

Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy:

A Tool to Support Educator Preparation Programs



As the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) engages in the [process of revising educator certification structures and standards](#) in order to “improve the preparation of the educator workforce,” educator preparation programs are revisiting their coursework and programs to ensure alignment with the new structures. A collaborative team of Michigan educators has developed a set of documents, *The Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy: Grades 4-5* and *The Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy: Grades 6-12*, that support this process of program analysis and alignment.

The suite of Essential Practices documents identify effective, research-supported approaches in literacy instruction. The *Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy: Grades 4-5* illustrates ten instructional practices for expanding literacy instruction across disciplines. The *Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy: Grades 6-12* describes ten instructional practices that are further interpreted within each of the four core subject areas. Both documents were used as resources by MDE in their educator certification revision process.

Key Themes Which Guide Disciplinary Literacy Instruction

- Learning is problem- or question-driven.
- Students access, analyze, and create a variety of texts typical of the discipline.
- Educators intentionally integrate the disciplinary literacy instructional practices into each unit of study.
- Educators and students connect to their communities and networks as they engage in disciplined inquiry and apply diverse literacy practices.
- Educators and students attend to language use within and across the disciplines.

Implications for Educator Preparation Programs:

Michigan’s standards for educator preparation require pre-service educators to learn how to introduce and support their students in engaging in disciplinary thinking and practices in the content areas. To support this goal, the Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy: Grades 6-12 document provides an intentional framework to support the integration of literacy instruction in all of the content areas. The Essential Practices document can be used to proactively develop and/or redesign literacy courses to reflect the changes in educator preparation standards while also meeting the existing general requirements for secondary reading instruction courses.

- The *Essential Practices* documents are being used in statewide professional learning for educators across all core content areas, supported by multiple Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA), and should also be used to help shape pre-service educator learning.
- A key conceptual implication of the *Essential Practices* documents is that educator education programs incorporate literacy instruction into all content areas and clarify that literacy development is not the sole responsibility of English Language Arts educators. While literacy is important in ELA, literacy instruction and ELA instruction are not synonymous. All pre-service educators will benefit from learning about the literacy practices that are authentic to their different disciplines.
- Disciplinary literacy is integrally linked to justice, equity, antiracism, and decolonization efforts, as disciplinary literacy focuses on access to and transformation of disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary discourse communities.
- Educator preparation programs, no matter how the reading and/or literacy coursework is structured, can provide pre-service educators with course content and readings that directly tie to the disciplines most closely associated with their content areas. For example, pre-service history educators will benefit from engagement with history-specific scholarship related to literacy.
- Administrators of educator preparation programs can also seek to recruit cooperating/mentor educators with experience in disciplinary literacy instruction, and/or provide support and learning to these educators to deepen their knowledge and practice.

Overarching implications:

Among other practices, pre-service educators should be prepared to, at an appropriate level, provide students opportunities to learn through problem- or question-based units using diverse texts that engage and support students in reading, writing, discussion, and production using practices authentic to the different disciplines.

Educator preparation programs that emphasize equity, justice, antiracism, and decolonization will find their efforts strengthened by a focus on these disciplinary literacy approaches.

To find out more, please visit literacyessentials.org, or the Task Force website at <https://bit.ly/3iOi8wu>.