

OUR Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal

Volume 8

Article 11

2021

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Recommended Citation

Zenzian, Christina (2021) "Defining Disciplinary Literacy in History," *OUR Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal*: Vol. 8 , Article 11.

DOI: 10.25778/0b13-v562

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/ourj/vol8/iss1/11>

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DEFINING DISCIPLINARY LITERACY IN HISTORY

By Christina Zendzian

I. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE LITERATE IN HISTORY

[Historical] literacy involves “specialized literacy practices” which shape how one develops, questions, thinks, and reflects on the information (Moje, 2015, p. 259). The specialized practices within history include understanding the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects that affect historical events. History is not linear, and it cannot be viewed through a single lens. Historical literacy also involves understanding how true historians read history. It should be understood that no one is immune to propaganda; therefore, adolescents practicing their disciplinary literacy in history must keep a careful eye out for the bias within the text as well as their own (Alvermann et al., 2012, p. 20). One way one can negotiate with the text is through writing, which is an important asset to history. Writing allows students to synthesize their thoughts, prior knowledge, and new information into a new text. Writing can be used by teachers to determine a student’s fluency and comprehension of a topic (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

In order to negotiate with historical texts, one must be able to objectively view primary and secondary sourced documents because it is nearly impossible to be unbiased. Historical literacy involves critical reading and analyzing multiple forms of texts, both traditional and non-traditional (Alvermann et al., 2012). Traditional texts can include textbooks or researched articles, and non-traditional texts can include a film released about the period of study or a photograph. Students can use these documents as sources to build their arguments or counterarguments. Due to the multiple social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of history, there can be an emotional investment. Emotions can help students create a personal connection

with the text and possibly “ignite an act of social justice (Moje, 2015, p. 258).” A sense of social justice is important to foster during adolescence to grow responsible citizens.

II. RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process that I engaged in to determine my definition of literacy in history involved three major components: self-reflection, text analysis, and classroom discussion. First, much of my definition was developed through years of dedicated study in the field of history. I developed an outline based on the social science skills that I learned and studied. Next, I researched and analyzed various peer-reviewed journal articles using a library journal database, required readings from my undergraduate coursework, and a course textbook: *Content Area Reading and Literacy: Succeeding in Today's Diverse Classrooms* (Alvermann et al, 2012). I also reflected upon previous small and whole group class discussions that I participated in as a student. Once I gathered the sources best suited for my research, I submitted my project outline on Google Drive for my peers to provide feedback and questions.

Finally, to prepare myself for this project and teach disciplinary literacy in history, I focused heavily on Moje's (2015) 4E heuristic framework for teaching disciplinary literacy and the Learning Cycle explained by Alvermann, Gillis, and Phelps (2012). Moje's (2015) 4Es represent four stages: *engage, elicit/engineer, examine, and evaluate*. The 4Es includes engaging students in the practices of the content area, eliciting prior knowledge, examining the language of the content area, and evaluating claims to encourage metadiscursive practices. Educators can work to reframe their student's education from teaching to meet standards to teaching students how to navigate multiple literacy contexts by following Moje's framework. The Learning Cycle

shares similarities with the 4Es; however, this model only has three components: preparation, guidance, and independence (Alvermann et al., 2012, p. 106). This project will highlight the key ideas from both the Learning Cycle and the 4Es.

III. INQUIRY-BASED PROJECT FOR DISCIPLINARY LITERACY IN HISTORY

A. Problem for Inquiry

Moje (2015) argues that inquiry should be the center of learning because it gives students more value and purpose in their education. The problem of inquiry for this project is, “Why did the Great Depression happen and what did it mean to survive?” Preparation is needed to tap into prior knowledge; therefore, a pre-reading strategy is necessary. To do so, students will brainstorm anything that they know about the periods leading up to the Great Depression, during the Great Depression, and after the Great Depression using the Timeline and Fact Sheet. This pre-reading activity will engage student interest by focusing on their ideas and beliefs and begin the Three Search Process. The teacher can input their ideas to help students brainstorm, but the activity will be more effective if it is student-led (Alvermann et al., 2012, p. 179). The Timeline and Fact Sheet invites students to fill in the blanks. Rough estimates of dates are allowed because this activity is focusing on prior knowledge. The Timeline and Fact Sheet can also be used at the end of the Learning Cycle to evaluate and reflect on student independence.

B. Data/text Usage for Inquiry

For this lesson, the teacher will begin by guiding students through primary sources to look at the Great Depression from a variety of perspectives. Students will look through newspaper headlines, photographs from Dorothea Lange, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Fireside Chats, letters, and government statements. Students will have to discuss the central idea of the text or image, at least three supporting details, the author's point of view, and whether there is any bias.

C. Incorporating Multimodal Media and Text

In the 21st century, education would seem incomplete without including online texts into lessons. As an introduction, students will complete an online simulation of the Great Depression. They will have to make informed decisions about farming and their family in order to survive the Great Depression. Simulations enable the students to make sense of difficult topics as they mimic what happens in a real-world world situation. Oral history will also be incorporated. Students will listen to a seven-minute NPR interview of survivors of the Great Depression to provide a more personal effect to the lesson. Oral history helps preserve the events that individuals lived throughout.

D. Analyzing, Summarizing, and Synthesizing Findings

The most challenging part of the Learning Cycle and Moje's (2015) 4E heuristic for students will be the organization of data. However, the ability to develop an effective organizational structure allows students to improve on their recollection (Alvermann et al., 2012, p. 390). Students will summarize their findings from the primary sources, secondary sources, and the online simulation by participating in the Read-Aloud/Note-Taking Method (Alvermann et al.,

2012, p. 386). The Read-Aloud/Note-Taking Method provides scaffolding for readers through the split-page method of notetaking which is also known as Cornell Notes.

Typically, the teacher will read aloud the text while the students listen; however, students at the secondary level will be expected to read to themselves unless stated otherwise. First, students will analyze the text without taking notes. Next, students will re-read the text while taking notes. The main ideas of the text will be written on the left-hand column while details and facts are written on the right-hand column. Finally, students will write a summary of the two columns underneath. Once students are finished note-taking, the teacher will ask students to share their summaries for the class. After a handful of students have shared, the Timeline and Fact Sheet will be revisited. The teacher will ask what has changed, and the students will answer after participating in a Think, Pair & Share.

E. Examining and Evaluating Claims

As mentioned earlier, writing is an important skill for historians to communicate their research. Fisher and Frey (2013) argued that if students cannot write fluently in a content area, they are not thinking fluently either (p. 97). Thus, students will synthesize their findings through RAFT². The acronym RAFT² stands for *Role, Audience, Format, Topic, and Task* (Alvermann et al., 2012, p. 330-331). For this activity, students will assume a role while addressing an audience. The roles will include farmer, a homeless woman living in a Hooverville, a store owner, the President of the United States, a government worker, and a Wall Street stockbroker. If those roles do not appeal to some students, then they can choose a role from one of the vocabulary terms from the unit. For example, students can assume the role of one of President Roosevelt's many government programs such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, or students can assume the role of Dorothea Lange herself or one of her famous photographs.

The audience must be different from the teacher. Students cannot be a farmer from the 1920s talking to the teacher about their struggles. Students will be tasked to write in the format of their choice: letter, speech, poem, song, poster, news article, or another product that is approved by the teacher. Within their format, students must emphasize the historical significance of their role. This activity will help prepare students to incorporate the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of the Great Depression into their writing. Further, peer reviews will be utilized with a checklist. Students will be instructed to comment on at least one strength of their partner's work, a suggestion, and any questions that they have.

F. Communicating Claims

To fully assess if students understood what life was like during the Great Depression, they will present their RAFT² assignment to the whole class. Students will be expected to utilize the feedback that they received from their peers. Students must have a visual and written explanation that explains the historical significance of their role. The teacher will use a rubric for the presentations that will focus heavily on the accuracy of the students' research. If the student stays in character, has good grammar and organization, then they will earn extra points.

IV. REFLECTION OF DEFINING DISCIPLINARY LITERACY AND DEVELOPING A LESSON

A. Easy or logical?

History is my area of expertise, and teaching history as I defined in the previous section. These two factors made defining disciplinary literacy in history easy. I was able to write from the heart, in my own words, what I believe it means to be literate in history. The least challenging aspect of

developing this project was research. I knew where to look for sources to support my claims due to the previous course assignments that led up to a final Disciplinary Literacy Inquiry. I could easily break down this project into manageable sections with the assistance of the Disciplinary Literacy Inquiry Outline.

B. Challenges

The challenging aspect of developing this project was the lesson itself. Until now, the lessons that I developed were in bullet form and in short, quick sentences. I struggled to write a lesson in the form of a narrative because it was an unfamiliar framework. Further, writing the final product was difficult. Communicating my claims in writing has been the bane of my existence since primary school. Also, it was challenging to develop engaging activities that correspond with a certain section of the Learning Cycle and the 4E heuristic framework. I found Moje's (2015) 4E heuristic framework difficult to translate and conceptualize into specific literary strategies. Through my research, I found a plethora of literacy strategies that could fit in multiple sections of Moje's 4E heuristic framework, but I had to decide which section suited it the most.

C. Future Benefits and Challenges

The predicted benefit of using the definition that was developed for disciplinary literacy in history is its concreteness. The definition I developed is straightforward and true to the disciplinary needs of history as a content area. My definition makes history more than memorizing dates and the names of historical figures by emphasizing the non-linear, cross-disciplinary nature of the subject. I believe this type of lesson will open doors for students because the activities are engaging. This lesson allows students from a variety of reading abilities to tap into their creative side while practicing their social science skills and their writing skills.

The predicted challenges would include the range of technical abilities of the students. There will be students who will struggle with the Internet more than others, which is why explicit instruction is necessary for this type of lesson. Another challenge would be how time-consuming the online simulation will be. This lesson will require multiple days, so it will possibly take away from other topics. When I completed the simulation on my own time, it took me almost two hours to complete. Students may lose interest and question the legitimacy of the assignment; however, the simulation is entertaining and quite educational.

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