

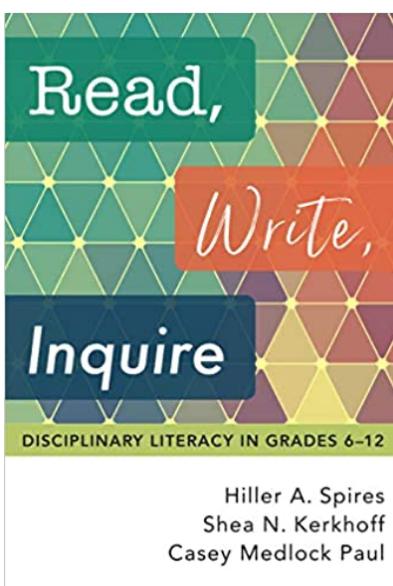
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Review of Read, Write, Inquire: Disciplinary Literacy in Grades 6-12

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Overview

Most educators seek to find instructional methods that tap into students' interests in addition to preparing their students for lives after they leave our classrooms. Yet, many secondary teachers, department chairs, and curriculum developers of each discipline, struggle with how to make their content area accessible and relatable, myself included. In *Read, Write, Inquire: Disciplinary Literacy in Grades 6-12*, Spires, Kerkhoff, and Paul (2020) offer to those individuals an accessible project based inquiry model intended to rejuvenate how various content area classrooms approach literacy that center student ideas while fostering skills and thinking appropriate for their respective discipline.

The introduction and chapter one establish the need for disciplinary literacy through inquiry-based projects in secondary classrooms. Chapter two briefly outlines the recommended model of implementation with chapters 3 through 6 extensively detailing the models' five stages: 1) ask a compelling question, 2) gather & analyze sources, 3) creatively synthesize claims & evidence, 4) critically evaluate & revise, and 5) share, publish & act. The authors call on their experiences of implementing this model in real classrooms to provide concrete examples and suggestions for each content area. Not to mention the included appendices that showcase lesson plans utilizing the model in its entirety for each subject. Throughout each chapter, the authors incorporate prompts for readers to reflect on how the readings may impact their discipline and teaching. Each chapter closes with a "Now It's Your Turn" Activity, often with links to online resources, that will help readers work through and imagine that stage of the model in their own classroom.

In this review, I will offer summaries of each chapter and thus describe the key tenets of this effective

problem-based inquiry model. Then, I will offer a reflection and critique because as it stands, this text fails to align with the critical need for justice-oriented frameworks in education. While the chapters of the text and this review will address literacy in each content area, it is important to note that my experience and expertise is in English classrooms. I hope to give insight on how this text enlightened me on the literacy practices within other subjects as well as the critical need for disciplinary literacy and cross-curricular collaboration.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: Disciplinary Literacy and Inquiry for Deeper Learning

Spires, Kerkhoff, and Paul begin this chapter with an explanation of disciplinary literacy, offering "disciplinary literacy involves advanced literacy skills and disciplinary ways of thinking: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing for deep learning and knowledge creation within a discipline" (p.7-8). The authors intentionally connect the social aspect of literacy and specifically disciplinary literacy in that there is always an interaction between the reader, the text, the author, and the task. After defining discourse as the "specialized language of community," (p. 10) the authors make a call for intentional use of disciplinary mindsets in classrooms because, by reading and interacting with texts in ways disciplinary experts do, students are afforded a deeper understanding of the discipline.

Next, the authors begin to give an overview of what disciplinary literacy can look like when established in communities of practice. They call for teachers to use an apprenticeship model in that they should gradually release the responsibility to the students as they learn to think and generate knowledge in ways within that respective discipline. The authors also emphasize the importance of working in

student-centered learning environments by using inquiry-based learning. This practice, ideally, would then foster disciplinary identities in the students.

Chapter 2: Relating Disciplinary Literacy to Inquiry Through the Project-Based Inquiry (PBI) Model

This chapter establishes Project-Based Inquiry (PBI) as means for incorporating disciplinary literacy in the classroom. To lay the foundation, the authors touch on how to get the whole process started. They recommend teachers “activate and/or build students’ background knowledge through a shared reading and lessons on a particular theme” (p. 23). From there, the inquiry begins. Students, in pairs or small groups, pose questions sparked by that lesson that they want to attempt to answer when proceeding through the PBI model. The authors slightly step away from the narrow classroom view and dive into how particular disciplines foster unique skills. Figure 2.1 and 2.2 on pages 24-25 best represent the author’s synthesis of how each discipline approaches literacy and creates knowledge differently.

Now, this chapter is not fully removed from an educational setting in that their descriptions are grounded in an example of a PBI conducted in a 10th grade English classroom focused on the global water crisis. They then explain how this unit could be complemented by other topically-focused PBI models in the other disciplines--Table 2.1 Applying the PBI Process with Different Disciplines Using the Theme of the Global Water Crisis succinctly describes that process and gives a good overview of the following chapters.

Although this chapter is organized by the stages in the PBI Model, it is mostly focused on helping the reader understand how experts execute these stages in their disciplines with some supporting evidence of what it looks like in classrooms. For example, the

authors explain how a literary critic “unearths layers of meaning through deconstruction of rhetorical and literary devices,” meanwhile a historian “pay[s] attention to the source of the information and the context surrounding the creation of the information” (p. 29, 31). The differences of each discipline detailed within this chapter help the reader understand why disciplinary literacy needs to enter classrooms to answer questions that students pose.

Chapter 3: Gathering and Analyzing Sources: Getting Close to Close Reading

Once teachers have shared a common text, students kick-off the PBI model as they pose questions related to the theme and start their inquiry with research. Chapter three begins with ideas on how to support students with finding high-quality resources by teaching them how to navigate the web. The authors recommend mini lessons on how to use search engines and a method for analyzing whether the resource is credible and accurate, the CRAAP test. This test “helps students assess sources for *currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose*” (p. 40, emphasis in original). From there, instruction evolves into using the selected resources for close reading in the ways the experts of that discipline would. The authors offer concrete examples of close reading with passages for each discipline. The specific reading of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address is modeled within both English language arts and social studies, highlighting the difference in what literacy should like in those classrooms. For readers who are not familiar with close reading, the authors close this chapter by offering three steps to implement this practice in their classroom and support them with content area specific resources and links to help them get started.

Chapter 4: Creatively Synthesizing Information: Building Digital and Global Literacies

In the third stage of the PBI model, teachers help their students answer the question by strategically synthesizing their resources gathered in the last stage in order to make a strong claim with evidence, leaving out any irrelevant information or sources. Within this stage, it is important that students practice applying critical perspectives. This means that,

readers question author bias and evaluate the credibility of claims based on whose voices are included and whose are left out. Writers construct claims by reading multiple sources to consider diverse viewpoints and to corroborate facts. Students apply critical literacy lenses to the world by examining power in society, breaking down oppressive systems, and building new social futures (p. 61).

In addition to having a critical lens, the authors explain that students should also adopt global perspectives within the PBI model in hopes to achieve “*educational cosmopolitanism*” to “frame an action-oriented worldview in which people proactively create positive change in their own lives and the world at large” (p. 63, emphasis in original). This supports the author’s claim that their PBI model supports the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal of Quality Education.

Synthesizing the information is the first part of this stage because then, students need to decide how they want to share that information. The authors encourage creativity here and provide resources, including digital tools that will be especially helpful to readers who are not used to students creating products in multimodalities. To help ground this stage in classroom practice, Spire, Kerkhoff, and Paul detail an example of the PBI model used in a 10th grade classroom in the United States along with

a Chinese high school under the PBI Global program. Therefore, the reader can see the model in action using a theme that addresses refugees and immigrants.

Chapter 5: Critical Evaluation as Summative and Formative Assessment

This chapter details how the reader can make use of summative and formative assessments within the PBI model. The authors encourage using rubrics in a three-tier evaluation process of “self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and outside expert evaluation” that takes place alongside opportunities to revise their project (p. 74). Formative assessments, as is in their nature, are recommended to be quicker check-ins to ensure the students are progressing through the stages appropriately and to determine if instructional changes need to occur. Table 5.1 Examples of Formative and Summative Assessments by PBI Phases succinctly outlines assessments in the model. The authors also provide sections on differentiation and supporting English Language Learners during the PBI model.

Chapter 6: Share, Publish, and Act: Students and Teachers Stepping into Leadership

Part of the motivation within the PBI model is that students will show their work to an authentic audience, particularly disciplinary experts to become “part of the disciplinary community” (p. 86). Beyond simply sharing, the authors also call for students taking action as a result of their findings by being involved in community service projects-- “teachers and students can advocate for needed improvements or social change as they forge creative spaces that support communities to also engage in the learning process” (p. 87). While sharing, publishing, and acting denotes the last stage of the PBI model, the bigger purpose that authors intend for this stage is to build leadership skills in students and teachers. The chapter comes to a close with what teacher

leaders as change agents looks like at the classroom, school, as well as state, national, and international levels. This chapter also includes teacher accounts of how this model has impacted their teaching and school.

Reflection and Critique

Having been interested in cross-curricular planning in the past and failing at my attempts to build curriculum effectively across subject area professional learning communities, my initial concerns were that this model would not offer detailed descriptions of each stage within each discipline. However, the format of the text equips readers to first understand the purpose of the stage and then to read how it can be enacted within each content area. I found this particularly useful as a previous middle school English teacher because I am quite disconnected from other content areas. Therefore, this book supports teachers who teach science, mathematics, history, and English while strengthening their understanding of other content areas and thus their ability to engage in cross-curricular planning in ways that benefit each subject.

While I do not promote only using one stage of project-based inquiry, chapter two offers a very practical application of disciplinary learning and so is a good entry point for schools who are centering literacy within all content areas. The frank reminder that students should not only read for literary critique, but also need to learn how historians use “source literacy” and mathematicians use “analytical literacy”- both of which are very different from how I asked students to read for understanding in my class- was heard loud and clear (p. 31). In my last school, our administration pushed for the social studies department to use the same annotation strategies as the English department in hopes of supporting state test scores in language arts. In

doing so, we took away an opportunity for students to think and act like historians. Individual teachers will surely benefit from this text, but department heads and curriculum designers will also find this a valuable resource for planning authentic and engaging curriculum with potential for cross-curricular collaboration.

The uniqueness and potential pitfall in this inquiry approach is that the authors have explicitly detailed how experts in different disciplines (e.g. literary critics, scientists, historians, and mathematicians) approach literacy and generating knowledge in ways that may limit how teachers define literacy in classrooms. My main critique with the text is this PBI model as written fails to recognize the cultural literacies that students bring to the classroom. By focusing on how the “experts” do things, teachers could emphasize standard English, resulting in isolation for students of color whose language at home and in their community does not reflect what is being taught in the classroom. This form of literacy instruction could enact what Wheeler and Swords (2006) call “code-switching” where students are asked to switch from the language and dialect that they are familiar with to that of White Mainstream English, this case the language of the disciplinary experts. In her book, *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, Baker-Bell (2020) writes on the shortcomings of “respectability language pedagogies” (p. 29, emphasis in text) such as code-switching, and proposes ten framing ideas for an “Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy” two of which I find particularly relevant to this PBI model. First, Baker-Bell calls for a pedagogy that “provides Black students with critical literacies and competencies to name, investigate, and dismantle white linguistic hegemony and Anti-Black Linguistic Racism” and second, “relies on Black Language oral, and literary traditions to build Black students’ linguistic flexibility and creativity skills” (p. 34). Therefore, it would be critical that

teachers who are seeking to implement Spires, Kerkhoff, and Paul's (2020) PBI model need also to

be intentional with celebrating the voices of students of color in their classrooms.

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