

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Adolescent Literacy in the Academic Disciplines: General Principles and Practical Strategies

edited by Tamara L. Jetton and Cynthia Shanahan

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In *Adolescent Literacy in the Academic Disciplines*, editors Tamara L. Jetton and Cynthia Shanahan provide an overview of principles and strategies for guiding student reading comprehension in high school subject areas. The introduction and framing of the book is well researched, convincingly written, and densely packed with practical information.

Chapter 1, “Learning from Text: Adolescent Literacy from the Past Decade” by Tamara L. Jetton and Richard Lee, describes the performance of American high school students on literacy tests and suggests that teachers need to spend more than the current 3% of classroom time on explicit reading comprehension strategies (Ness, 2007, 2009, as cited in Jetton & Shanahan, 2012, pp. 1–2). Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe common reading challenges in the disciplines, habits of text comprehension used by disciplinary experts, and how to apply these ideas to lesson planning. Chapters 5 through 9, written by a variety of American-based scholars, are dedicated to describing the literacy strategies needed for specific high school subject areas.

Chapter 1 includes a review of studies on comprehension strategies and instructional frameworks, outlining the context of each study and the key findings. For instance, concept-oriented reading instruction (CORI) is described as a framework that involves students in “activating prior knowledge, generating questions, searching for information, organizing new knowledge and monitoring their comprehension” (Guthrie, 2004, as cited in Jetton & Shanahan, 2012, p.10). Jetton and Lee explain that essential components that

make the framework successful are student involvement in their own goal setting, reading relevant material, and engaging in discussion. They cite two studies that support CORI as effective for increasing student reading comprehension. In addition, “Appendix 1.1” elaborates on further comprehension strategies and each of their associated objectives and instructions (pp. 24–33). Providing such a thorough overview of these strategies works to raise awareness of the broad range of options available and encourages readers to think about potential applications, depending on objectives and context. Jetton and Lee explain that more research is needed on which comprehension strategies work best for specific disciplines, thereby setting up the thesis for the book.

The chapters that focus on language arts, math, science, history, and the arts are helpful in their level of detail and the use of classroom examples to illustrate different teaching and learning strategies in action. At their best, these chapters are well organized, relate to the thesis, clearly define assumptions and theories, and offer relevant teaching strategies. For instance, in the chapter “Learning with Texts in History: Protocols for Reading and Practical Strategies,” Bruce VanSledright anchors his argument in a description of the unique challenges and opportunities afforded by historical texts. He explains that they are hypertextual (draw from other texts), intertextual (require reading between different versions of the same events), and partially multimodal (span a variety of forms and media from pottery to film). He then provides an overview of strategies used by historians to read texts effectively. A chart (p. 212) summarizes epistemic frameworks of the discipline, connecting them to reading strategies such as “assessing author perspective,” “asking rich, significant historical questions,” and [“showing”] metacognitive awareness” of one’s own positionality as a reader. Throughout the chapter, VanSledright illustrates his ideas with the example of two Grade 8 students who grapple with the meaning and variable truths of different historical texts. This chapter makes the links between epistemology, expert knowledge, and classroom application explicit and detailed, without becoming prescriptive.

On the other hand, in Chapter 5, “Learning with Text in English/Language Arts,” authors Troy Hicks and Susan Steffel sometimes deviate from the thesis of expert disciplinary reading strategies by focusing more on literacy education theories. While not strictly adhering to the topic of the book, they provide a helpful critique of functional literacy, cultural literacy, and progressive literacy, and they make a compelling argument for more focus on critical literacy, multiliteracies, new literacies, and reader-response theory. This is an ambitious list of theories, and the authors sometimes conflate or skim through them

in an attempt to cover everything. Furthermore, some of the theories are underdefined and overapplied. Critical literacy is only briefly alluded to in justifying a series of corrective interventions for teachers. Although Hicks and Steffel criticize prescriptive teaching, in many cases they simply change the types of narrow questioning and instructions they would use with students (p. 144), not fully engaging with Freire and Macedo's idea (1987) that critical literacy "invites students to 'read the world and the word, by using dialogue to engage texts and discourses inside and outside the classroom'" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2003, as cited in Jetton & Shanahan, 2012, p. 128). While this chapter offers few examples of expert strategies for reading literature and may try to cover too much too quickly, it does provide an ambitious summary of current debates in the field of literacy education.

Adolescent Literacy in the Academic Disciplines provides a wealth of information on current challenges and strategies in adolescent literacy, bringing together the insights and expertise of sixteen scholars from different disciplines. The literature review in Chapter 1 by Jetton and Lee, Chapter 2 (by Zhihui Fang), and Chapter 3 (by Cynthia Shanahan), which frame the topic, are informative, and many of the disciplinary-focused chapters are theoretically grounded and well-argued. As can happen with such an ambitious and collaborative work, coherence is sometimes compromised when contributing authors deviate from the main argument or do not fully explain the theories or experiences that inform their statements. Nevertheless this book is a valuable resource for educators wishing to become more supportive and explicit in guiding their students through reading strategies in different disciplines and encouraging them to be analytical and discerning in their engagement with texts.