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Disciplinary Literacy Strategies to Support Transactions in Elementary Social Studies

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Abstract: In today's diverse and global world, the importance of disciplinary literacy is rapidly increasing. Thus, elementary educators must consider ways to incorporate disciplinary literacy into their instruction. Elementary educators often implement the transactional theory of reading to enhance comprehension and evoke aesthetic responses to fiction literature. This theory is rarely applied to the expository texts of the disciplines. This article explores disciplinary literacy strategies as helpful tools to support transactions between the reader and the text to enhance comprehension and develop the specialized literacy demands determined by the discipline of history in the elementary social studies classroom.

Keywords: disciplinary literacy, elementary education, social studies



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Introduction

Elementary educators face the challenge of answering the current call of the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies put forth by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). These standards reflect a shift from the retention of facts to a more collective, humanistic approach that examines the reader, ethics, and the global world (Adler et al., 2010; National Council for the Social Studies, 2021). To meet the call of the NCSS, social studies instruction in the K-5 classroom must not focus exclusively on facts within nonfiction texts (Beach, 2012). Thus, elementary educators might consider “how can the transactional theory of reading be incorporated into social studies instruction in the elementary classroom?” because Louise Rosenblatt’s (1994) transactional theory of reading is often applied to only fiction literature. The answers to this question vary widely as we continue to attempt to understand how the transactional theory of reading can be applied to nonfiction texts in the discipline of social studies (Robinson, 2020).

The Transactional Theory of Reading

The transactional theory of reading emphasizes the relationship between the reader and the text as they work together to construct meaning (Rosenblatt, 1994). Rosenblatt (1994) suggests meaning does not reside within the text or the reader but lies within the exchange or “transaction” between the reader and the text. She further argued, “as a reader responds to the printed words or symbols, his attention is directed outward, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after reading” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 24). The transaction between the text’s meaning and the reader’s interpretation is influenced by the reader’s emotions, personal connections, and prior knowledge that are evoked at a particular time within a particular context. Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1994) suggests that

comprehension takes place during the actual transaction between the reader and the text. The way the reader and the text transact is dependent upon the situation and the purpose for reading. In other words, the interaction is unique for that specific context (Rosenblatt, 1994). Educators can create these specific contexts and learning opportunities that support the construction of meaning (Pardo, 2004).

The transactional theory of reading distinguishes two stances of reading, i.e., the efferent stance, wherein readers focus on the information in a text, and the aesthetic stance, wherein readers focus on the experience they have with a text (Rosenblatt, 1994). The stance students assume while reading is often a result of the context, e.g., the situation and the purpose for reading (Pardo, 2004). Further, students do not remain fixed in their stances (Rosenblatt, 1994). They may delve into both stances, placing one foot in each when educators create a context for learning that focuses on how to approach a disciplinary text that provides multiple entry points for exploring content through social endeavors as they discuss content, consider various perspectives, actively engage with the text to make connections, and synthesize learning to develop an interpretation.

The Importance of Disciplinary Literacy

Disciplinary literacy focuses on the aspects of reading and writing specific to each academic discipline (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Disciplinary literacy focuses on reading to learn and understand concepts by focusing on the specialized ways of reading, understanding, and thinking in each academic discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014). As Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) confirmed, “disciplinary literacy matters because general reading skills can only take students so far” (p. 637). Students can learn to identify the main idea and key details or use a graphic organizer to understand the content, but not to the same extent

Table 1

Pause and Ponder

- How do you foster meaningful responses to social studies texts?
- What routines do you have in place for students to approach social studies texts? Do they mirror those of the experts in the discipline?
- What is your process for planning disciplinary literacy tasks and activities?

that more disciplinary approaches would (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014). Disciplinary literacy pushes students to move beyond reading, writing, thinking, and listening for the sake of completing homework or passing tests (Hamilton & Stolle, 2016). Instead, disciplinary literacy instruction invites students to engage within the disciplines authentically by creating, communicating, and applying knowledge in the field (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). In the discipline of history, disciplinary literacy challenges students to move beyond reading a historical text solely for information to identifying and considering the perspective, bias, message, and source of the historical texts they consume (Hamilton & Stolle, 2016). In doing so, students are provided with opportunities to critically analyze and assess how they consume texts to construct meaning and form interpretations of the diverse and global world in which they live (Hamilton & Stolle, 2016). For example, after I read aloud *The Crayon Man: The True Story of the Invention of Crayola Crayons*, students in my third-grade class discussed who wrote the picture book, why it was written, the potential bias of the author’s viewpoint, and how the inventions of entrepreneurs impacted the industrial revolution. One of the students expressed, “I think the author included the information in the back of the book to help readers see this book is based on real-life facts. It is a biography that explains why and how Edward Binney invented Crayola Crayons.” This is an example of disciplinary literacy in an elementary classroom where the reading, thinking, and understanding of the discipline develops.

Disciplinary Literacy Strategies that Support Transactions

Disciplinary literacy strategies can be defined as teaching tools and techniques that educators can use to model the specialized literacy demands of a given discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Students use disciplinary literacy strategies as they read, write, listen, speak, think critically, and perform in a congruent way with a given discipline. Rosenblatt (1998) indicated that competent readers continuously draw from a range of resources to transact with the text. So, how can elementary educators use disciplinary literacy strategies as helpful tools to support transactions between the reader and the text to enhance comprehension in social studies? The following strategies, which educators have used for years to enhance comprehension (see Miller 2002; Pardo, 2004; Wright, 2019), can be used to support transactions while supporting students’ reading, understanding, and thinking required across disciplines. These strategies will help educators attend to the reader, the text, and the context, including the situation and purpose for reading. In this article, I present a lesson sequence that includes three strategies: interactive read-aloud, annotating, and synthesizing all of which can help educators support student transactions to enhance comprehension in social studies.

Interactive Read Alouds

Interactive read alouds are frequently used in elementary classrooms to teach various literacy skills and support students' conceptual knowledge about the world (Wright, 2019). Interactive read alouds provide educators with opportunities to explicitly model comprehension strategies and demonstrate reading behaviors students will be able to use when they read and create disciplinary texts independently (Pardo, 2004; McClure & Fullerton, 2017). To create a context for learning that supports transactions and disciplinary literacy, educators need to understand the social, cultural, and historical context in which reading occurs and how to implement effective instructional practices with texts (Brock et al., 2014). An interactive read-aloud enhances these understandings as it engages students in a context for learning. They can experience transactions through ongoing interactions with the text, their peers, and their teacher (Barrentine, 1996). In these moments gathered around a picture book, the text may illuminate a new way of thinking and inspire a new reading of the world (Wissman, 2019).

As seen in Appendix A, educators can model their thinking that aligns with the discipline under investigation. By modeling their thinking, educators can facilitate discussion that invites students to share ideas and actively listen to the ideas of others (McClure & Fullerton, 2017).

Vignette 1

Teacher: "It is evident that Binney's inventions were created during the industrial revolution. The dates

included in the caption on opening 4 and in the running text on opening 12 provide this evidence. I am also thinking these inventions were created during this time period because they were manufactured in large amounts, which was not likely prior to the industrial revolution."

Student 1: "I think Edward Binney invented Crayola Crayons because he felt kids needed better tools for their schoolwork that were not expensive. He could make them cheaper because factories were producing goods during the industrial revolution."

Student 2: "He invented the crayons because he saw a need and wanted to help! He was successful because teachers and kids wanted to write and draw with color."

Student 3: "Other inventors during this time wanted to make new inventions to help others like Edward Binney did."

Student 4: "I don't think Edward Binney would have created colorful crayons if he had not worked with carbon black before, because the author's note explains that he used what he knew about carbon black to make crayons."

This discussion encourages critical thinking and analysis of the content to construct meaning that students might use to nurture a sense of agency that can be described as the remaking of identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools, resources, and histories (Lewis et al., 2007) while listening to a disciplinary text being read aloud.

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Annotating

Annotating refers to making notes while reading in which students use exclamation marks to indicate things that were surprising, question marks to indicate points of confusion, and stars to indicate important information (Brock et al., 2014). This strategy recognizes how experts across disciplines monitor their reading resulting from the understanding that meaning is constructed during reading and is an interactive process between the reader, the text, and the context (Zywica & Gomez, 2008). Annotating provides students with opportunities to connect their reading to their personal experiences, and those experiences inform their understanding of what they have read (Brown, 2007). If this work is done in groups, students can discuss content and their interpretations simultaneously (Zywica & Gomez, 2008). As seen in Appendix A, students can annotate primary and secondary sources to construct their own evidence-based interpretations while focusing on their literacy skills and developing dispositions to read critically (Popp & Hoard, 2018).

“Annotating provides students with opportunities to connect their reading to their personal experiences, and those experiences inform their understanding of what they read.”

Synthesizing

Synthesizing refers to “the process through which readers bring together their background knowledge and their evolving understanding of the text to create a complete and original understanding” (Miller, 2002, p. 117). Educators can use synthesizing to introduce and guide the reading of multiple texts on the same topic to prepare students for disciplinary reading (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014). As seen in Appendix A, synthesizing can provide students with opportunities to interact with multiple texts in various contexts as they actively make connections

with the texts (Yang et al., 2020). According to Probst (1987), the goal of the transactional approach is to acknowledge what is known or associated with a text and to credit that while also finding a place for new material. As students synthesize their reading, they will make connections calling upon their previous experiences with related text, their background and conceptual knowledge, and their personal attitudes and perspectives. By making these connections, students will construct meaning and form their interpretations (Brozo, 1988).

Putting It All Together

Now, to put these disciplinary literacy strategies together in a way that provides educators with a framework that provisions the planning and implementation of these strategies. Appendix A includes an example lesson sequence that exemplifies how these three strategies can seamlessly work together to support student transactions in a third-grade social studies classroom that promotes the specialized literacy demands required in the discipline of history.

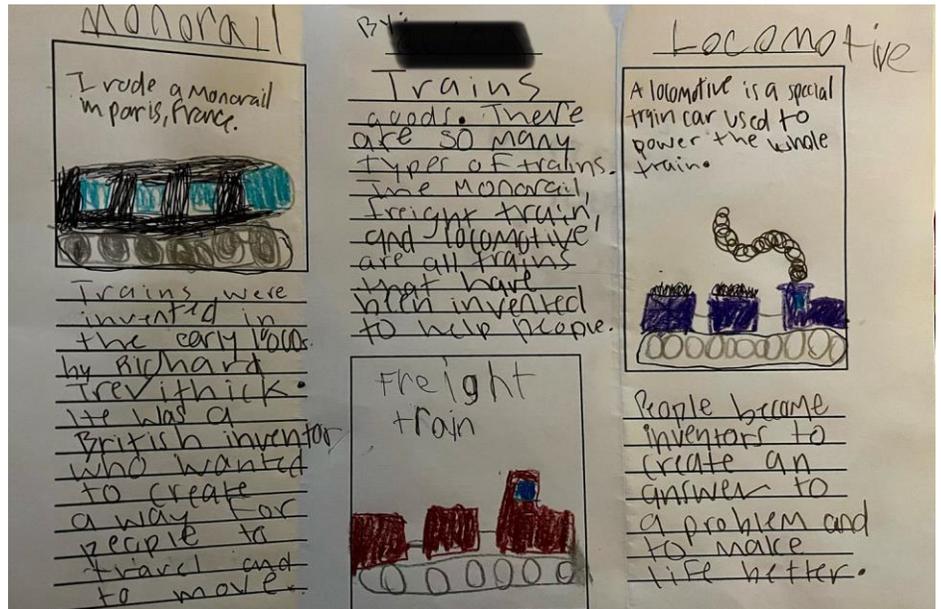
For the first lesson, the biography, *The Crayon Man: The True Story of the Invention of Crayola Crayons* by Biebow (2019), illustrated by Steven Salerno, could be selected for an interactive read aloud. This text could be used to explicitly model how to approach a text like a historian by asking specific questions, thinking aloud, and facilitating meaningful discussions that encourage students to share their ideas and interpretations to form their own perspectives and make informed judgments and democratic decisions later (see Appendix A: Lesson 1).

For the second lesson, students could work in small groups to interpret primary and secondary sources using specific annotation marks. Annotation marks might include a question mark to indicate when the reader has a question or to indicate a point of confusion. Speech bubbles might be used to indicate when the reader makes a prediction. A capital letter “I” might be used to indicate when the reader makes an inference, and the capital letter “C” might be used to indicate when a connection is made. An eyeball might be used to indicate when the reader visualizes, and a star might be used to indicate an important event in the text. An exclamation point might be used to indicate when the reader feels excited or interested. Finally, a capital letter “N” might be used to indicate new information. In small groups, students could discuss annotation marks and evidence-based interpretations of the content while also considering their peers’ interpretations to form their own perspectives and judgments (see Appendix A: Lesson 2).

For the third lesson, students could work independently to create evidence of their learning that fuses together conceptual information, draw conclusions, and develop their interpretations regarding why people become inventors or entrepreneurs based on synthesizing the reading and discussions over the course of the three-lesson sequence (see Appendix A: Lesson 3 and Figure 1). These lessons provide opportunities for students to think critically as they form well-reasoned, evidence-based interpretations, similar to the expert ways of historians. Through these opportunities, students are

Figure 1

Brochure Example



given tools to study, as well as to shape, the world around them.

Conclusion

Interactive read-alouds, annotating, and synthesizing are authentic, engaging, and rigorous disciplinary literacy strategies that can be implemented into instruction to support transactions between the reader and the text to enhance comprehension in social studies. These strategies serve as pedagogical tools that immerse educators and students into the specialized literacy practices required in social studies. These strategies provide a context for learning that focuses on approaching a text, discussing content to consider various perspectives, annotating to actively respond to the text, and synthesizing learning to develop interpretations and justify claims. In this instance, the lesson sequence incorporates each of the disciplinary literacy strategies previously mentioned to illustrate how disciplinary literacy can support the transactional theory of reading in the elementary social studies

classroom. The integration of interactive read-alouds, annotating, and synthesizing provide one of the many ways to answer the question, “how can the

transactional theory of reading be incorporated into social studies instruction in the elementary classroom?”.

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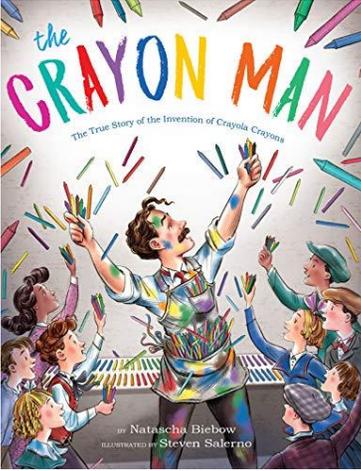
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Appendix A

Lesson Plan Sequence

Grade Level, Discipline, Topic of Study	Common Core State Standards addressed:	Lesson 1: Read Aloud (Whole Group, 30 min.)	Lesson 2: Annotating (Small Group, 30 min.)	Lesson 3: Synthesizing (Independent, 30 min.)
<p>3rd grade, History, Entrepreneurs/Inventors</p> 	<p>3.E.2.1: Explain why people become entrepreneurs/inventors</p> <p>SL.3.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>RI.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.</p> <p>RI.3.3: Describe the relationship between a series of historical events using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect</p>	<p>Read Aloud Text: <i>The Crayon Man: The True Story of the Invention of Crayola Crayons</i> by Natascha Biebow and illustrated by Steven Salerno</p> <p>Questions Historians ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who is the author?</i> • <i>Why was this text written?</i> • <i>Potential bias?</i> • <i>Type of source?</i> • <i>What was happening in history during this time period?</i> <p>Model thinking while reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think this text may influence others to...</i> • <i>It is evident that Binney's inventions were created during The Industrial Revolution because...</i> • <i>It can be argued that Binney's life would have been much different had he not patented an apparatus to manufacture carbon</i> 	<p>Annotation Marks:</p> <p>? : Point of confusion/I have questions about.</p> <p> : Prediction/My prediction was correct...</p> <p>I: Inference</p> <p>C: Connection</p> <p> : I visualize...</p> <p> : Important part</p> <p>! : Exciting/interesting</p> <p>N: New information</p> <p>Types of Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biography of Edwin Binney • Primary Source: E. Binney Patent (https://aoghs.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Carbon-Black-Crayola-patent.jpg) • Article about inventor/entrepreneur whose work solved a problem during the late 1800s 	<p>Activities to synthesize learning:</p> <p>Students may research to explore other inventors, entrepreneurs, or inventions to create the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infographic • Brochure • Invention • Business Plan • Newspaper article <p>Student may present their artifact to peers using classroom materials or available technology.</p> <p>Students may reflect on their learning through writing by using the following sentence stems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People become inventors or entrepreneurs to...</i>

	<p>RI.3.10: Read and comprehend informational texts independently and proficiently.</p>	<p><i>black prior to making colored crayons...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think Binney used his talents for the greater good by...</i> • <i>I think the author's intent was...</i> <p>Questions to facilitate discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you ever considered creating something to help others or solve a problem? (Page 1)</i> • <i>What does it feel like to suggest something new? Are there potential challenges? (Page 4)</i> • <i>Why did Binney want to improve the existing slate pencil and black wax crayon? (Page 7)</i> • <i>Let's consider why Binney dedicated his life to inventing. What do you think his purpose was? (Page 20)</i> • <i>How did the supply and demand of colored crayons impact Binney's success? (Page 22)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article about an entrepreneur, inventor, or invention from the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. <p>Students can discuss their interpretations by explaining why they used each annotation mark in their small group.</p> <p>Small groups will be encouraged to share their thinking with the whole group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I used to think...but now I understand...</i> • <i>_____ is important because _____.</i> • <i>One piece of evidence that informs my decisions is _____.</i> • <i>Based on _____, I conclude that _____.</i> • <i>The most likely reason for _____ was _____.</i> • <i>_____ led to _____.</i>
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