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Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in Secondary Classrooms

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Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in Secondary Classrooms

by Laura Gabrion, Michelle Renna,
Megan Schrauben, and Jenelle Williams



“Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history” (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Furthermore, according to the recent *Gary B. et al. v. Whitmer et al.* (2020) settlement, students in Detroit and elsewhere “have a fundamental right to education, including literacy.” Our youth, especially those in grades 6-12, deserve meaningful literacy experiences that will prepare them for their lives beyond the classroom.

Now, more than ever, we need to consider ways to engage students in relevant, authentic learning experiences that leverage student choice and voice and build on their existing competencies. Our students come into our classrooms with a multitude of diverse skills and assets. By creating learning communities that allow students to grapple with the complex reality of our world today, we apprentice students into the ways of reading, writing, and thinking across various disciplines (i.e., journalism, engineering, economics, etc.)—allow students to “try on” various career options they may have never considered. We allow for more just, equitable opportunities. Equity refers to an educational asset or right that students need in order to be successful in school and beyond and is achieved through intentional shifts in practice away from just attaining equality



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and towards providing for the individualized needs of everyone. Our role as teachers is to help each student build on his or her assets and to encourage all students to uncover more about themselves and who they want to be in the future.

In response to the call for increased literacy and more equitable learning opportunities across the state of Michigan, the 6-12 Disciplinary Literacy Task Force formed. This group is a sub-committee of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) representing Michigan’s 56 intermediate

school districts, the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan-based professional organizations, and several universities. Our first charge was to draft, revise and publish the *Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12*.

This document, which was made available to the public in March 2019, required professional conversations both within and across disciplines. During the 2019-2020 school year, over 500 education consultants and educators from around Michigan participated in the Regional One-Day Institutes held on February 13 and March 10. The institutes served as an introduction to the *Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom*, and due to COVID-19, Disciplinary Literacy Task Force members have decided to re-run the introductory event in a virtual setting on August 4, 2020.

We all know that the best professional development is ongoing, job-embedded, and social. To keep the conversation (and learning) moving forward among secondary English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Career Tech, Visual/Performing Arts, and World Languages teachers, the Disciplinary Literacy Task Force is excited to offer the Deeper Dive Institute during the 2020-2021 school year. This professional learning series will consist of four synchronous learning sessions with asynchronous learning activities in between each session. The first synchronous session will be held on October 15. During the Deeper Dive Institute, participants will engage in collaborative inquiry cycles to consider framing problems in their discipline, supporting students with gathering knowledge, scaffolding students' meaning-making, creating equitable discussion opportunities, and offering effective feedback to help students reflect and set goals.

Key Themes Which Guide Disciplinary Literacy Instruction

- Learning is problem- or question-driven
- Students access, analyze, and create a variety of texts typical of the discipline
- Educators intentionally integrate the disciplinary

literacy instructional practices into each unit of study

- Educators and students connect to their communities and networks as they engage in disciplined inquiry and apply diverse literacy practices
- Educators and students attend to language use within and across the disciplines

As we continue to navigate this uncharted territory in education, we are so excited to leverage the opportunity to re-envision learning for sixth- through twelfth-grade students. When we lift up how students see the world, we provide them with tools to change the world for the better.

Keep in touch. Where are you at in your disciplinary literacy journey? Follow us @GELN612Literacy and contact jenelle.williams@oakland.k12.mi.us for more information on joining the Deeper Dive Institute.

Author Biographies

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Megan Schrauben is the Executive Director for the MiSTEM Network at the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity. She is interested in growing inclusive communities through the use of problem-based learning with direct connections to future careers. She can be reached at SchraubenM1@michigan.gov.

Jenelle Williams is a Literacy Consultant within the Leadership and School Improvement unit at Oakland

Schools. She joined the organization in 2017 following 18 years of experience in public schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She has served as a classroom teacher, IB Middle Years Programme Coordinator, teacher leader, and educational technology coach. An IB Educator since 2013, Jenelle leads professional development workshops for coordinators and building leaders in IB World Schools. She holds an

Education Specialist in Leadership degree and a Master's degree in Reading and Language Arts through Oakland University. Jenelle is passionate about supporting teachers, building leaders, and central office administrators in the area of secondary literacy, and she is especially excited to be able to support Michigan's work around disciplinary literacy through her role as Co-Chair of the statewide Disciplinary Literacy Task Force.

Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12

Available in a complete PDF booklet with further explanations and background research, these 10 instructional practices “can have a positive impact on both literacy development and conceptual learning of content” when used consistently, across content areas and grade levels. For more information, download the entire Essential Practices for *Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12* booklet from <literacyessentials.org>.

1. Problem-based instruction
2. Diverse texts and abundant reading opportunities in the school
3. Intentional and standards-aligned instruction in disciplinary reading
4. Intentional and standards-aligned instruction in disciplinary writing
5. Higher-order discussion of increasingly complex text across varying participation structures
6. Opportunities for and instruction in speaking and listening
7. Intentional efforts to build vocabulary and conceptual knowledge
8. Ongoing observation and assessment of students' language and literacy development that informs their education
9. Community networking to tap into available funds of knowledge in support of developing students' content knowledge and identities
10. Metadiscursive awareness within and across academic and cultural domains

