Disciplinary Literacy

*Close Reading of Complex Texts in the Disciplines*

Overview and Speaker Notes

**Intended Audience:** Principals and other leaders responsible for curriculum and instruction, grades 6-12.

**Overview for Facilitators**
The CEEDAR Center is pleased to provide the anchor presentation: *Close Reading of Complex Texts in the Disciplines*. The materials are designed to be included in a pre-service teacher or leader preparation course or in-service teacher professional development program. Aligned with the Common Core State Standards, this resource will increase in-service professionals’ ability to improve secondary students’ readiness for college and careers.

**Speaker Notes**
The speaker notes are what the facilitator can say, verbatim, to explain each slide and the activities. The notes are provided as a guide, and speakers should feel free to modify these as needed. Directions and notes for the facilitator, not to be said aloud, are in *italics*.

**Materials Required**
1. Handouts 1 and 2: Generic Reading Strategies & Disciplinary Literacy Strategies
2. Handout 5: *Common Sense*
3. Handout 6: *Common Sense*, annotated
4. Projector with audio
5. Chart tablets and markers
6. Presentation slides with speaker notes
Objectives: After participating in this professional learning opportunity, participants will be able to:

- Define disciplinary literacy
- Note how the CCSS address disciplinary literacy
- Discern unique literacy skills utilized in the content areas
- Identify strategies good readers use to comprehend complex text
- Identify what they should observe students and teachers doing in classrooms

Outline of Session with Activities and Approximate Time

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Suggested Follow-Up Professional Learning Opportunities
In professional learning communities, study a selection of the following:

Books:

Articles:
Today we will examine disciplinary literacy, a term you will hear often. The Common Core State Standards expect students to be able to independently read complex text in all disciplines.

Reading complex texts in various disciplines is challenging for many adolescents, yet knowing how to comprehend, analyze and critique complex text in the disciplines is essential to be educated citizens and to be prepared for college and careers.

The teachers will need your support implementing new strategies emphasizing in-depth reading of complex text. This brief overview provides you the basic information you
You may have heard this adage many times. However, not all secondary teachers can be a reading teacher, responsible for teaching adolescents basic literacy skills. A teacher of physics, chemistry, geography, music, or P.E., for example, has neither the time nor, typically, the skill to teach students who struggle with basic decoding and comprehension skills. However, all teachers can teach students to understand their discipline and the specialized skills required to read and write in that discipline.

Most teachers don’t take courses during their preparation in how experts create knowledge, communicate it, and critique it in their disciplines. Thus they don’t have a full understanding how to TEACH the literacy of their own discipline. (Shanahan, C., 2013, p. 95). This session is intended to provide you with the awareness, knowledge, and skills to support your teachers and students to read complex disciplinary text. We’ll discuss the shift from every teacher a reading teacher to every teacher able to model the use of generic reading strategies and discipline-dependent literacy practices to teach the literacy skills essential to each discipline.
After this session, you will be able to:

◆ Define disciplinary literacy
◆ Note how the CCSS address disciplinary literacy
◆ Discern unique literacy skills utilized in the disciplines
◆ Model/evaluate an effective think aloud
◆ Articulate what you should observe teachers and students doing
Slide 4—Objectives continued

Ask the participants to read the objectives silently. Partner B, which of these objectives is most important to you? Share why with Partner A.

Objectives continued

◆ Discern unique literacy skills utilized in:
  – History
  – Mathematics
  – Science & Technical Subjects
  – Literary Genres
◆ Model how to think aloud to teach close reading of disciplinary literacy
◆ Plan effective, evidence-based scaffolds for students with learning difficulties
The Common Core State Standards require educators to make instructional shifts in five areas.

1. There is an increased emphasis on reading information text, from K-12, so that by high school 70% of text read by students throughout the school day should be informational. (Coleman, 2011) The complexity of the texts increases throughout the school years. This has not been true in the past. The complexity of text in the early grades has increased since the 1970’s, but the difficulty of texts secondary students are expected to read has decreased over the years (ACT, 2013; Adams, 2010; Hiebert, in press) Close reading, using various metacognitive strategies, supports students in making this shift and will be discussed in this session.

2. Literacy knowledge in the disciplines, particularly history and the sciences, is demanded. Students find it difficult to read complex text in the disciplines for reasons to be discussed in few minutes. This is one reason why so many students find it difficult to successfully transition to college and careers—they are unable to read complex text with deep comprehension, independently.

3. In the past students have been expected to relate what they read to their own experiences. While this is still appropriate at times, students must also learn to rely on evidence from the texts they are reading, not their personal beliefs or experiences, to write an argument. This shift requires that students build knowledge about the world through TEXT (not the teacher, peers, or activities).

4. The emphasis in writing has moved from an emphasis on
narrative and personal experiences to answering text-dependent questions and writing argumentative and analytical essays, relying on evidence found in the text.

5. Academic Vocabulary, both the general vocabulary required to negotiate secondary and college classrooms (sometimes referred to as transferable vocabulary) AND discipline specific vocabulary is essential for student success.

Slide 6–Why are Disciplinary Texts Difficult for Students?

Take a moment and turn to your partner to answer this question. Why do you think students struggle so much reading textbooks that many teachers aren’t even asking them to read anymore? Provide about one minute for this discussion. Take another minute and have participants call out the reasons why students often struggle reading textbooks and other grade level text.

Let’s see what the researchers have discovered. Read this slide enumerating why students struggle. Did you and your partner arrive at the same conclusions? Provide one minute for participants to read and reflect with their partner.

Why Are Disciplinary Texts Difficult for Students?

Students may lack:
1. Experience reading lengthy expository text
2. Content-specific vocabulary
3. Decoding skills
4. Comprehension strategies
5. Background knowledge and interest in the content
CAEP, the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation, accredits most of the teacher education programs in the country. CEC, the Council for Exceptional Children, has created standards for special education teachers. There are other sets of standards for teachers from many professional organizations, such as the International Reading Association, the International Dyslexia Association, and from organizations in each of your content areas. This slide illustrates how the standards align, from what students need to know and be able to do to what teachers need to know and be able to teach.
several disciplines. Now let’s discuss just what is meant by disciplinary literacy.

Disciplinary literacy has been researched and written about a great deal in the last ten years (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Jetton & Shanahan, 2012, Moje, 2006; Lee, 2010, Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010). Tim Shanahan and Cynthia Shanahan conducted studies of experts in various disciplines including how they read and interpreted text and what they thought was most important in their discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). For example, mathematicians don’t find it important to know who the author of a particular theorem is, when or where the author lived. Mathematicians read about mathematics, looking for the reasoning and possible errors. Historians, however, feel it is essential to know who the author is, where and when the author lived, the audience the author was addressing, and the purpose for writing. In addition to these different perspectives, the language of the disciplines differ. Think of some common vocabulary words and the different meanings the words have in the different disciplines: *mean*, *of*, *sinus*. We need to teach students how to notice polysemous words, words with multiple meanings, and to discern their meanings in the different disciplines.
Slide 9—DL Comparisons

This slide gives examples of the unique perspectives of the different disciplines. Take a moment to read this slide.

Pass out Handouts 1 and 2. Here are two checklists that teachers and students can use as they are reading disciplinary text. Handout 1 includes the universal or generic reading strategies that are appropriate to use with many types of texts. Handout 2 lists strategies that are typical in the disciplines. These checklists are helpful to teachers and students to remind them of strategies they should utilize to enhance comprehension.
Instruction in disciplinary literacy refers to: Proceed to read the slide, signaling for participants to join you to read the words in bold print.

Disciplinary Literacy Instruction

- Refers to the specialized ways of knowing and communicating in the different disciplines to make meaning
- Encompasses the idea that students need to be taught specialized routines

(Jetter & Shanahan, 2012)
Disciplinary Literacy is NOT:

- Another term for *content area reading*
- A method to work with poor readers
- A generalized approach to literacy across disciplines
- Limited to study skills

Slide 11—Disciplinary Literacy is NOT

Turn to your partner, why are these points NOT disciplinary literacy? You have 30 seconds to discuss this.
Slide 12–What About These Strategies?
These are typical strategies taught in “reading in the content area” courses. They are excellent, generic or universal strategies. If the participants are not familiar with these strategies, make it a homework assignment for designated participants to provide a definition and an example of one of these to post at the next class. The “other” is for you to add another strategy or for the students to locate an additional strategy commonly taught in “reading in the content area” courses. You can designate sets of partners to research #1, another set to research #2, etc. Do NOT spend time in this session to teach these strategies.

All content teachers can use these strategies effectively—the strategies just need to be tailored to the content to encourage cognition. For instance, when a science teacher is using KWL, don’t ask what do you know about phylum and what do you want to know about phylum? (The most likely answer for both questions will be “nuthin’.”) Instead ask: What do you know about animal classification? Not only will they probably know something, this is a good opportunity to teach vocabulary. Using any of the generic strategies, regardless of how effective they are, is a little like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. You need to put the right strategy in at the right time and tailor strategies for the content.
Slide 13–The Increasing Specialization of Literacy Development

Tim Shanahan and Cynthia Shanahan (2008) created this diagram to illustrate how disciplinary literacy is related to basic literacy, taught in grades K-3; intermediate literacy, taught in grades 1-5; and disciplinary literacy, generally taught in secondary school, though it can be introduced in elementary grades.

**Basic Literacy** refers to skills such as decoding and knowledge of high-frequency words that underlie virtually all reading tasks.

**Intermediate Literacy** includes skills common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies, common word meanings, and basic fluency.

**Disciplinary Literacy** refers to specialized skills required to understand history, science, mathematics, literature, or other subject matter.
Recently Cynthia Shanahan provided ten tips to teaching disciplinary literacy. Partner B, whisper read these tips to Partner A. 

**Note to Instructor:** Systematic research on the effectiveness of these strategies as a multi-component approach has not been conducted, but most have been found to be effective as single strategies. Most of these do not need further explanation, but additional information is provided on those that do:

3. Be explicit about your intentions to build persistence and capacity and celebrate when students reach their goals.
Partner A, whisper read these tips to Partner B.

6. Set purposes for reading that are authentic to a discipline, such as to determine what position the author is taking.
7. Work carefully through the text.

The authors of the CCSS tell teachers to allow students to “celebrate the struggle”. Allow students to struggle figuring out a text, with support but not so much help that you provide them all the answers so that there is no need for them to read the text.
The CCSS states in the introduction that students “who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature” (p. 3) and to “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it” (CCSSO & NGA, 2010, p. 10).

Coleman & Pimentel, two of the authors of the CCSS, write that “close reading and gathering knowledge from specific texts should be at the heart of classroom activities and not be consigned to the margins when completing assignments” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 1 & 9).
Students need to realize that reading complex text takes time and multiple readings to understand the nuances. Tim Shanahan (Shanahan, June 2013) recommends at least three readings. The first time a student reads a difficult text is for basic comprehension to determine the main ideas. The second time a text is read, the reader wants to notice how the text works. For example, the reader considers the literacy devices used by the author, the author’s choice of words, the quality of evidence, and how the data was presented.

Rereading text is an excellent opportunity for students who have difficulty reading to learn from the text. Teachers can provide a reader (partners, recorded text) to read the text the first time. The amount of text can be reduced so that only the most relevant paragraphs are read, or specific sentences can be selected. Or a different text on the same topic, closer to the student’s reading level, can be utilized.
Finally, during the third meeting, the reader can delve into the deeper meaning of the text and analyze it critically. Some texts will need even more readings while other texts may need fewer readings.

Students with reading difficulties should be encouraged to share their thoughts about the meaning of the text and how effective it was in communicating to them. They should contribute to the discussion about how the text connects to other texts they have read and to their own experiences. All students need to participate in a discussion critically analyzing the text.
One of the most critical teaching practices you can implement is modeling everything you want students to know and be able to do. Do not assume they know or understand exactly what you expect. Anita Archer calls this “commiting assumicide!” Rather, students need explicit instruction. So remember to:

Indicate that the participants read the slide, model, model, model, model…
Pass out the Paine article, *Handout 5*. You have 5 minutes to read this and share the main idea. *Wait about one minute then stop them and present the pop quiz, next slide.*
STOP reading! Please answer these questions. *Slide in the questions and pause a few moments, then continue.*

Of course I will not ask you do to this. This is a **non-example**. I did not provide any background information. I did not provide a purpose for reading or pre-teach difficult vocabulary. I didn’t contextualize the passage (author, setting, audience, purpose). However, this example of poor instruction happens frequently in secondary schools when students are often told to “read chapter 16 and answer the questions at the end of the chapter.” Little learning comes of this approach. Or teachers may not require any reading because their students can’t read the text. Neither are good options. Now I will provide an appropriate model of close reading of a complex disciplinary text, reading a common text required of 10th or 11th graders.
First, some background knowledge. Thomas Paine was an American patriot urging the colonies to break from England. He was known for his oration, writing pamphlets, and reading them to the public.
One of Paine’s most famous publications was *Common Sense*, a pamphlet published in January, 1776, at the beginning of the revolutionary war. Paine was appealing to the colonists to declare independence from Great Britain. General Washington had it read to all his troops in Boston. Widely read in taverns and meeting places, the purpose of the text was to incite the colonists to fight for freedom from British rule. Although we may find it hard to read, Paine wrote in a simpler style than most of that time so that common people could understand him.
Let’s listen to a teacher model as she works through this difficult text. Notice how she makes her thinking evident. Write down strategies she uses to solve comprehension problems. Note how she recalls what she knows about Thomas Paine, what she wonders about as she is reading, what predictions she makes, and how she solves comprehension problems. These are metacognitive strategies. She is thinking about her own understanding. This is the type of modeling you want to see teachers doing for their students.

After the video, say: Take 30 seconds to talk with a partner and jot down what you noticed about how the teacher modeled an authentic think aloud.

Provide Handout 6 as an example of the read-aloud for Payne’s text.
Slide 25—Practice Think Alouds

Now it’s your turn to read and think aloud. Partner A, read from Line 7 “For were the impulses” to line 12 “choose the least.” B, record strategies A uses.

Then B, read from where A left off to the end of the paragraph. A, record strategies B uses. If you finish before I tell you to stop, continue reading, A reading the next paragraph and B the last paragraph. You may begin.

Watch the participants. When all have read the first paragraph, stop the group and lead a discussion about the experience.
Have a chart prepared and labeled: Strategies Good Readers Use. Discuss with your partner the strategies you used. Provide 2 minutes for this discussion. In secondary classrooms it is helpful for teachers and students to create posters of strategies good readers use. At your table, discuss the strategies you used to read this passage and select one person to write one strategy on this poster.
Effective think alouds model the metacognitive thinking good readers do while reading complex text. Review these lists: Did you or your partner use any of these strategies? Did they help you comprehend the material?

- Accessing of prior knowledge
- Awareness of rhetorical devices
- Use of imagery and visualization
- Linking of information with prior knowledge (also text to text)
- Use of context clues to find word meaning
Once students recognize they don’t know something, such as how to decode a word or what a word or phrase means, they are becoming metacognitive, thinking about their own learning. Getting them to stop and use fix-up strategies to figure out what they don’t know is the next step. This self-awareness is crucial for struggling readers who typically skip words or phrases they can’t decode or don’t understand. It is a huge step when students recognize what they don’t know and stop to figure it out.
Here are some more ideas about how to scaffold, provide temporary support, to students who need it, including students with learning difficulties. It is important for you as the teacher to know what your learning objectives are, so that you can be more creative when you plan options for the students to reach those objectives. The last thing we want to do is lower expectations for students with disabilities—we want them to master as many of the CCSS objectives as they possibly can, with hard work and teacher support.
Slide 30—Returning to Paine

Distribute copies of the Disciplinary Literacy Sample Lesson Plan: History (Handout 7) on Thomas Paine.

Take a few minutes to read this lesson plan. Pay particular attention to the three tiers of instruction. All students receive Tier 1 instruction in the general education classroom. Some students, maybe 15-20% of the class, need more support to learn the material. (If more students need help, reteach the lesson to the entire class.) Note the suggestions for providing more intense interventions. A few students, 5-10%, maybe 2 out of your class, need more intensive support. These students may need to be taught by another teacher, often within the class but sometimes in a pull-out situation. You have 5 minutes to review this lesson.

After 5 minutes, bring the group back together.

With your partner, think about other ways your teachers could ensure students had access to the materials, opportunities to participate in class, and means to demonstrate what they learned about their own metacognitive reading skills as well about the content, Paine’s influence on the colonists.

Pass out the three versions of Summarizing From & Synthesizing Across Texts: Questions into Paragraphs (Handouts 8, 9, 10), which is one of the activities included in the lesson plan that could provide scaffolding or differentiation. Provide participants another 5 minutes to think of other things they could do to support students.
**Slide 31—In Conclusion**

As a review, take a moment to do a quick write, a strategy that is useful for teachers to implement in their classes. List strategies you should observe in classes as teachers and students read complex texts in the disciplines. Write a few strategies teachers should use and those that students should utilize. You have 3 minutes.

As you continue to hone your skills as instructional leaders, consider how you can support your teachers in implementing these strategies and address literacy in all the disciplines.

Thank you! I look forward to seeing you at another session!