

## Micro-Paper 19: *Content Area Literacies*

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### Defining the Term

Content area literacies are skills required in the acquisition and production of knowledge in a specific content area (e.g., literature, math, science, and social studies). Content area literacies can vary across subject areas, but most notably and broadly include reading, writing, communicating via speech, listening, and thinking. As students progress through school and content presented becomes more versatile, the skills required to complete reading and writing tasks change.

Subsequently, literacy skills in each content area become more specific and demanding. While a strong foundation in instruction of phonics in primary school is essential to success in later literacy activities, research has found that secondary students need explicit instruction of language conventions of various disciplines and genres since disciplinary texts used in secondary classrooms require specialized reading and interpretative skills. Content area literacy is also commonly termed as “disciplinary literacy” throughout literature.

### Connecting it to LSLP

Second language learners benefit from explicit instruction of any content area material. Teachers who understand the complexity of content area practices and the sophisticated skills they require are more likely to implement supportive literacy strategies that will assist second language learners in the acquisition of the

language as well as content area information across all types of text. Within any community and discipline, there are language conventions and practices learned and used by its participants. These conventions and practices expand across all languages, so providing explicit instruction of the content area will make the knowledge accessible in both their mother tongue and second language. This is an inclusive approach to make the conversation about the respective discipline globally accessible.

### Expanding Second Language Research

Studies have evaluated the effects of teachers who implement content area practices within their subject area and have found critical, positive results. While we know that second language learners benefit from additional instructional support and supportive literacy strategies, an interesting strand of research could be conducted to examine correlation of language acquisition with academic language proficiency and overall conceptual understanding.

### References

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This LSLP Micro-Paper is part of a series of guest micro-papers by researchers at the Initiative for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies Research at Florida State University