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**Strand of work:** Theoretical/Integrative

**Abstract:**

For the last several decades, researchers, classroom educators, and policy makers have targeted strategies for improving adolescent literacy achievement. Nevertheless, across the nation, few students reach literacy levels that enable them to develop interpretations, think critically about texts, make evidence-based arguments, or assemble information from multiple texts into a coherent understanding of a topic. While this set of circumstances may not be news, it should continue to concern us all. Despite new awareness of the literacy learning needs of adolescents, new policies aimed at advancing literacy skills for middle and high school students, new understandings of the unique demands of discipline-specific texts and literacy practices, and new standards focused on literacy instruction across the grade levels and subject-matter classes, we've made little progress over the past several decades. We believe that one, fundamental reason students are not making progress in gaining advanced levels of literacy is that they have very little opportunity and support to use texts for purposeful learning in the subject areas, and thereby to gain needed dispositions, strategies, and skills.

The purpose of this chapter is to add to the existing literature about this state of affairs. We recognize that many factors contribute to the persistent problem of engaging middle and high school students in learning from and with text including widely varied engagement and reading proficiencies, lack of appropriate instructional resources, limited know-how among subject-area teachers, and competing commitments that undermine a sustained focus on reading to support learning and increasing independence. Ultimately, we know that solving the problem of learning from text will require simultaneous attention to all of these. And, we recognize that doing so will unsettle the normative ways of teaching in middle and high schools. But, we argue that doing so is foundational to improving outcomes for all students.

In this chapter, we draw on our distinct experiences over two decades to fill some of the gaps in research about how texts are actually used in disciplinary teaching and learning (Moje, Stockdill, Kim, & Kim, 2011), giving what Pearson & Gallagher (1983) have called an "existential description" of reading in the secondary subject areas. We target the perennial problem of learning with and from text in subject area classrooms, share successful strategies we've undertaken, and make several recommendations that we feel are sensible and workable in the context of today's schools.

**Implications**

Having called for a focus on engaged academic literacy, entailing what we believe is a profound epistemological shift and purposeful inquiry orientation toward the use of text in subject area learning, we turn to strategies to launch and sustain such work. Here, we draw on approaches we have used in our various design research and professional development efforts. We present practical ideas to implement engaged academic literacy, offering tools and approaches for 1) planning instruction to purposefully integrate the *use of texts* for subject area learning, rather than the avoidance of texts; and 2) implementing instructional routines that develop students' learning dispositions and facilitate subject matter and disciplinary learning. While recognizing the everyday contexts of schools, their teachers, and their students, we aim with these suggestions to shift instruction toward engaged academic literacy in the service of subject-area learning. Such an approach will, we believe, recognize and draw on the expertise of teachers who know the core topics and concepts central to the courses they teach, in order to generatively create ongoing opportunities for students to use text for subject area learning.

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