The Components of Active Literacy in Content Comprehension

Reading, writing, drawing talking, listening and *investigating* to engage in the world of issues and ideas, to enhance understanding to build and actively use knowledge and to develop insight (Harvey and Goudvis, 2007).

Talking and listening to each other

Having a conversation-"Literacy floats on a sea of talk." (Britton, 1970)

Sharing thinking and learning with others

Reading to construct meaning

Noticing and thinking about inner conversations

Activating background knowledge and thinking about new learning

Inferring to surface big ideas and themes

Responding by talking

Connecting personal experience and ideas to the text

Wondering and thinking inferentially

Responding by reading by writing and drawing

Writing and drawing to merge thinking with information

Making thinking visible

Writing and drawing to construct meaning and explore thinking

Learning information, building new knowledge and organizing it

Expanding thinking and ideas-inferring and interpreting

Investigating and doing further research

Exploring topics of our own choosing; gathering information

Asking and answering significant questions

Summarizing and synthesizing information

Sharing learning to bring to life

Creating a common language for thinking and learning…

Fosters a community of learners

Supports students to articulate and discuss their thinking and learning

Focuses thinking (theirs and ours) and encourages thinking dispositions

Builds across the grades-the cumulative effect is powerful

Thinking is not just for school…

"Learning is a consequence of thinking." *David Perkins*

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Content literacy: " Reading the world" to better understand it.

Our goals :

Kids engage in the world of information, issues and ideas.

Kids explore, experience, question, read, write, discuss and debate to learn about and better understand what's going on in the world.

Kids discover new thinking, illustrate their learning, venture an opinion, take a stand or take action.

How do we begin? We give kids tools to read, write, draw, talk, listen and investigate...and provide a framework for this:

Explore and build background knowledge—engage, wonder, teach key concepts and ideas, focus on guiding and essential questions

Read to understand and gather information; react, respond, ask and answer questions

Summarize and synthesize information—writing and drawing to keep track of and remember what we learn

Demonstrate understanding and share knowledge—Kids teach others what they have learned via posters, projects, poems, pictures, etc.

As kids investigate their world, we find that

Taking a stand or taking action can deepen understanding.

The more experiential the work, the greater the engagement and the more kids learn and remember.

What really matters for kids, and perhaps for all of us, is our willingness to ask questions... questions spark curiosity and inspire independent thinking.

Reading the World DVD (Stenhouse 2005)

Content Literacy: From Curriculum Topics to Investigations

We share the following framework (Harvey and Goudvis 2005b), designed for planning and teaching content literacy topics, such as those demonstrated here.

As kids read, write, talk, listen, and investigate their way through the curriculum, they develop an understanding of content that goes beyond merely covering it. They explore, read extensively, engage in discussion and debate, and delve into topics of their own choosing. Instruction focuses on key concepts, big ideas and important questions as a topic study unfolds.

Build Background Knowledge Through Exploration

- Engage with and activate background knowledge about the topic
- Learn vocabulary and concepts central to the topic
- Immerse kids in the topic via picture books, field trips, experiences, etc.

Gather Information to Develop Big Ideas and Questions

- Read, write and talk using comprehension strategies: I learned, I wonder
- Hold thinking on Post-its, note taking forms, learning journals, etc.
- Turn and talk about information, share learning, engage in discussion
- React and respond to information orally and in writing
- Ask and answer questions to expand thinking

Summarize and Synthesize Information and Ideas

- Move from facts to ideas; explore lingering questions
- Organize information and merge our thinking with it
- Weave our thinking and voice into what we say and write

Demonstrate Understanding and Share Learning

- Create responses, posters, picture books, etc. to synthesize learning
- Organize information to teach what we've learned to someone else
- Understand our learning process and articulate it
- Take our thinking public via sharing and oral presentations

Framework for a Science Topic Study

Goals for the Insect Topic Study

Key concepts and ideas include mastering the vocabulary of insect body parts and behaviors, and understanding how insects are adapted to the specific environments where they live. Kids learn to research, learning information, asking and answering questions, illustrating and writing up information to synthesize it.

Content Comprehension: Across the Day and Throughout the Year

Key Ideas

The goal of content instruction is understanding.
Students acquire knowledge, enhance understanding and develop insight in science and social studies. Reading, writing and thinking are active processes—kids ask questions, gather information, infer big ideas and issues and conduct investigations as they engage in content learning.

Explicit comprehension strategy instruction is a means to an end.
We teach thinking and learning strategies for understanding content topics. How we learn (the process) is every bit as important as what we learn (the content). In fact, the whole point of learning how to learn (the process) is so you can learn something (the content)! We can't have one without the other. Content and process then are completely integrated to facilitate understanding: we ask questions to spur investigations and find answers, we summarize and synthesize information to grasp big ideas and issues (Pearson, Harvey and Goudvis 2005).

Teachers plan and design instruction that carefully considers children's linguistic diversity—all the different languages our students speak as well as their language proficiency.
Rather than developing several different programs for "linguistically different" students, there is one instructional plan that is responsive to the learning and language needs of all the kids in a school (Commins and Miramontes 2005). Teachers develop an inclusive and cohesive instructional philosophy that translates into consistent instruction across all grade levels. Explicitly teaching the language of comprehension instruction to all children builds a common language for thinking and learning throughout the school.

Collaboration and planning between grade level and vertical teams results in more thoughtful instruction.
Based on kids' literacy and language development, teachers design instruction that focuses on important concepts, essential questions and curriculum standards in science and social studies rather than a potpourri of activities and lesson plans. Classroom teachers, ELL teachers, and the librarian coordinate and design instruction that focuses on comprehending content and identifying reading, writing and language instruction that helps kids learning English understand this content.

For English language learners, moving between text, images, photographs, realia, and experiences is essential.
In order to understand new information, ideas, and concepts, we carefully choose our materials and plan instruction to clearly communicate the information and concepts central to the topic study. We use a multi source-curriculum of trade books, magazines, historical fiction, picture books, illustrations, photographs, artifacts, etc. to give kids a range of entry points into topics.