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Letter to Readers

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Dear Readers,

As we reflect on our first year as editors, we would like to thank the many scholars who have submitted their research to *Reading Horizons* to share with our readership. We also would like to thank our Editorial Review Board, many who are new this year, for their thoughtful and constructive feedback on manuscripts. We are also thankful for the many great submissions we've received. In this volume, we have a variety of topics that will inspire education professionals in their research and practice.

In this last letter to our readers for this year, we have decided to share a review of a recently published book titled, "Engaging Students in Disciplinary Literacy, K-6: Reading, Writing, and Teaching Tools for the Classroom" written by Brock, Goatley, Raphael, Trost-Shahata, and Weber (2014). We chose to review this book because of its timeliness to key issues in the literacy field.

Elementary educators and administrators will be delighted with the content of *Engaging Students in Disciplinary Literacy, K-6: Reading, Writing, and Teaching Tools for the Classroom*. Out of all the recently published texts supporting implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), this professional text offers educators a quick and accessible review of research and experience that has consistently demonstrated how to create positive outcomes in student achievement across the disciplines. The authors of this text bring a diverse and well-rounded perspective that condenses an enormous amount of complex research and pedagogy into a pragmatic examination of how to provide effective disciplinary literacy instruction.

The text begins with a nod to the current political context that drives the emphasis on disciplinary literacy at all levels. The authors demonstrate how the CCSS, whether you view them positively or negatively, have placed a priority on higher levels of learning across the subject areas in K-12. The standards are a reality in most schools across the U.S. for the moment. "Although we agree that standards alone cannot lead to sustainable improvements, the rhetorical power and policies that stem from standards – especially nationally supported ones such as CCSS – do impact the day-to-day lives of teachers and students" (p.16). A national mandate is never welcomed, and there are many critical issues that leave us concerned about the possible misuses of the standards. However, the authors weave a powerful argument that these are some of the more pedagogically sound, research based, and constructivist mandates the U.S. has ever seen.

The chapters present clear and concise arguments for new conceptions of disciplinary literacy that contextualize the higher levels of learning. An important feature of this text is that the authors specify that disciplinary knowledge must foreground instructional practice in each subject area. That means it is no longer acceptable for a literacy expert or consultant to visit a school and advocate the

use of generic strategies across the disciplines. In fact, when administrators seek professional development on “high utility” strategies, it is now an opportunity for many providers to talk about the problems associated with that approach when deeper understandings of disciplinary literacy are not present. The authors point out four problems that have slowed progress in this area: 1) a very limited research base in disciplinary literacy, 2) disciplinary literacy is minimally defined in the early grades, 3) elementary learners typically have little experience with informational texts, and 4) “Norms of the discipline – how experts think, act, talk, and write within their disciplines – have not been foregrounded in elementary classrooms” (p.21). The authors provide readers with descriptive examples of what is, and what is not, effective disciplinary literacy instruction. Visuals and graphic information support their arguments across the text to drive home salient features of effective practices versus ineffective practices. As researchers and scholars in the field of literacy, we acknowledge that professional texts have not always provided clear and explicit descriptions of recommended practice. We applaud the practical classroom scenarios provided in this book.

The book also addresses how teaching and learning in the areas of literacy; defined as reading, writing, and talking, will support disciplinary knowledge. Five interrelated components of the reading process are shared in chapter three. Regarding reading as a social process, the authors embrace a transactional and sociocultural framework of literacy learning. The context of the reading situation, knowledge of the comprehension process, knowing your students and their backgrounds, knowledge of texts and text features; and finally, knowledge of instructional and assessment practices are all key features of disciplinary reading for information. It is this birds’ eye view of the disciplinary reading process that we find most helpful to practitioners in the field – who ultimately need accessible instructional guideposts that are research based and practical.

The authors have provided excellent principles for the complex task of teaching specific content knowledge through varied literacy practices within and across texts. If you are looking for a practical and pedagogically sound resource to help schools implement mandated CCSSs, then “Engaging Students in Disciplinary Literacy, K-6: Reading, Writing, and Teaching Tools for the Classroom” is highly recommended.

We hope you enjoy reading this volume and we wish you all an excellent holiday season!

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Co-Editors of *Reading Horizons*