



INTRODUCTION

In education we often come full circle and then go round again. Sometimes, the only things that change are the edu-acronyms that spin a language all their own: RTI, NCLB, AYP, RTT, CCSS, DI, and ESSA, for instance. It can be dizzying. This phenomenon often makes teachers (and many administrators) reluctant to fully engage in “one more thing” that may be viable only for the duration of a political season. Some of those new “things” appear to have been envisioned in places far removed from the classroom, but other times they spark positive change that leads to deeper learning. In both cases, educators often feel frustrated and overwhelmed as they scurry to meet deadlines or comply with mandates that come too fast and too often.

Two such initiatives that have generated widespread change in schools across much of the world, both of which were based on solid research and good intentions, form the foundation of this book: literacy initiatives and professional learning communities (PLCs).

We first look at how a preoccupation with content reading led to the misstep of identifying “every teacher” as “a teacher of reading” and, eventually, “every teacher” as a “teacher of writing” as well. All teachers, especially in middle and high school, were teachers of content, for sure, but asking them to become reading teachers led to frustration and resistance while they struggled to keep their subject front and center.

Then, we look at PLCs, a staple in most schools, if in name only. Instead of harnessing the power of professional learning, these communities, often more committee-like than community-like, frequently functioned mechanically through checklists and predetermined tasks. As districts rolled out plans to implement new literacy initiatives, common sense was often sacrificed to belief in the PLC silver bullet and, as we all know, there are no silver bullets, especially in a field that deals with the messy, unpredictable nature of teaching and learning. What’s more, the standardization of processes that inherently rely on customization often lead to less than ideal outcomes.

Lest we mislead you into thinking that we have come up with an absolute solution to such challenging and systemic issues central to both literacy and professional learning, we want to be clear. We are making a case in this book that answers will emerge when we collectively immerse ourselves in questions that cannot be readily answered. Solutions require *time*, *dialogue*, and *reflection*—factors we are not used to allotting to professional learning—as well as a degree of trust that we aren’t used to appropriating. This is not a book of quick fixes because chasing them may well lead to disaster. We argue instead for a reassessment of literacy learning for both teachers and students.

Research, as well as our experience, creates the central message. It is possible to reenergize effective teaching in every content area by utilizing literacy skills such as reading, writing, thinking, discussing, inquiring, and evaluating in *discipline-specific* ways. And when teachers work in true professional learning teams where they model the practices they want their students to employ, particularly collaborative inquiry and problem solving, the recursive cycle of change will become powerful and self-sustaining.



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What to Expect From This Book

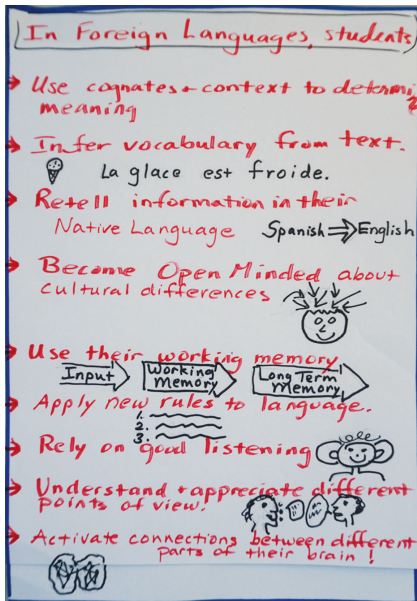
Disciplinary Literacy in Action follows ReLeah’s book on disciplinary literacy (*This Is Disciplinary Literacy: Reading, Writing, Thinking and Doing . . . Content Area by Content Area*, 2016) but differs in significant ways. Here, we first offer a primer on disciplinary literacy and learning, specifically in the first five chapters, while we examine how this shift has moved “across-the-discipline” generic literacy strategies to “within-the-disciplines” learning that utilizes literacy as a tool for content understanding. We ask readers to consider literacy in the 21st century and what it means for students to engage in content learning as experts might. We argue that students must be able to use literacy in flexible ways as they navigate various disciplines and the demands these disciplines make on learners. It is no longer enough for students to memorize material and call it learning or answer questions and call it passing; we call for a shift in how we think about learning overall and learning within the contents in particular.

The research supporting this model as well as the comprehensive “picture” provided in the first half of the book offers a foundation that teachers, coaches, leaders, and administrators might seek to create as they move toward a disciplinary literacy/learning approach, especially as they read the many examples we provide from various content areas.

While not offering as many specific lesson ideas as appeared in *This Is Disciplinary Literacy*, we do provide clear understandings of the skills required for reading, writing, and reasoning (which encompasses speaking and doing) in *all* content areas, devoting one chapter to each of these skills. We know that disciplinary literacy extends to *every* discipline, not just to those classes with the highest number of students enrolled. If we want our students to learn how to move fluidly within and among the disciplines and become self-regulated in knowing how and when to use literacy skills, we must include teachers from courses outside the core math, science, social studies, and English language arts classes. We want this book to be a resource for all content teachers and leaders, including those content areas that sometimes get overlooked. Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, Nokes, and Siebert (2010) remind us that “content instruction cannot be separated from literacy instruction” (p. 33), and if we are



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World language teachers brainstorm the literacy skills students need to become successful in their discipline.

seeking systemic, schoolwide change, that means *all* contents. We have, therefore, included examples from art, music, world language, health, and technology throughout the book.

The first two chapters lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters by showing the benefits of a disciplinary literacy approach and how such instruction might look when supported by an authentic professional learning team.

Chapters 3 through 5 focus on the *schoolwide* creation of a disciplinary literacy model as illustrated by the graphic in Figure 0.1.

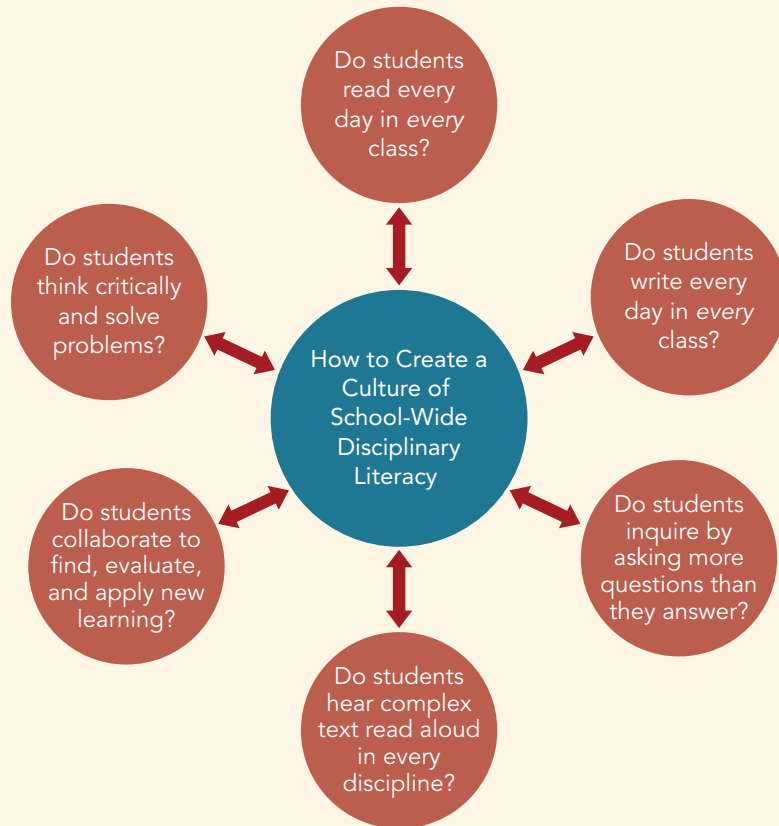
Chapters 6 through 9 make a transition from informing readers about disciplinary literacy instruction into providing suggestions and logistical underpinnings for how to implement a disciplinary literacy approach not only in individual classrooms but also in entire schools or districts, beginning with the formation of teams, departments, grade levels, or learning communities, as Figure 0.2 illustrates.

Such a shift requires understanding the most effective components of learning communities, such as collaboration, autonomy, supported risk taking, and continuous learning, as well as a consideration of why traditional PLCs have so often failed to meet the goals of professional learning. Specific suggestions and protocols for how to create various disciplinary literacy/learning communities based on your school's unique population are also embedded, as well as ideas for supporting disciplinary literacy leaders, coaches, and administrators.

Finally, in an effort to help teachers expand their literacy offerings, we have included ten appendix items to the companion website, one for each of the major disciplines, as well as one each for health, world language, PE, art, music, and technology as a way to support ongoing dialogue among and within the disciplines. You may download these from <http://resources.corwin.com/lent-voigtDLinAction>.

Figure 0.1

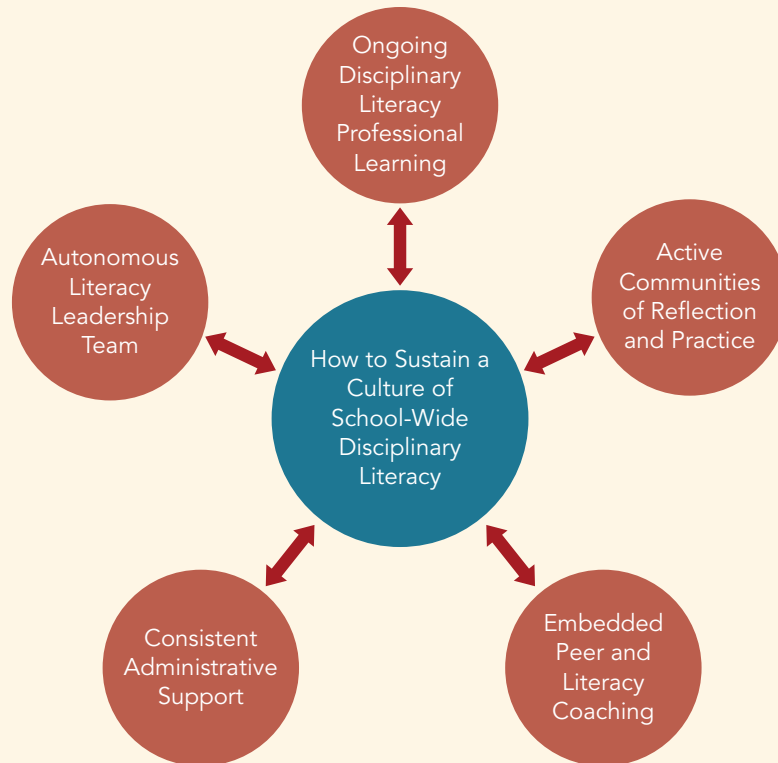
How to Create a Culture of School-Wide Disciplinary Literacy



Disciplinary literacy is not just the latest, shiniest thing to hit the educational scene. It is a necessary shift that may well help us synthesize isolated initiatives into a productive whole that can change teachers' lives as well as the lives of their students. A pointed reminder came just the other day when ReLeah was sitting in a café reading through the draft of a chapter of this book when her server, Kaitlyn, asked her what she was doing. ReLeah explained as

Figure 0.2

How to Sustain a Culture of School-Wide Disciplinary Literacy



succinctly as possible the concept of disciplinary literacy, trying not to bore the young woman who, she thought, was probably just being polite. Surprisingly, Kaitlyn became extremely interested, saying that she was a junior in college majoring in criminal justice, and she wished she had been taught to read and write in the way that law enforcement officers or legal aids read and wrote. “I did great in English but I wasn’t prepared for the technical writing and reading

that my instructors expect. We had to do a lot of essays based on literature in high school but not much of the report-type of writing that I have to do now.”

ReLeah couldn’t help but think of the many ways Kaitlyn might have been better prepared for college and her career if she had been taught to write as experts in various fields write and to actually participate in the literacies of varied subject areas.

It is our hope that this book will enable teachers in every subject area—and leaders in every school—to reimagine learning through a disciplinary literacy approach, one that values the knowledge of the teacher as well as the unique literacies that support each content area.