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Supporting high-quality literacy instruction: Disciplinary processes for reading literary text

This presentation expands the concept of disciplinary literacy in English Language Arts (ELA) by discussing two questions: 1) what are the discipline-specific strategies that literary experts and novices use when reading literary texts and 2) what can we take from their approaches to support high-quality disciplinary literacy instruction in English/Language Arts classes?

Disciplinary literacy focuses on the sophisticated ways authors and readers in different subject areas use language and formulate, evidence and comprehend texts (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). However, expert academics often do not realise that the social, discursive practices within their discipline are unique and therefore invisible to novices (Macbeth, 2010). In other words, because academics do not see the differences, they do not communicate these disciplinary differences to novices, which make those differences seem invisible to novices.

Seminal research on disciplinary literacy in history (e.g. Wineburg, 1991, Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), science (e.g. Bazerman, 1985, Shanahan, 2012), and maths (e.g. Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) found discipline-specific traits and practices that experts in those fields used as they read disciplinary texts. Unfortunately, there has been little work done in disciplinary literacy in English Language Arts (Moje, 2007; Lee & Spratley, 2010). The work that has been done tended merely to expand general reading strategies for ELA classes (Buehl, 2011), examine writing genres as disciplinary structures (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009), or study the expert-novice responses for specific disciplinary analysis such as general-versus-specific areas of expertise (Warren, 2011), or comparisons to specific literary theories (Earthman, 1992; Peskin, 1998).

Our goal is to articulate a concept of ELA disciplinary literacy using the processes of Generating, Weaving, Curating that teachers could utilise to help their students navigate literacy in English Language Arts classes and which would help those students read, understand, and construct interpretations in more meaningful ways.

This presentation discusses discipline-specific strategies that literary experts and novices use to read literary texts and approaches to support high-quality instruction in English/Language Arts classes.