



LEARNING POINT

Disciplinary literacy and student-centered instruction and assessment in secondary English language arts

Disciplinary literacy encompasses the ways of being, inquiring, comprehending, and communicating of an insider within a specialized community. Students who develop disciplinary literacy within secondary English language arts (ELA) are apprenticed by content-expert educators into real-world skills used in associated fields, such as communications, journalism, and publishing. Student-centered assessment of disciplinary literacy in ELA affirms students' existing literacies while engaging them in authentic purposes for inquiry, comprehension, and communication associated with these fields. This Learning Point considers the intersec-

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assessment of disciplinary literacy in secondary ELA.

Intersection of Literacy Essentials and Equitable Assessment in Secondary ELA

Consistent with Moje (2015), equitable assessment leverages students' identities, desire for belonging, and curiosities. Diagnostic assessments, such as an interest and reading survey or Personal Reading History (Greenleaf et al., 2023), provide insight into students' existing language and literacy practices. Equitable assessment also considers patterns in adolescent language and literacy development in ELA based on standards, such as the Michigan K-12 Standards for English Language Arts (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.). These standards highlight relevant disciplinary practices, such as examining patterns in text, asking and answering text-based questions, and making claims (Rainey, 2017; Reynolds & Rush, 2017). Teachers can intentionally connect

students' existing literacies with those they are developing in ELA, such as how they make inferences to determine the author's intent when they read text messages from their peers as well as when they examine characters' interactions in short stories.

Equitable assessment in disciplinary literacy in ELA engages students in real-world tasks. Teachers design these tasks for purposes and audiences that are authentic to how insiders in the discipline comprehend and communicate. Examples include:

- writing a summary or review of a novel to display at the library;
- recording a newscast about a current event in the community;
- dialoguing in a Socratic Seminar to compare and contrast the themes of two poems; or
- designing a public service announcement to propose a solution to a problem.

Teachers choose relevant texts to support students' achievement of assess-



tion between the Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in Secondary ELA¹, or Literacy Essentials, and MAC's Components of Equitable Assessment to offer key considerations for student-centered instruction and

¹The Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in Secondary Education, or Literacy Essentials, outline ten strategies enacted by educators to effectively apprentice students into the real-world knowledge and skills needed within the disciplines. Extensively informed by research conducted at the University of Michigan, they were developed by content and learning experts from intermediate school districts, professional educator organizations, university researchers and educators, and the Department of Education in Michigan. This document identifies cross-disciplinary for disciplinary literacy instruction as well as specific considerations for individual disciplines, such as ELA.





ment tasks, establishing a real-world purpose for inquiry, comprehension, and textual analysis. They also vary these texts according to students' language and cultural backgrounds, curiosities and passions. Through listening, reading, and viewing, students become familiar with the genres that they are creating and develop metalinguistic awareness of how language is used. Through speaking, writing, and other forms of representation, they communicate their ideas while drawing upon the patterns of genre and language they have learned. Students gain a sense of ownership when they help set learning goals and success criteria for assessment, allowing them to reflect on their learning.

Students' agency is affirmed when they choose the texts and tasks integrated into assessment; opportunities for collaboration provide additional differentiation and are relevant to how insiders interact within the discipline of ELA. Students' agency is further affirmed when scaffolds are integrated into the formative assessment process to ensure they can demonstrate full achievement of the success criteria—regardless of variations in prior knowledge, language, or out-of-school literacy practices; these scaffolds are reduced as students demonstrate independent achievement through summative assessment.

For example, students can collaboratively analyze the patterns of genre and language in children's books they

chose during independent reading to recommend what criteria be included in the class rubric for developing their own children's books. Criteria in this class-constructed rubric might include integrating visuals with text, using transition words to show sequence within the plot, and incorporating a lesson into the resolution of the story. Students use this rubric while creating their own children's

books to self-assess their final products before sharing them at the local elementary school.

Incorporating teacher and peer feedback, self-assessment, and reflection affirms students' ownership over the assessment process—and also is consistent with the disciplinary literacy practices of ELA. In one-on-one conferences with teachers, students learn to inquire, comprehend, and communicate through personalized feedback. In peer conferences and self-assessments, they practice writing like readers and adjust their communication to connect with authentic audiences. This also bolsters students' capacity to read like writers (or speak like listeners), developing their meta-discursive awareness as they reflect on their own language use and consider how to most effectively achieve their communicative purposes.

Conclusion

Developing disciplinary literacy within secondary ELA is essential for fostering students' identities and real-world skills. By centering instruction and assessment around students' existing literacies, educators create an inclusive environment that nurtures belonging and agency. Authentic tasks and texts not only engage students but also mirror the practices of professionals within the discipline, preparing them for future endeavors. Through differentiated assessments that consider students' diverse needs and interests, learners gain ownership of their educational journeys. Conducting student-centered assessment through a disciplinary literacy lens enriches students' experiences in secondary ELA and ultimately equips them with the necessary skills to thrive in a complex, interconnected world.

References

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- Moje, E. B. (2015). Doing and teaching disciplinary literacy with adolescent learners: A social and cultural enterprise. *Harvard Educational Review*, *85*(2), 254-278,301.
- Rainey, E. C. (2017). Disciplinary literacy in English language arts: Exploring the social and problem-based nature of literary reading and reasoning. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *52*(1), 53-71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.154>
- Reynolds, T., & Rush, L. S. (2017). Experts and novices reading literature: *An analysis of disciplinary literacy in English language arts. Literacy Research and Instruction*, *56*(3), 199-216.

To learn more

Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12

<https://bit.ly/DL-Secondary>

Resources Hub

<https://sites.google.com/resa.net/dl-resources-hub/home>

Edupaths Course: Planning for and Implementing Assessment

<https://edupaths.org/catalog/1694/details>

Ongoing Observation & Assessment of Students' Literacy Development

<https://bit.ly/40ATYk3>

The Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community open to educators and policymakers committed to improving their assessment literacy and increasing student learning through equitable and effective assessment practice.