies and narrows the focus to aid in, “ building background knowledge specific to the discipline, learning specialized vocabulary, deconstructing complex discipline-specific text structures, mapping graphic and mathematical representations against explanations in the text, posing discipline-specific questions, and providing evidence to support and evaluate claims”. (pg2)

McGlynn, K. and Kozlowski, J. (2016, October) Literacy Engagement and its role in the science classroom; states, “Reading is a fundamental way for the students to develop and

answer questions about the world around them". The paper enforces the importance of disciplinary literacy by choosing materials purposely for students in the disciplines. Making sure to choose various levels of the same text, in order to convey the same content, to the diverse readers in the classroom. These strategies help mandate educators conform to the rigor and shifts in the CCSS ELA/Math and NGSS processes. These demand students are provided regular practice with complex texts, academic language, practice reading, writing, and speaking using text evidence. This aids in building knowledge through non-fiction literature and informational text that is rich in content. As students apply these skills they will be develop vocabulary knowledge and word/phrase meaning by decontextualizing the text. Students will develop the skills to present careful analysis of the text and learn to defend their claims using clear information/details. Students will make inferences, ask/answer questions, and plunge themselves in information about their surrounding world.

These strategies are like AVID's WICOR strategy, where reading and writing are used to learn. AVID (2018), is a "learning model that educators can use to guide students in comprehending concepts and articulating ideas at increasingly complex levels (scaffolding) within developmental, general education, and discipline-based curricula". AVID uses both content area literacy and disciplinary literacy strategies such as; how to interact with text, how to write using note taking strategies, engaging readers to think critically, form opinions, and justify claims, and making analogies of the text. These skills build capacity and collaborative structures in the classroom.

These two literacy processes are also embedded in NY Engage Math and ELA modules. These Common Core aligned curriculum resources provide the combined skills of content area literacy and disciplinary literacy along with some project-based inquiry activities. All of these

ideas provide students will deep understanding of content material through real world experiences. According to Siebert (2013), “disciplinary content area learning instruction nurtures students’ abilities to read, think, and communicate and act in a manner that conforms to the expectations of that discipline”. To accomplish this task, students must be engaged in authentic real-world experiences that encourage them to investigate, ask questions, imagine a solution, plan, create, improve design/paper/idea, while continuing through the process if needed. When complete students should present the learning experience creatively to their selective audience, while teacher observes for mastery of the performance outcome. For instance, in a lesson about wind force and tall structures there could be a variety of ways for the students to show mastery. The students could build a structure of their own using various materials and present a live demonstration giving details of their learning, show a video recording, create a power point, present in an essay, complete a science journal, use a technology resource such as Google Classroom.

In conclusion, combining content area literacy strategies and disciplinary literacy in instruction is a necessity and will provide a rich learning environment with real-world learning experiences for students. This will develop a deep understanding; allowing the student to study a subject with depth instead of quick broad pieces of learning. This provides a pathway to meeting the demands and rigor of standards in the Common Core and the Next Generation Science Standards; bringing equal opportunities for our students to grow and thrive in the 21st Century. Students will attain better academic achievement preparing them as they graduate school, to be career/college ready becoming productive members of society.

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