

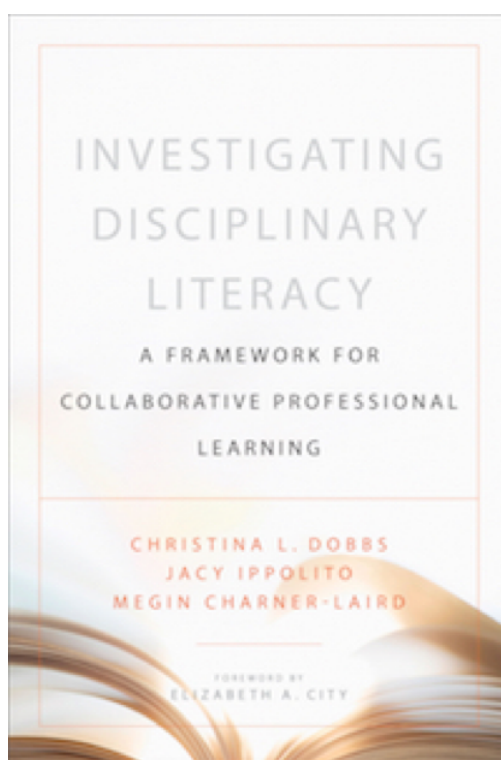
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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Review of Investigating Disciplinary Literacy: A Framework for Collaborative Professional Learning

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Dobbs, C. L., Ippolito, J., and Charner-Laird, M. (2017). *Investigating Disciplinary Literacy: A Framework for Collaborative Professional Learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

ISBN: 978-1682530689

Investigating Disciplinary Literacy: A Framework for Collaborative Professional Learning makes a significant contribution to two important areas of teacher development and preparation: disciplinary literacy and the implementation of *in-situ* professional development within schools drawing on teachers' skills, knowledge, and expertise. One suggestion to the authors would be that they include the word "adolescent" in the title since the book is about improving (disciplinary) literacy with adolescents.

Disciplinary Literacy as a genre combines literacy practices such as reading and writing with subject matter knowledge and ways of thinking in a discipline-specific manner. Its main goal is to aid learners in using language to think, talk, and do, the way experts in specific disciplines think, talk, and do (City, 2017). The many advantages of being literate in specific disciplines are highlighted in Moje's (2008) work. She writes: "Disciplinary literacy instruction can help youths gain access to the accepted knowledge of the disciplines, thereby allowing them also to critique and change that knowledge" (p. 96). This idea of making visible and providing learners access to expert or knowledgeable ways of thinking and doing is becoming common practice. Glisan and Donato (2017) explain that knowing, understanding, and practicing experts' ways of thinking and doing is paramount when aiming to become a part of a specific discipline or field of studies.

Articles dealing with disciplinary literacy in specific disciplines such as Social Studies (Monte-Sano, De La Paz, & Felton, 2014), English Language Arts (Goldman et al., 2016; Rainey, 2017), and Science (Cook & Dinkins, 2015; Koomen, Weaver, Blair, & Oberhauser, 2016; Wright & Gotwals, 2017) abound. A common thread among them is that challenges arise when implementing disciplinary literacy, and there is scarce literature available

addressing this issue (Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, & Donovan, 2015; Smagorinsky, 2014). Dobbs, Ippolito, and Charner-Laird reviewed in this manuscript successfully presents the reader with examples from multiple single disciplines (including world languages) and across content areas. It also provides solutions to challenges presented by practitioners such as: (1) how to provide support to those interested in taking advantage of disciplinary literacy, and (2) how to create spaces and structures that allow and support disciplinary literacy.

Investigating Disciplinary Literacy: A Framework for Collaborative Professional Learning is divided into two parts. The first part defines and discusses two topics that will be combined throughout the text, *disciplinary literacy and its challenges* and *professional development*. The second part delves in detail into the different steps that form the framework for collaborative professional learning proposed by Dobbs et al. in this text.

Part one, "Bringing Together Disciplinary Literacy and Professional Learning," contains three chapters. Chapter one, "The Challenge of Disciplinary Literacy," defines *disciplinary literacy* (p. 17) and discusses the challenges faced by teacher preparation programs in instructing pre-teachers how to teach literacy strategies and skills within specific disciplines. As a result of this challenge, many teachers are not equipped to teach and therefore resist teaching literacy skills. Based on the premise that adolescents need to bolster their academic reading, writing, and communication skills (p. 12), the authors exhort teachers to provide learners with tools that make transparent the "habits of mind" (p. 19) and ways of reading and writing used in their specific disciplines or content areas. Most importantly, they urge instructors to do so on a daily basis given that, although literacy is ubiquitous in the lives of the

learners, disciplinary literacy with its unique needs and strategies is not. This immersive approach supports the need to explicitly teach, exemplify, and discuss it with the students. The authors contend that the ability to *do* and *think* like an insider in a specific discipline will give learners opportunities to become more invested and successful in specific areas of study by becoming members of said communities.

The last two chapters in part one, chapter two, “Focusing on Professional Learning” and chapter three, “A New Model for Disciplinary Literacy Professional Learning,” present *professional learning* as a viable option to remedy the gap found in teacher preparation programs in their disciplinary literacy instruction. The professional learning process advocated by Dobbs et al. includes the following three essential parts: *professional learning communities (PLCs)*, *inquiry*, and *teacher leaders*.

The authors recommend a seven-step framework (p. 49) that may be used for designing and implementing the disciplinary literacy professional learning process. The seven steps are sub-divided into three phases that align with the steps of curriculum design (Nation & Macalister, 2010). The *planning phase* includes (1) forming a design team and (2) completing a needs assessment. The second phase, *implementation*, is comprised of (3) creating teacher teams, (4) making meaning of disciplinary literacy practices, (5) participating in collaborative inquiry into disciplinary literacy, and (6) designing and testing new practices. The final phase, the *expansion/evaluation*, includes (7) refining and sharing the tested disciplinary literacy practices.

Through these steps teams of teachers carefully design, implement, and reflect upon their use of disciplinary literacy instruction in their

classrooms. As a result, instructors and learners increase their ability to use language to think, communicate, read, and write using discipline-specific language.

In summary, the first part of this book highlights three aspects that will lead to improving students’ disciplinary literacy skills: (1) supporting teachers in using their professional and discipline-specific literacy knowledge to create and test ways in which disciplinary literacy can be incorporated into their teaching/lesson, (2) guiding teachers on how to work together, cooperating in the creation and testing of materials and the implementation ideas, and (3) realizing that teaching disciplinary literacy is a process that includes a trial and error cycle, that empowers teachers, and that successfully supports learners’ literacy skills growth.

Part two turns to design and implementation and dedicates a chapter to each of the seven steps included in the framework developed by Dobbs et al. The *new model for disciplinary literacy professional learning* comes alive with examples that include snapshots of practice from the field shared by teachers and administrators at schools where disciplinary literacy projects were successfully implemented. Chapters 4-10 are focused on process and carefully guide the reader through the enactment of each step. Each chapter includes commentary on how a variety of professional stakeholders could be involved in the process and the various and diverse steps they could take in order to accomplish their goal to include disciplinary literacy in specific situations and based on the needs of each individual site (department, school, or district).

In chapter four, “Forming a Leadership Team and Identifying Readiness for Change,” two

topics are addressed: how to best form a leadership team that will guide the project and how to gauge the readiness and need for change among stakeholders. As Rogers's (1962/2003) *diffusion of innovation theory* reminds us, 2.5% of any population fall under the "innovators" category, which means that meaningful, sustainable, and deep change such as disciplinary literacy work can only happen with time, careful planning, and support, all points stressed in this chapter. Dobbs et al. write about the "issue of ripeness" and McDonald & Cities and Schools Research Group (2014) *theory of action space* as the first and most important pieces in the journey to change. Without the buy-in of stakeholders recognizing the need for change and financial support and resources, change will not become established, and the new intended practice of disciplinary literacy will not survive. Disciplinary literacy work may begin with the leading team, which Rogers might say includes *innovators*, *early adopters*, and maybe some members of the *early majority*. They will assess needs and find ripe actions spaces to begin disciplinary literacy work, which are the topics of chapter five.

Chapter five, "Assessing Needs and Identifying Levers for Change" explains how to conduct a targeted, effective, and efficient needs assessment or self-study and suggests the use of "structured conversations or discussion-based protocols to support data analysis and reporting phases of the work" (p. 73). The authors also stress the need to capitalize on existing organizational and professional strengths in order to address current, site-specific needs and areas of growth. They warn of the dangers of forcing a top-down initiative that is neither needed nor welcomed by stakeholders. Dobbs et al. provide readers with a suggested list of steps to follow in order to complete a streamlined needs assessment: (1) identify the goals of the needs assessment, (2) select or design

preliminary needs assessment tool(s) to meet team goals, (3) determine existing sources of data, (4) determine how to collect new data, (5) decide on audiences to consult, and (6) analyze and report on data. Dobbs et al. explain that knowing where and how the professional learning will take place (structure and process) will aid the leadership team in deciding the format that the facilitation will take.

After the planning phase (chapters four and five) is completed, the *implementation phase* begins with "Forming Teams of Content and/or Cross-Content Area Teachers and Leaders," which is the content of chapter six. Finding a suitable group of individuals who will willingly and actively engage with the work necessary for propelling the initiative forward while making it inclusive and participatory could be challenging, but it represents the "bridge" between the design and the implementation stages of the model. This step is vitally important to the process. The authors therefore begin this very practical chapter sharing potential traps that team leaders should avoid during the design process and end with a reminder to the reader: "The *purpose* for the professional learning initiative needs first and foremost to guide each of the decisions outlined in this chapter" (p. 103).

The potential traps related to implementation are:

- (1) including everyone in the initiative; the authors suggest a minimum of three groups and a maximum of six, "each comprising a handful of teachers" (p. 102).
- (2) requiring that all involved teach the same grade level, content, and curriculum; instead, having cross-content area teachers in the same

planning team has proven to enrich the process although having discipline specific teams can also result in a powerful professional learning experience).

- (3) selecting initiative participants in a top-down fashion; such a hierarchical organization will likely exacerbate power dynamics and power relations that exist in all spaces where humans interact. In underperforming schools the leadership may require professional learning for all teachers. Allowing individuals who are genuinely interested in the project to participate will make for a more active, productive, and successful contribution.
- (4) choosing team leaders without considering team members and team dynamics, which does not lead to an autonomous, organic development and selection of a leader in a given group

Although it is not mentioned in the text, Dobbs et al. follow a backward design approach in that they encourage disciplinary literacy leadership teams to begin the project with a clear goal in mind and to maintain and share the purpose of this initiative with all involved often and clearly. They write, “literacy leadership teams and project participants must continually voice *why* this project is so important and how each design decision furthers the overarching purposes of the larger initiative” (p. 103; emphasis in original). With those goals in mind, teams will design approaches and literacy strategies to then implement and test in the classrooms before adopting them.

Chapter seven delineates the process that disciplinary literacy initiative participants need to undertake in order to discover the habits of mind related to their specific disciplines and how to present these habits of mind to the students based on their current levels of understanding. Dobbs et al. argue that it can be “genuinely difficult for teachers to *see* the habits of mind and norms of practice within their disciplines if those habits and norms always came naturally” (p. 108; emphasis in original). I would add that the same could be true for English as a second language or world languages teachers who are native speakers of the languages they teach. Among the items that learners may need to understand in order to become members of a particular discipline are: understanding and ability to use academic language and specific vocabulary (i.e., the meaning of the word “times” in mathematics as opposed to its other uses in daily life); using and discussing multiple and multimodal texts; and using disciplinary reading and writing to learn in other domains. This chapter also discusses best practices on creating sustainable working practices among colleagues who participate in the initiative.

The next three chapters—chapter eight, “Collaboratively Inquiring into Domains of Disciplinary Literacy Practice,” chapter nine, “Designing, Testing, and Assessing New Disciplinary Literacy Practices” and chapter ten, “Refining and Sharing New Disciplinary Literacy Practices”—walk the readers through necessary processes that lead to the completion of the framework presented by Dobbs et al.. The steps included in these chapters (i.e., the design, implementation, testing, assessment, reflection of disciplinary literacy strategies) will require much specificity and tailoring to the learners and environment where the project will be implemented. Once the disciplinary literacy strategies are implemented, teachers will be

able to assess and reflect upon the outcomes, which will in turn determine further modifications, final adoption, or dismissal of a particular strategy.

In order to develop context-specific disciplinary literacy strategies and practices, the authors recommend that teacher teams follow recurrent inquiry cycles, because of inquiry's "potential for the development of effective new ideas within and among groups of teachers" (p. 126). The five steps of a traditional disciplinary literacy inquiry cycle include: (1) defining an inquiry question or topic, (2) building background knowledge and drawing on experts, (3) collaborating in idea generation, (4) testing individual ideas, and (5) sharing and revising ideas and practices. Once teams of teachers go through these five steps, they are able to pilot and assess the disciplinary literacy strategies and practices they developed at a larger scale and subsequently share their findings with others. Piloting and reflecting as a team can be challenging; in fact, the authors state that it is "the most challenging part of the overall process" (p. 139) because each teacher is uniquely equipped to complete the task in his or her way and may complete them at different rates and pace. Results thus may vary.

At this step in the framework the leader has a twofold job: that of encouraging team members to experiment with the different approaches they generated to determine if they improve student disciplinary literacy or if still need modifications; and helping them to modify these approaches to find strategies that work well and have promise for improving students' literacy skills. Dobbs et al. have occasionally found that teachers become frustrated when they do not see immediate results. Using suggested protocols, team leaders can help their colleagues process their frustrations and continue to pursue their inquiry work. The

other two core professional learning structures in this framework, namely *professional learning communities (PLCs)* and *inquiry cycles*, are equally important in that they provide participants with additional encouragement and support in attempting various new instructional strategies while keeping them accountable in implementing and documenting (collecting data) successful adaptations of instructional strategies.

These adaptations can then be analyzed in order to scale and/or refine further. In order to share and scale findings, teams must decide how they wish to share the information and also how to end a particular inquiry cycle. With regards to the inquiry cycle, Dobbs et al. recommend that teams, keeping in mind their original purpose in selecting a topic for inquiry, decide from among several possible outcomes: "make new instructional practices a more consistent or permanent part of the curriculum,...abandon practices that did not seem effective or impactful,... continue refining practices,...continue collecting data,... [or end the] inquiry cycle" (p. 156). When making decisions about sharing findings, teams must carefully decide what to share, whom to share them with, and what format suits them best. Additionally, they will have to decide on which outcomes they are seeking upon sharing the findings with others (e.g., is the team asking others to change learning strategies they currently use?). Finding momentum in the presentation of findings will increase the possibility to begin other phases of the initiative, which may include increasing the number of individuals involved in the project. Like all of the other steps in this framework, teams will have to carefully decide if this is the best use of other's time and expertise.

Chapter 11, "Ending Well" concludes this book reminding readers that the end must be framed

at the beginning of the professional learning initiatives journey. Being aware of the full lifespan of the project may encourage more participation, investment of time and resources, and dedication on the part of participants and stakeholders. It may also stimulate the creation and development of new projects.

Final Thoughts

In general, this text is very accessible and an excellent way to begin thinking, discussing, and working on disciplinary literacy projects provided that there is a space for action and provided that stakeholders are ready for them and see their need and value. Of particular significance and usefulness are the discussion-based protocols to guide conversations at every step of the process, the appendices, tables, and figures, and the great number of snapshots and

practical suggestions offered throughout the text. All of these elements strengthen the practicality of this manuscript. As a curriculum designer, I appreciate the authors' reminder to be highly aware and consciously consider the results from the analysis of the needs assessment when making changes, so that the modifications benefit the specific environment for which they were created.

Dobbs et al. end this text with a very important reminder: "Our model is not a quick fix but if engaged in fully and collaboratively, it will result in meaningful change that engages teachers and students in reading, writing, communicating, and thinking more deeply" (p. 171). This ideal is something all teachers and administrator would want in place in their schools and in their classrooms.

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