

Eric Neal:

Hello and welcome to The State Support Team 11 podcast. I'm Eric Neal and today we're joined by Rachel Lang-Daniels. How are you, Rachel?

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

I'm great, Eric. Thanks. Thanks for having me here today.

Eric Neal:

Thanks for coming on. Tell us a little bit about the work you do here at The State Support Team.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Well, Eric, I am the adolescent literacy specialist here at The State Support Team Region 11. There are actually two of us in the state. My colleague Roger Howard lives up North and works at the Cuyahoga County equivalent of our office.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

At this time I'm doing work that supports the adolescent literacy sub grantees that receive the striving readers grant. Though I'm stationed here at the ESC and work through The State Support Team, I'm doing a lot of work with the Department of Education around adolescent literacy.

Eric Neal:

Well, yup. You are all over the place all the time. We barely get to see you.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

That's true, Eric.

Eric Neal:

Yeah. Today we're going to talk specifically about disciplinary literacy. If you could tell us what is disciplinary literacy and why should it matter to today's educator?

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Well Eric, that's such an important question to ask and disciplinary literacy is one of my favorite subjects to talk about. I'm excited to share with you today just a snippet of the work we're doing at the state department. What you probably know is we have a plan in Ohio called Ohio's plan to Raise Literacy Achievement. Disciplinary literacy is one of three components that make up the work we're doing around adolescent literacy.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

For the definition of disciplinary literacy in the state, we look to the work of Tim Shanahan. He describes disciplinary literacy as, "Literacy that moves beyond common strategies used across all of the content areas and focuses on unique strategies, expert use to engage with texts in an academic discipline."

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Essentially what that means is that disciplinary literacy honors the specialization in a content area. We need to think like historians, we need to do mathematics.

Eric Neal:

Like mathematician.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Like mathematicians. You're reading my mind. Consider data the way a scientist would. In essence really consider the habits of mind that live within each specialization of the content area.

Eric Neal:

That makes a lot of sense. I remember when you came to our internal meeting and were kind of giving us the rundown explaining this to us. I had that in my mind that it was kind of like literacy across the content areas. That it was kind of reading strategies but reading strategies for these different things.

Eric Neal:

Being a social studies person, I was imagining ways to read history better or something. That explanation that you got into really kind of helped me to understand it I think. It was more about all of the skills that you would need to be a historian.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Right.

Eric Neal:

How to research, how to do those different things.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Yes.

Eric Neal:

That kind of helped me really clarify it a little bit.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Yeah. Eric, you bring up a good point. There's often a misunderstanding or confusion between two concepts. The first concept being content area literacy and the second being disciplinary literacy. I like to think of them on a continuum and in the state of Ohio we do honor both approaches.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Content area literacy though is more of the common or general strategies that you would use in any classroom, in any hallway, in any secondary building. That would be a strategy like summarizing. You could find a place or a space for summarizing pretty much in any class.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Where disciplinary literacy is a little bit different, is that strategy like sourcing for example is highly important in social studies. We absolutely need to know where the source of our information is. In social studies sourcing is king. It's one of the most important concepts we can talk about.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

In math, we might not be as concerned about where the numbers are coming from. Sourcing may not be as important. Precision to detail, absolutely important in mathematics. Logic, absolutely critical in mathematics.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Those are two examples that kind of help you to see the difference between content area and disciplinary literacy and why disciplinary literacy is sort of bubbling to the surface now. As anyone listening might remember, we went through a phase in education where we talked about everyone being a teacher of reading.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Though I still see that as a critical aspect in every teacher's classroom because let's be honest, in what classroom are there things that aren't read? None. If I removed the literacy practices from a classroom, you would be hard pressed to have anything to teach.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

I think it's about shifting what our understanding of literacy is and it can be easy to misunderstand and confuse literacy with literature. Asking a teacher to be a teacher of literacy isn't saying, "Get a rocking chair, and a fluffy rug, and some picture books, and call your students to the front of a class and read them nice stories."

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Though I can make a case for using picture books in any classroom, there's lots of good ways you can do that. That's really more about reading. In literacy, disciplinary literacy specifically, we're talking about a much more broad, vast understanding of what it means to use literacy practices.

Eric Neal:

If you were going to look into disciplinary literacy, would you be... If you're a practitioner you're going to be someone that's going to be planning and delivering lessons using these new skills. If you were a science person, go to a specific disciplinary literacy thing for science? Or could you go to something general and apply kind of a framework or just a way of approaching the work that would be able to be used across all the different disciplines?

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

That's the funny thing about disciplinary literacy is that we talk about it being a specialization of content, but the idea is a general idea. Thinking about the habits of mind within your content area is disciplinary literacy.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

You can attend PD or do your own research or work from both of those perspectives. For example, you could read a book like ReLeah Lent's book, *Disciplinary Literacy in Action* and learn a lot of the ins and outs around what disciplinary literacy is. In the back of her book there's a fantastic appendix that breaks down each content area and thinks about the ways in which mathematicians read, write, and use information. Lent does that for all of the core subjects and some of the special areas like the fine arts, or technology, and physical education. That's a great resource.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

There is another resource that I'm quite fond of that I think people can learn from and that is a book by Jacy Ippolito, Christina Dobbs, and Megin [Shard 00:07:09] and it's called, *Disciplinary Literacy Inquiry and Instruction*. It's another book that does a really good job of showing the ways in which content area and disciplinary literacy ebb and flow together and the ways in which you can use disciplinary literacy to really ramp up instruction in your classroom.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

One benefit of that resources in the back of it, there is a self reflection checklist that you can do to think about are your students actively participating in disciplinary literacy within your course? It's a good way for a practitioner to say, "Do I understand disciplinary literacy? Am I using it? Are my students being exposed to it? How do my texts connect to disciplinary literacy?" The thing I love the most about that particular tool is that there's an equity component. A podcast for another day would be to talk about how disciplinary literacy becomes an equity tool for a classroom.

Eric Neal:

Yeah, absolutely. I'm seeing all sorts of crossover and different things in my mind about the change in the way we teach and what students are learning from when the old standards came in. To you have common core or the new Ohio Learning Standards. It went from the idea of you're just going to read something and remember it and on this day in the Spring you'll bubble in a test to say that you remembered it.

Eric Neal:

Moving on to those higher level thinking things and this feels kind of like something for a teacher in your toolkit that will help to operate at a higher depth of knowledge. To help your students build 21st century skills that they're going to need to be able to think, and analyze, and do all those things within these different disciplines.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Absolutely. Right Eric, so you hit the nail on the head. It's really about leveraging the best practices within a discipline and using that information to help apprentice students into learning.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

I think it changes the way that we think about what a typical classroom looks like when we move beyond just wrote lecture or use of textbook.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

In social studies again, I'll come back to that content area as an example. Think about using primary and secondary sources and allowing students to really have a more of an inquiry based exploration of a text. Instead of a teacher being a sage on the stage and sharing all of this knowledge and information. Allowing students to really dive in and learn some things and grapple with learning. Perhaps have some productive struggle.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

When we think about what historians do, they don't often have information just handed to them. They have to search, dig, put resources up against each other.

Eric Neal:

Absolutely.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Consider the sourcing, consider the time period, contextualize the information, all of those things. Those are the kinds of practices we want students to have authentic experiences in the classroom doing and that is disciplinary literacy.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

If a teacher wants a little bit more guidance on what it might look like in his or her classroom, when the common core standards were released. One of the beautiful components within them that some people still don't know about are the literacy standards.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

There is a set of standards for six through 12 social studies, history, math, science, and the technical subjects. That really outline in grades six through 12 what are those disciplinary practices when it comes to reading and writing and how can they best be incorporated into a classroom. A teacher could find them unfortunately by looking in the English Language Arts standards.

Eric Neal:

Right.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

Those standards should live in all of the documents. They don't, but they are easy to find if you just look in the ELA standards.

Eric Neal:

That does sound like a great resource. That's really pretty much all I had to cover with you today, but I was wondering if there is any upcoming events that people that are learning or interested in learning more about disciplinary literacy could attend or find through State Support Team 11 or through the Department of Education?

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

As a matter of fact, there is Eric. My colleague, Roger Howard, and I have a two day adolescent literacy series coming up. We'll be doing a tour of the state again. The two days will include a full day on disciplinary literacy from a general perspective.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

We'll look at examples and we'll look at habits of mind within the four core areas. I will lead a full day on that and then my colleague Roger Howard will lead a full day on leading adolescent literacy at the secondary level.

Rachel Lang-Daniels:

If our listeners are interested in attending the session, it is free and registration is located in STARS. If you log into your STARS account and search the keyword adolescent, you should find those opportunities. As a side note, we'll be adding some additional dates. Keep an eye out for more sessions coming across Ohio.

Eric Neal:

Great. Thank you. That wraps up our episode today of The State Support Team 11 Podcast. I want to say thank you again to our guest, Rachel Lang-Daniels.

Eric Neal:

If you would like to know more about who we are and what we do, you can reach me at [eric.neal@escco.org](mailto:eric.neal@escco.org). Check out our website. That's [sst11.org](http://sst11.org) or call us at (614) 445-3750. Finally, follow us on Twitter. We are @sstregion11. Until next time, thanks again, I'm Eric Neal.