Mentoring Students in Disciplinary Literacy

Essential Question: Why is there a significant need for disciplinary literacy instruction?

Modeling. The teacher-regulated phase assumes that many students do not know what doing a specific task well looks like, and they need explicit instruction to guide their thinking. For the purposes of this book, we are talking about what it means to read, write, and think through a disciplinary lens. This phase of mentoring means that students are provided with modeling and access to how experts think in order to build their own mental models of disciplinary thinking. When a history teacher engages in a think-aloud that talks through how historians interact with an author as they read, say, a primary document, the teacher is letting the students in on the secret, so to speak, of reading through a historian lens. When a mathematics teacher thinks out loud about how to carefully deconstruct sentences on a page of a geometry textbook, the teacher is demonstrating reading through a mathematics lens. When an English teacher publicly grapples with understanding a poem, the teacher is modeling reading through a literary lens. The most profound facet of this model is that students have access to something they cannot readily observe: thinking.

Teachers, of course, recognize this phase and will likely comment, “We already do this.” Of course, we will find elements of such explicit instruction in many forms in classrooms, but we will rarely find it connected to mentoring students as readers and writers in disciplinary contexts. Students are given reading and writing assignments not reading and writing instruction. Again, the prevailing assumption tends to be that instruction from previous years is sufficient for students who must adjust to new disciplinary reading, writing, and thinking demands.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR A WRITE AROUND**

from Harvey "Smokey" Daniels

Form a group of four.
Each person needs to have a large blank piece of paper ready to use.
Each member puts his or her initials in the upper left-hand margin.

EXPLAIN the TWO RULES:
1. Use all the time for writing.
2. Don’t talk when passing.

WRITE FOR ONE MINUTE: Write your thoughts, reactions, questions, or feelings about the article. (You may expand this with topic-specific suggestions if needed. Keep time not by exact minutes and seconds, but by walking and watching kids write. (When most students have filled 1/4 of a page, it is time to pass.)

PASS the paper when asked to do so. Here teacher reiterates instructions by saying:

READ all the entries on the page. Then WRITE for one minute. You can offer a comment on any or all of the above entries, ask questions, or raise a new topic. Keep the conversation going! (You need to allow a little more time with each entry because kids will have more to read with each successive exchange).

PASS at the signal.

RINSE And REPEAT.
(4 times, total)

READ OVER: The paper you started and ended up with.

DISCUSS IN WRITE-AROUND GROUPS: Continue the conversation out loud for about 2 minutes.

SHARE HIGHLIGHTS OR KEY IDEAS WITH WHOLE CLASS: Now use kids’ write-around ideas to extend and deepen their thinking about the subject. Possible prompts: What was one highlight of your written conversation? A topic that sparked lively discussion? Something people disagreed about?

DEBRIEF: discuss the process. How could we make it work better next time?
Gray Matter  
By AMY WRZESNIEWSKI and BARRY SCHWARTZ

THERE are two kinds of motive for engaging in any activity: internal and instrumental. If a scientist conducts research because she wants to discover important facts about the world, that’s an internal motive, since discovering facts is inherently related to the activity of research. If she conducts research because she wants to achieve scholarly renown, that’s an instrumental motive, since the relation between fame and research is not so inherent. Often, people have both internal and instrumental motives for doing what they do.

What mix of motives — internal or instrumental or both — is most conducive to success? You might suppose that a scientist motivated by a desire to discover facts and by a desire to achieve renown will do better work than a scientist motivated by just one of those desires. Surely two motives are better than one. But as we and our colleagues argue in a paper newly published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, instrumental motives are not always an asset and can actually be counterproductive to success.

We analyzed data drawn from 11,320 cadets in nine entering classes at the United States Military Academy at West Point, all of whom rated how much each of a set of motives influenced their decision to attend the academy. The motives included things like a desire to get a good job later in life (an instrumental motive) and a desire to be trained as a leader in the United States Army (an internal motive).

How did the cadets fare, years later? And how did their progress relate to their original motives for attending West Point?

We found, unsurprisingly, that the stronger their internal reasons were to attend West Point, the more likely cadets were to graduate and become commissioned officers. Also unsurprisingly, cadets with internal motives did better in the military (as evidenced by early promotion recommendations) than did those without internal motives and were also more likely to stay in the military after their five years of mandatory service — unless (and this is the surprising part) they also had strong instrumental motives.

Remarkably, cadets with strong internal and strong instrumental motives for attending West Point performed worse on every measure than did those with strong internal motives but weak instrumental ones. They were less likely to
graduate, less outstanding as military officers and less committed to staying in the military.

The implications of this finding are significant. Whenever a person performs a task well, there are typically both internal and instrumental consequences. A conscientious student learns (internal) and gets good grades (instrumental). A skilled doctor cures patients (internal) and makes a good living (instrumental). But just because activities can have both internal and instrumental consequences does not mean that the people who thrive in these activities have both internal and instrumental motives.

Our study suggests that efforts should be made to structure activities so that instrumental consequences do not become motives. Helping people focus on the meaning and impact of their work, rather than on, say, the financial returns it will bring, may be the best way to improve not only the quality of their work but also — counterintuitive though it may seem — their financial success.

There is a temptation among educators and instructors to use whatever motivational tools are available to recruit participants or improve performance. If the desire for military excellence and service to country fails to attract all the recruits that the Army needs, then perhaps appeals to “money for college,” “career training” or “seeing the world” will do the job. While this strategy may lure more recruits, it may also yield worse soldiers. Similarly, for students uninterested in learning, financial incentives for good attendance or pizza parties for high performance may prompt them to participate, but it may result in less well-educated students.

The same goes for motivating teachers themselves. We wring our hands when they “teach to the test” because we fear that it detracts from actual educating. It is possible that teachers do this because of an overreliance on accountability that transforms the instrumental consequences of good teaching (things like salary bonuses) into instrumental motives. Accountability is important, but structured crudely, it can create the very behavior (such as poor teaching) that it is designed to prevent.

Rendering an activity more attractive by emphasizing both internal and instrumental motives to engage in it is completely understandable, but it may have the unintended effect of weakening the internal motives so essential to success.

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<tr>
<th><strong>When Writing is Assigned</strong></th>
<th><strong>When Writing is Taught</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Students are asked to write only on the teacher's topics.</td>
<td>Students have opportunities to create topics that matter to them.</td>
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<td>The teacher selects writing topics for papers without consideration of audience and purpose.</td>
<td>Audience and purpose for papers are specifically identified in assignments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most of a teacher's time is spent correcting papers.</td>
<td>Most of a teacher's time is spent in class teaching writing skills and strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are asked to analyze, compare, describe, narrate, review, and summarize, without the strategies to successfully complete these tasks.</td>
<td>Students are given writing models, assignments, and strategies to guide each of their different writing tasks.</td>
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<td>Students are not aware of significant improvement in their writing.</td>
<td>Students reflect on significant growth—or lack of it—in specific writing skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are required to rewrite—in some cases. But rewriting usually is limited to correcting grammar, usage, etc.</td>
<td>Students are encouraged to revise, edit, and improve—and to correct drafts and then resubmit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are required to write without much forethought.</td>
<td>Students think about what they write through brainstorming, freewriting, role-playing, discussion or other prewriting activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students and teachers are bored by what students write.</td>
<td>Students and teachers are excited about what students write and make efforts to display and publish it.</td>
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First Love

Before sixteen
I was fast
enough to fake
my shadow out
and I could read
every crack and ripple
in that patch of asphalt.
I owned
the slanted rim
knew the dead spot in the backboard.
Always the ball
came back.

Every day I loved
to sharpen
my shooting eye,
waiting
for the touch.
Set shot, jump shot,
layup, hook—
after a while
I could feel the ball hunger-
ing to clear
the lip of the rim,
the two of us
falling through.
—Carl Linder

One of the questions often asked a Civil War historian is, “Why did the North fight?” Southern motives seem easier to understand. Confederates fought for independence, for their own property and way of life, for their very survival as a nation. But what did the Yankees fight for? Why did they persist through four years of the bloodiest conflict in American history, costing 360,000 northern lives—not to mention 260,000 southern lives and untold destruction of resources? Puzzling over this question in 1863, Confederate War Department clerk John Jones wrote in his diary: “Our men must prevail in combat, or lose their property, country, freedom, everything.... On the other hand the enemy, in yielding the contest, may retire into their own country, and possess everything they enjoyed before the war began.”

If that was true, why did the Yankees keep fighting? We can find much of the answer in Abraham Lincoln’s notable speeches: the Gettysburg Address, his first and second inaugural addresses, the peroration of his message to Congress on December 1, 1862. But we can find even more of the answer in the wartime letters and diaries of the men who did the fighting. Confederates who said that they fought for the same goals as their forebears of 1776 would have been surprised by the intense conviction of the northern soldiers that they were upholding the legacy of the American Revolution.
Helpful Resources:

General Resources Regarding Reading and Writing Instruction

• Doug Buehl – *Developing Readers in the Academic Disciplines*
• Nancie Atwell – *In the Middle*
• Harvey “Smokey” Daniels et. al – *Content Area Writing: Every Teachers’ Guide*
• Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmerman – *Mosaic of Thought*
• ReadWriteThink - [http://www.readwritethink.org/](http://www.readwritethink.org/)
• The National Writing Project - [http://www.nwp.org/](http://www.nwp.org/)

Resources for Collecting Mentor Texts

• American Library Association “Best Of” Lists
  [http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/browse/rlist?showfilter=no](http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/browse/rlist?showfilter=no)
• Poetry 180 - [http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/](http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/)
• Nancie Atwell – *Naming the World*
• Library of Congress -
• Common Core State Standards Suggested Texts -
  [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf)
• Ask your local librarian, outside experts in your discipline, and students for suggestions.