



Research article

# Adopting Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in Education

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## Abstract

Low achievement in reading is a concern in a suburban school in the southeastern part of Florida. In an attempt to combat this issue, the school's administration has focused on teaching disciplinary literacy in content area classes, specifically social studies. In addition, the state standards also require that social studies teachers meet the Reading for History/Social Studies standards. Despite the effort put forth by the administration, there has yet to be an assessment of the social studies teachers' knowledge of the Reading for History/Social Studies standards or the instructional practices used to meet these standards. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore social studies teachers' knowledge of the Reading for History/Social Studies standards and the instructional practices utilized to meet the demands of these standards. Shulman's theory of pedagogical content knowledge framed this study, as it explores the need for teachers to be knowledgeable in both content and pedagogy. A purposeful sample of 10 social studies teachers participated in an interview and an instructional observation and submitted documents for review. Data were analyzed using hand coding for themes. The study results showed that teachers had concerns for the pacing of their course, their knowledge/preparation, and professional development opportunities.

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**Keywords:** Disciplinary literacy, high school, social studies, literacy instruction, reading.

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## Introduction

Recent studies have shown that students in the United States have remained below the threshold of proficiency in basic literacy skills (Carlson, 2015; Wendt, 2013). These deficiencies may provide dire consequences for students at the secondary and postsecondary level (Wendt, 2013). According to Wendt (2013), the term literacy no longer refers solely to a student's ability to read text. It now includes students' ability to read fluently, comprehend and analyze complex text, and effectively communicate socially and electronically, skills that are critical in secondary and postsecondary education, as well as in the professional world (Carlson, 2015; Wendt, 2013).



The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data show a steady decline in reading proficiency scores from 1992 to 2015, with only 37% of high school seniors scoring at or above grade-level proficiency in 2015 (Nation's Report Card, 2015). Of these 12th-grade students, approximately 46% of White and 49% of Asian American students scored at or above grade level proficiency. For Latinos/Hispanics, 25% scored at or above grade-level proficiency, while 17% of Black students scored at or above grade-level proficiency (Nation's Report Card, 2015). Regardless of the implementation of new programs and changes in state and federal mandates, trends in reading proficiency have remained relatively similar over the past several decades, with the average score for 12th-grade students fluctuating from 292 in 1992, the first year of implementation for the NAEP assessment in reading, to 287 in 2015 (Carlson, 2015; Nation's Report Card, 2015).

In response to this nation-wide literacy issue, the Common Core Standards call for cross-disciplinary literacy instruction for all students, making the effort to improve students' literacy skills a shared responsibility (Wendt, 2013). However, social studies teachers may not be providing their students with disciplinary literacy instruction due to a lack of understanding of the reading process (Wendt, 2013; Wolsey & Faust, 2013). According to Wolsey and Faust (2013), teachers sometimes resist incorporating reading strategies into their instructional time because content area teachers may not feel equipped to teach reading. They may not be sure what content area literacy is and how the instructional practices would look during a lesson (Wendt, 2013), as teacher preparation programs may not adequately prepare aspiring teachers to be experts in both content and pedagogy (Ingram, Bumstead, & Wilson, 2016). In addition, content area teachers may also resist incorporating reading instruction because they feel their focus should be on teaching content and do not feel responsible for reading instruction (Wolsey & Faust, 2013).

Disciplinary literacy allows content area teachers who may feel unprepared to take on the responsibility of teaching literacy skills and who may be concerned that teaching literacy will detract from their ability to cover content material to create literacy instruction during content acquisition (Pytash & Ciecierski, 2015). Implementing disciplinary literacy involves a shift in a teacher's beliefs about literacy (Wolsey & Faust, 2013). They must focus on a more in-depth examination into the function of literacy in the discipline and how that can be incorporated into their review of the content material (Pytash & Ciecierski, 2015). It does not necessarily make them reading teachers; however, incorporating disciplinary literacy teaching strategies may make them better teachers of their content (Dew & Teague, 2015). Unless the resistance to teaching disciplinary literacy is addressed, there will be a gap in teachers' instructional practices that may negatively affect student achievement.

The Florida Standards, created by the Florida Department of Education to align with the Common Core Standards, require high school social studies teachers to provide disciplinary literacy instruction to meet the expectations of the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2017). Content area teachers at a suburban school in Southeastern Florida report being directed by administrators to implement literacy instruction along with their course content to assist with closing the achievement gaps in reading (personal communication, August 18, 2017). The implementation of the Florida Standards makes disciplinary literacy instruction not only an educational priority, but a requirement for high school social studies teachers.

Although content area teachers are aware of this directive, levels of background and experience may lead some to implement literacy instruction more effectively than others. Teachers in the social studies department expressed concerns about the implementation of literacy instruction in their classrooms (personal communication, April 5, 2016). Their concerns involved an admitted lack of pedagogical understanding and a concern for the amount of time necessary for the implementation of literacy instruction during their class period (personal communication, April 5, 2016). However, the need for an increase in literacy instruction was noted by members of the social studies department when data from the state assessments in reading were reviewed (personal communication, April 5, 2016).

It is uncertain if the social studies teachers at the school of study are implementing disciplinary literacy instruction. According to the administrator, an evaluation of the implementation of disciplinary literacy skills in social studies has not been conducted as the focus has always been on the instruction of content material (personal communication, August 18, 2016). However, the tool utilized when administrators conduct teacher observations calls for the observation of a teacher's use of appropriate curricula, including the state requirements for reading, where applicable. School administrators in this study desired a focus on closing the achievement gap in reading through disciplinary literacy instruction; however, they have not examined social studies teachers' understanding of disciplinary literacy instruction or their ability to implement disciplinary literacy in their instructional practices. The following research questions were the basis for developing interview questions for this study:

RQ1: What types of training in disciplinary literacy instruction, if any, have the social studies teachers at the school of study attended?

SQ: If training was attended, how effective was the training in disciplinary literacy instruction attended by the social studies teachers at the school of study?



RQ2: How are the social studies teachers at the school of study providing disciplinary literacy instruction to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards?

RQ3: How do the social studies teachers at the school of study blend disciplinary literacy instruction with content instruction to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards?

## Materials and Method

The purpose of this intrinsic qualitative case study was to explore the methods in which social studies teachers incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in their classes. The target school's School Improvement Plan indicated that reading achievement has declined at a steady rate for the past 3 years. Based on past reading performance on state and district assessments, school administrators have determined that there is a need to close the achievement gap in reading through disciplinary literacy instruction. Although the Florida State Standards require social studies teachers to address the state standards for literacy, specifically the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards, during their teaching of social studies content to ensure literacy and writing development, according to the school administrator, there is no evidence that disciplinary literacy instruction is being implemented or how it is being implemented. Most researchers have focused on observations and interviews to explore disciplinary literacy instructional practices, but research on disciplinary literacy instructional practices in social studies has never been done at the school of study, and that is why an intrinsic qualitative case study was the best design for this study.

The school of study is located in the southeastern area of Florida. Enrollment at the school of study stood at approximately 2,600 students; however, in the past, enrollment has been as high as 3,500. The school's annual School Improvement Plan stated in 2018 that the student population was diverse, with a 95% minority population, an 81% economically disadvantaged (ED) rate, as determined by free and reduced lunch qualification, and 26% English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) population. For this study, a representative sample of participants was used from the school of study, which included teachers of minority, ED, ESOL, special education, and advanced academic students. A representative sample comprises participants who are characteristic of the entire population being studied (Creswell, 2014). There were 14 social studies teachers in the school of study. All 14 of the social studies teachers were invited to participate. Inviting all of the 14 teachers increased the possible number of participants and allowed for a generalization of the data collected (Leedy & Ormond, 2015). There were a total of 10 participants for this study. The criteria used to select participants for this study included: two participants who teach classes that include minority students, two participants who teach ED students, two teachers who teach ESOL students, two teachers who teach special education students, and two teachers who teach advanced academic students. This sample of teachers allowed me to deeply explore the disciplinary literacy instructional practices being used by teachers who teach a representative sample of the whole school population.

Data was gathered through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, instructional observations, and reviews of documents that explored social studies teachers' knowledge of disciplinary literacy instruction and the instructional practices used to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards. Participants were asked to volunteer for this study. Ten teachers were willing to be interviewed, observed, and submit documents for review. Using three different methods of data collection allowed for triangulation.

### Data Collection Instrument

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews was used to collect data. Face-to-face interviews may yield a high response rate if the researcher can establish a friendly, nonthreatening rapport with the participant, which will encourage cooperation (Leedy & Ormond, 2015; Yin, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to begin questioning the participant by using planned interview questions; however, they also give the researcher the flexibility to explore themes that may arise during the interview (Leedy & Ormond, 2015).

In addition to face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, instructional observations were conducted of all participants. Observations can add "new dimensions for understanding" a phenomenon that is being studied (Yin, 2014, p. 114). Instructional observations allowed a first-hand view of the disciplinary literacy instruction taking place, as well as any success or problems encountered during the instruction. During a direct instructional observation, the researcher should take hand-written field notes based on their observations and later organize the notes by major topics (Yin, 2014). A protocol for conducting an instructional observation and adhered to the protocol during the observations.

Another data collection tool used during this study was a review of documents. Each participant provided sample documents that showed evidence of disciplinary literacy instruction, such as: lesson plans, formative assessments, and/or summative assessments. A review of documents or artifacts can be an important component in the overall case study (Yin, 2014).



### **Conducting the Interviews**

The number of participants for this study was 10. From the willing participants, two participants who teach classes that include minority students, two participants who teach ED students, two teachers who teach ESOL students, two teachers who teach special education students, and two teachers who teach advanced academic students were selected. This allowed a representative sample of the whole school population to be collected.

One hour of time for each interview was allotted. The interviews were audio recorded and brief notes during the interview were taken. At the conclusion of each interview, a self-reflection detailing the researchers' thoughts on the interview were provided. While listening to the audio recorded interview, transcription occurred on a password-protected personal computer. A summary of the transcription was emailed to each participant for verification of accuracy.

### **Observation Protocol**

The observation protocol addresses the research questions and sub-questions. Observations occurred after each interview; a time of one hour was allotted to observe each participant while he/she was teaching class. The goal of the observation was to determine how the participant incorporates disciplinary literacy instruction in class and how it is blended with content instruction. Because observations can be disruptive, observations were completed with minimal disruption to the instructional process, only seeking to assess the occurrence of disciplinary literacy instructional practices (Yin, 2014). Data were recorded in the form of field notes (Yin, 2014). The instrument used during the observations entailed specifics such as the participant's assigned number, the date and time of the observation, the topics being covered in the class, the standards being taught, the objective of the lesson, the intended outcome of the lesson, the materials used, the activities, how students were assessed, and the number of students present in the class. In addition to observing teaching and learning, notes of any evidence of disciplinary literacy instruction in the daily agenda, on posters and other classroom décor, and on student work that was posted on the walls of each classroom was also noted. At the conclusion of each observation each participant was sent a summary to review and verify for accuracy, as a form of member checking (Merriam, 2009).

### **Conducting the Observation**

There were 10 participants for this study. From the willing participants, two participants who teach classes that include minority students, two participants who teach ED students, two teachers who teach ESOL students, two teachers who teach special education students, and two teachers who teach advanced academic students were selected. This allowed a representative sample of the whole school population to be collected.

One hour of time was allotted for each observation. Field notes were taken during each observation. At the conclusion of the observation, a reflection detailing any thoughts on the observation were written down. A summary of the field notes were emailed to each participant as a form of member checking, for verification of accuracy (Merriam, 2009).

### **Conducting the Review of Documents**

There were 10 participants for this study. From the willing participants, two participants who teach classes that include minority students, two participants who teach ED students, two teachers who teach ESOL students, two teachers who teach special education students, and two teachers who teach advanced academic students were selected. This allowed a representative sample of the whole school population to be collected.

One hour of time for the review of documents was allotted for each participant. Field notes during the review of documents were taken. At the conclusion of the review of documents, a self-reflection detailing thoughts was written.

## **Results and Discussion**

Data from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that aimed to explore the methods in which social studies teachers incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in their classes to meet the demands of the Reading for History/Social Studies standards was conducted.

The interview protocol was divided into three sections: Background Information, Knowledge of Disciplinary Literacy Instruction, and Instructional Practices. The first section collected background information regarding teaching experience. The second section explored the participants' knowledge of disciplinary literacy instruction and the Reading for History/Social Studies standards included in the Florida State Standards. This section connects to the first research question because the question addresses teachers' knowledge of the literacy standards and any training they



may have in teaching disciplinary literacy. The third section explored the instructional practices in disciplinary literacy. This section connects to the second and third research questions because it explores how teachers incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in their classes to meet the demands of the Reading for History/Social Studies standards. After conducting the interviews, a transcription of the information from the audio recorded interviews was conducted on Microsoft Word, printed a copy of each transcription, and looked for themes and recurring patterns. Different colored highlighters was used to note similarities in phrases and words used by various participants. Having the text in different colors provided an easy way to note dominant themes that were emerging. The initial 22 highlighted statements from the interviews into three themes were categorized.

The observation protocol designed addressed the second and third research questions. It sought to answer how the participants incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in their classes and how that instruction is blended with content instruction. After conducting the observations, field notes were reviewed to identify recurring patterns. Reoccurring words and phrases were identified by using different colors. Once all of the observation notes were highlighted, the highlighted words and phrases under each of the three themes were categorized.

The review of documents protocol addressed the second and third research questions. It sought to answer how the participants incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in their classes and how that instruction is blended with content instruction. After conducting the review of documents, notes were reviewed to look for recurring patterns in the words and phrases. Reoccurring words and phrases were highlighted in different colors. Once all of the reviews of document protocol notes were highlighted, the highlighted words and phrases were organized under each of the three themes that emerged from the interview data. Evidence of new themes were reviewed, but no new themes were discovered during the review of documents. All of the reoccurring words and phrases were able to fit under the three themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview notes.

Data triangulation helped to corroborate the findings and assure validity. The three methods used when applying triangulation were: a) interviews; b) instructional observations; and c) a review of documents. Although the majority of the data collection derived from the interviews, the instructional observations and review of documents helped to validate the themes identified from the interviews (Creswell, 2014). The instructional observations and review of documents added validity to the findings from the interviews and added rigor to the study (Leedy & Ormond, 2015).

### **Patterns and Themes**

The interview data addressed RQ1: What types of training in disciplinary literacy instruction, if any, have the social studies teachers at the school of study attended? The data from the interviews also addressed the sub-question to RQ1: If training was attended, what was the perceived effectiveness by the social studies teachers at the school of study? Three themes emerged from the data: (a) Pacing; (b) Knowledge/Preparation; and (c) Professional Development Opportunities. Participants expressed concern about the pacing of the courses they teach. They were concerned that implementation of disciplinary literacy instruction would impede on the amount of time they have to teach course content and keep them from maintaining the pace required by the district; however, the review of documents and observations showed that many of the teachers were already implementing disciplinary literacy instruction. In addition, participants also felt uninformed about the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards and unprepared to teach disciplinary literacy due to a lack of training; however, the review of documents and observations showed that many of the participants were implementing disciplinary literacy instruction. Finally, although the participants did not actively seek professional development opportunities, many expressed the need for professional development in disciplinary literacy instruction specific to social studies.

Each of the 10 participants took part in an interview. The interviews ranged from 35 to 45 minutes. The study sample included 10 high school social studies teachers: two honors/advanced placement teachers, two special education teachers, two ESOL teachers, two ED teachers (see Table 1).



**Table 1:**  
 Teacher Demographic Information, Experience, Certifications, and Courses Taught

| Participant | Gender | Age | Experience | Certifications  | Courses Taught   |
|-------------|--------|-----|------------|---|--|
| 1           | M      | 55  | 31         | Social Studies (6-12)   | Government, Economic, U.S. History, World History, Legal Studies, European History, Latin American History   |
| 2           | M      | 54  | 21         | Social Studies (6-12)   | World History, U.S. History, Government, Economics, Debate   |
| 3           | F      | 47  | 11         | Social Studies (6-12); Gifted                                     | World History, U.S. History, Government, Economics, Advanced Placement Government, Advanced Placement Economics  |
| 4           | M      | 71  | 14         | Social Studies (6-12); Physical Science; Earth and Space Science  | World History, U.S. History  |
| 5           | F      | 48  | 16         | Social Studies (5-9; 6-12); ESOL (K-12)                           | World Geography, World History, U.S. History, Economics  |
| 6           | F      | 43  | 21         | Social Studies (6-12)   | World History, Government, Economics   |
| 7           | F      | 44  | 12         | Social Studies (6-12)   | Language Arts (9-12); World History, U.S. History, Government, Economics   |
| 8           | F      | 44  | 16         | Social Studies (6-12); Gifted                                     | Journalism, Geography, Civics, World History, Advanced Placement World History, Advanced Placement European History, U.S. History, Government, Economics |
| 9           | M      | 60  | 37         | Social Studies (6-12); Special Education (K-12); English Language | English Language Arts (9-12), Intensive Reading, World History, U.S. History, Government, Economics  |



Arts (6-12)

|    |   |    |    |                       |   |
|----|---|----|----|-----------------------|---|
| 10 | M | 48 | 14 | Social Studies (6-12) | World History, U.S. History, Advanced Placement U.S. History, Government. Economics |
|----|---|----|----|-----------------------|---|

The first seven questions, background questions, were answered by all participants. The participants included five male and five female teachers between the ages of 43 and 71. The participants reported having between 11 and 37 years of teaching experience. When asked if they have ever taught a subject other than social studies, four of the participants reported that they had not, while four reported having taught English and one reported having taught science. All 10 participants reported having taught social studies classes to all grade levels from 9-12, including World History, American History, Government, and Economics. Four of the participants have taught Advanced Placement (AP) level courses in the past. When asked if they have taught in another district or state, all of the participants reported that they had not; however, four of the participants had taught in another school within the district.

Questions 8 to 11, knowledge and training questions, sought to answer RQ1: What types of training in disciplinary literacy instruction, if any, have the social studies teachers at the school of study attended? They also spoke to its SQ: If training was attended, what was the perceived effectiveness by the social studies teachers at the school of study? The questions addressed the participants' knowledge of disciplinary literacy instruction and training they have received in disciplinary literacy instruction. The following questions and responses addressed participant interviews.

Question 8 asked: "Are you aware of the Reading for History/Social Studies state standards?" Six of the 10 participants responded positively to this question without further explanation or clarification from the researcher. After clarification from the researcher, two of the other four participants stated that they were aware of the standards and two stated that they were not. One participant stated that he/she was "aware of the standards but could not recall them in detail."

Question 9 asked, "What do you feel is the role of the social studies teacher in providing literacy instruction to students?" Nine of the 10 participants stated that the role of the social studies teacher in providing literacy instruction to students is critical and should be implemented in conjunction with the instruction given by ELA teachers. One reason for that was that "the content on the ELA state exam [Florida Standards Assessment] is mostly nonfiction, and a lot of the material that the students read on the exam contains historical documents, so it is important for social studies teachers to teach them to read these historical documents for understanding." Although nine participants agreed that it was critical for social studies teachers to implement literacy instruction, four of them felt that they were not adequately trained or knowledgeable enough to do so effectively. One participant stated that "the responsibility needs to be carried mainly by the ELA teachers because we have to worry about covering a massive amount of content. There is not much time to teach reading skills. And, I do not feel that I am the best person to do that. The ELA teachers should lead that charge. We can encourage the students to read though."

Question 10 asked: "What professional development sessions have you attended, if any, that were geared to teaching literacy in social studies?" Nine of the participants have attended Creating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies (CRISS) training, which focuses on literacy skills. One participant stated, "I use CRISS strategies often in my class. I wish they would offer an updated version of that training." Eight of the participants stated that they attend the annual social studies conference offered by the school district each year. All eight of those participants stated that there were break-out sessions, taught by district ELA teachers, geared toward literacy instruction specific to social studies classes during that annual conference. One participant shared that attending those break-out sessions, "Makes you feel that everyone senses the need to help students with reading."

Question 11 asked: "Have you attempted to attend professional development sessions geared to teaching literacy in social studies?" Other than the annual social studies conference offered by the district, eight of the participants stated that they have not actively sought professional development that is specifically geared toward teaching literacy in social studies. Two participants stated that they have sought professional development training in literacy but were not able to find any to attend. One stated, "Those types of trainings are few and far between. The focus for social studies seems to always be on content."



Questions 12-16, instructional practice questions, focused on the participants' instructional practices, including instructional strategies and planning. The following questions and responses addressed participant interviews.

Question 12 requested: "Please describe a typical lesson in your class." Five of the 10 participants discussed beginning their class with a "bell-ringer" activity. One stated, "I post the essential question on the board as a bell-ringer. Students copy it into their notes and attempt to answer it by the end of the class period." Another participant stated, "I do various activities as bell-ringers, graphic organizers, political cartoons, or visuals of some kind, to introduce the new topic being discussed in class that day." Two of the participants stated that they begin class with oral reading of the text. Three of the participants stated that they begin class reviewing what was discussed during the previous class, either orally or by having students complete a written activity.

All of the participants stated that they use in-class oral reading and lecture during a typical class. One participant stated, "I know it isn't looked highly upon, but I lecture. Honestly, there is no other way to get the information to the students. They may read it, but they don't always understand it by themselves." Three of the participants stated that they provide students with guided reading activities during in-class reading or guided note-taking worksheets to use for taking notes. One participant stated, "If I do not provide students with a note-taking worksheet, they would write down every word I said. Note-taking would take the full two-hour period, and we don't have time for that." Seven of the participants stated that they assign independent or group work to students following a lecture and note-taking session. Those seven participants all stated that they rely heavily on the textbook to provide the follow-up activities to reading and note-taking.

Question 13 asked: "How do you decide what instructional strategies to use during each lesson to meet the requirements of the state standards?" All ten of the participants mentioned the district created pacing guides when asked this question. Four of the participants stated that they base their instructional strategies on the student population in their classes. One participant stated, "Knowing your student population is so important. I make instructional decisions based on IEPs and 504s, reading levels, ability levels, and interest levels." Another participant stated, "I have a lot of SPED students. I have to modify a lot of what I do in my classes, but they are still meeting the standards."

Question 14 asked: "Do you incorporate disciplinary literacy strategies in your everyday lessons? If so, how? If not, why?" All of the participant responses were positive. All ten of the participants agreed that they, in some way, incorporate literacy instruction in every class period. One common thread was vocabulary. All of the participants mentioned utilizing vocabulary instruction in every class period. One participant stated, "The students have to define vocabulary and key terms every class period. If not, they have no idea what they are reading about or what I am talking about when I lecture."

Another commonality among the responses to this question was that all of the participants stressed the need to stay on pace with district expectations. They all agreed that incorporating literacy strategies is important, but that time is an issue. One participant stated, "We are up against the clock called the pacing guide. If we do not stay on pace, our students won't do well on the mini-assessments given by the district. Those scores then reflect poorly on our teaching." Another participant stated, "As much as I recognize the need to teach literacy skills, I have to stay on pace and cover the content. They have an exam to take at the end of the year. Those scores are part of what determines our school grade."

Question 15 asked: "How do you balance the instruction of disciplinary literacy and content in your class?" All of the participants stated that this is a struggle for them as teachers. Balancing the amount of time given to cover material while assuring that students have the skills, they need to understand that material appears to be a common concern among the participants. One participant stated, "This is our biggest challenge. I'm up against the district's expectations. I can't stop covering content because a student struggles with reading. What do I do?" Although they all admitted that this is a struggle, eight of the participants stated that they attempt to implement literacy instruction while they cover content. One participant stated, "I use graphic organizers to help them break down difficult text. We read primary documents, and I use a lot of CRISS strategies." Another participant stated, "It's a give and take. I incorporate reading skills and writing skills. The social studies labs are very useful for incorporating writing in our classes. We are covering content, but they are also practicing writing."

Question 16 asked: "How much time is used to teach disciplinary literacy? How much time is used to teach content?" Six of the participants stated that they believe it is a 40/60 ratio of literacy instruction to content instruction. One participant stated that approximately 15 minutes of the two-hour block is used for literacy instruction. Two participants stated that approximately 25% of class time is used for literacy instruction. One participant stated that it has to be equal. "In my class, it has to be 50/50. If I don't incorporate literacy instruction, they will never understand what they are reading. How can it possibly be less?"

In summary, the data from the interviews showed a discrepancy in the amount of time utilized to incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in social studies classes. All of the participants admitted that time is a major factor in how they incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction in their classes and that keeping on pace with district expectations





is a high priority. The data also showed that while all of the teachers understand the need to incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction, some feel unprepared to do so, citing a lack of effective training in disciplinary literacy instruction in social studies; however, the majority have not sought training to assist them in this endeavor.

## **Observation Data**

### **Observations**

The observation data addressed RQ2 and RQ3: How are the social studies teachers at the school of study providing disciplinary literacy instruction to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards? How do the social studies teachers at the school of study blend disciplinary literacy instruction with content instruction to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards? Each participant agreed to a 60-minute observation. The researcher utilized the observation protocol and took notes during each observation.

Participant 1 engaged students in an analysis of American social issues. The students took notes while the participant lectured. A guided note-taking worksheet was utilized. At the conclusion of the lecture, students were asked to respond to guiding questions in their notebooks. The social studies standards being address were clearly posted for students; however, no Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards were posted.

Participant 2 began class by reminding students of the requirements for the project on which they are currently working. The project required students to affirm or negate Billy Joel's proposition that we (America) did not start the fire. Students were being asked to respond in the form of a researched-based, analytical essay and a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. After the reminders, the students moved their desks to meet with their group members and began working on their project. Student tablets were utilized to access resources on the Internet. Students also utilized their textbook as a research resource. The social studies standards, as well as the Reading for History/Social Studies standards, were clearly posted on the board.

Participant 3 assigned a similar project to students as did Participant 2. Class began with a review of the project requirements, the grading rubric, and expectations for academic integrity. Students utilized their tablets to work in groups to research their chosen decade and its impact on American history. The participant provided students with guiding questions for their research. The social studies standards, as well as the Reading for History/Social Studies standards, were clearly posted on the board.

Participant 4 began class by introducing a new topic. Guided note-taking worksheets were distributed to each student. Students took notes utilizing the guided note-taking worksheets while the participant lectured. No standards or objectives were posted in the classroom.

Participant 5 began class with a bell-ringer activity. When students entered class, a political cartoon was posted on the electronic white board. Students took a moment to record their thoughts in their notebooks. Once the participant took attendance, a review of the political cartoon began. Students offered their thoughts, and the participant shared how the cartoon connects to the topics being covered in class. This activity lasted about 15 minutes. The participant then reviewed some history sources posted to a Pinterest page. The participant then distributed a graphic organizer to each student. The purpose of the graphic organizer was for students to take notes during the participant's lecture. Short videos were utilized during the lecture to clarify certain points of information. The social studies standards, as well as the Reading for History/Social Studies standards, were clearly posted on the board.

Participant 6 began class by reviewing the topic discussed during the previous class, what a person needs to do to be elected. Once the review ended, the participant handed out a graphic organizer for students to complete utilizing their notes and resources that they were directed to access on the internet. The social studies standards were posted on the board for the students to view; however, the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards were not posted.

Participant 7's class was engaged in a project similar to the students in Participants 2 and 3's classes. Class began with a review of the project requirements and the grading rubric. Students utilized their tablets to work in groups to research their chosen decade and its impact on American history. The participant provided students with guiding questions for their research. The social studies standards, as well as the Reading for History/Social Studies standards, were clearly posted on the board. The students worked in their groups for the remainder of the 60-minute observation. The participant circulated the room to assist students in need.

Participant 8 engaged the students in a discussion regarding future course choices and college entrance requirements. Standards were not posted; however, the class being observed was an Advanced Placement (AP) course which is not necessarily limited to the Florida State Standards. The participant explained to the researcher that the AP exam for that course had already taken place, so the focus for the students is on choosing other AP courses and understanding college entrance requirements.



Participant 9 addressed the Cold War and Post-War changes during the observation. Students were utilizing a note-taking guide to take notes while the participant lectured. The participant utilized a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation to provide visuals to supplement the lecture. Students asked questions as needed, and discussion took place. The social studies standards, as well as the Reading for History/Social Studies standards, were clearly posted on the board.

Participant 10 also utilized lecture as the primary method of information distribution. Students listened and took notes in their notebooks based on the lecture being given. No note-taking worksheets or guides were provided. No standards were posted for the students.

In summary, apart from Participants 8 and 10, all of the participants utilized some form of reading or note-taking/writing strategy during the class that was observed. While all but three participants posted the social studies standards, the Reading for History/Social Studies standards were only posted by five participants. In addition, all but three of the participants utilized lecture during their observed classes. In the three classes without lecture, the students were engaged in a group project.

### **Review of Documents**

The review of documents addressed RQ 2 and RQ 3: How are the social studies teachers at the school of study providing disciplinary literacy instruction to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards? How do the social studies teachers at the school of study blend disciplinary literacy instruction with content instruction to address the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards? The participants were asked to submit any document that showed evidence of disciplinary literacy instruction. The documents submitted by the participants were categorized into four types: lesson plans, classwork/worksheets, project descriptions, and assessments.

**Lesson plans.** Of the 10 participants, three submitted lesson plans for the review of documents. The intended purpose of all of the lesson plans was to detail the objectives of each lesson, the activities in which students were engaged, and how students were assessed on the skills that were taught. Of the three lesson plans submitted, one did not list any of the Florida Standards, neither the standards for social studies nor the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards. One lesson plan listed only the social studies standards covered by that lesson, and one lesson plan listed both the social studies standards being covered as well as the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards.

**Classwork/Worksheets.** All ten of the participants submitted documents in this category. The documents included graphic organizers, reading assignments, review questions, political cartoons, and writing assignments. The intended purpose of each of the documents submitted was for students to review a topic that had been covered in class by using a reading or writing skill. All of the documents addressed both Social Studies Florida State Standards and Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards.

**Projects.** Five of the ten participants submitted project descriptions. The documents included group projects and individual writing assignments. The intended purpose of each assignment was to assess students' knowledge of a particular historical topic by having students research, write an essay/report, or present their findings via PowerPoint. All of the documents addressed both Social Studies Florida Standards and Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards.

**Assessments.** Three of the 10 participants submitted an assessment, either a quiz or a test, for the review of documents. The intended purpose of each assessment was to determine students' knowledge of a historical topic. Of the three documents submitted, one of the documents consisted of 40 multiple choice questions.

In summary, all of the participants submitted documents that showed evidence of disciplinary literacy instruction. Examples of these include writing assignments, reading assignments using primary documents, and graphic organizers. While three participants submitted lesson plans as a document for review, only one participant listed the Reading for History/Social Studies standards on the lesson plan.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine social studies teachers' knowledge of disciplinary literacy instruction and how it is being implemented in their classrooms. Based on the current literature and the findings from this study, it is evident that there is a need for professional development to address the social studies teachers'



understanding of the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards and their knowledge of disciplinary literacy instruction. The findings showed that participants felt uninformed about the Reading for History/Social Studies Florida Standards and unprepared to teach disciplinary literacy. They were also concerned that implementation of disciplinary literacy instruction would impinge on the amount of time they have to teach course content and keep them from maintaining the pace required by the district. Participants expressed the need for training in how to implement disciplinary literacy instruction without utilizing a great amount of time needed for content instruction.

An alternative way to address the problem at the school of study could be to include implementing a long-term professional development program. Continuing the program for more than 3 days will allow the participants an opportunity to share concerns regarding implementations of the lessons and instructional materials created during the first three sessions. An extended program could also allow for the sharing of best practices in disciplinary literacy instruction. In addition, an extended program could allow for the involvement of other content area departments as well, such as mathematics and science.

Another alternative could be to involve social studies teachers from several schools throughout the district that are experiencing the same problems with literacy proficiency. Involving other schools would lead to more generalizable data and a greater collaborative effort and sharing of best practices. This strategy would support the need to increase literacy proficiency on a district-wide scale.

Possible future implications and applications include additional professional development programs that address disciplinary literacy instruction in other subject areas or disciplines, such as science and mathematics. This study could also be implemented at other high schools in the district to extend the collaborative effort of the professional development program. In addition, the information gathered from this study and the implementation and evaluation of the professional development program could be shared with local colleges and universities in an effort to create more effective teacher preparation programs.

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