

Response: Heller's "In Praise of Amateurism: A Friendly Critique of Moje's 'Call for Change' in Secondary Literacy"

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I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Rafael Heller's critique of my commentary on foregrounding the disciplines in secondary school literacy teaching and learning. Exchanges with Heller are always a pleasure, because he brings to light many new ideas and important concerns. This particular exchange also gives me the opportunity to clarify several points I had hoped to make with the commentary and to counter a number of concerns he raised.

Heller challenges the idea of approaching secondary literacy instruction from a disciplinary perspective by arguing that rather than teach young people the literate practices and skills necessary for reading and writing proficiently in various subjects or disciplines, secondary school teachers should focus on developing "amateurs" who are well versed in the general liberal arts. This argument, however, is troubling on several levels. First is his use of the word *amateur*. I was immediately curious as I read the title of his piece, "In Praise of Amateurism: A Friendly Critique of Moje's 'Call for Change' in Secondary Literacy": Who were the amateurs to whom he referred? Adolescent students? Secondary school teachers? The answer, it seems, is both.

Heller's use of *amateur* most explicitly refers to the secondary school students. Indeed, at one point, he suggests that we should not attempt to produce "disciplinary experts" by the end of high school and instead should be content with producing amateurs. That statement puzzled me, because producing experts is in no way the goal of disciplinary literacy instruction; that is, such work is not about producing junior literary theorists, historians, scientists, or mathematicians. Disciplinary literacy is about providing learners with the opportunity to engage in the kinds of knowledge production and representation, on a limited scale, of course, that members of the various disciplines enact on a regular basis. The point of such engagement is to make clear how disciplinary communities (or any discourse community, for that matter) produce knowledge, thereby enabling learners to question that knowledge.

Disciplinary literacy instruction produces critical thinkers who can read a magazine article claiming that antibiotics lead to breast cancer and ask themselves, What kind of experiment could produce a causal claim like that? Disciplinary literacy instruction might even lead those same readers to

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conclude that, due to either poor word choices or deliberate misrepresentation, correlational evidence was being represented as causal. With the opportunity to engage in multiple investigations and read and write in the service of those investigations, students can learn to question and challenge representations of disciplinary knowledge, whether in the study of the disciplines or in everyday life.

Disciplinary literacy instruction is thus an act of social justice and offers the possibility to produce the very kind of citizen Heller calls for at the end of his critique. This instruction is decidedly *not* about producing discipli-

nary experts or about trying to push the college curriculum down to high school (another concern that he appears to have about disciplinary literacy). To be sure, those of us who support this work believe that it will better prepare our nation's youth and close the knowledge and skill gap that many lament, but that is not the primary focus of the work. Even a strong disciplinary literacy focus would generate what Heller calls "amateurs" (I prefer "novices") by the end of high school, but they would be thinking and questioning novices who are able to read, write, and discuss everyday decisions that are framed by work in the disciplines.

Heller does not limit the label of "amateur" to students. He also questions whether it is possible for high school teachers to develop deep enough content and linguistic knowledge to engage in disciplinary literacy instruction. He further claims that they do not care to do so:

Given that secondary teachers have much less allegiance to their departments and disciplines than do college professors, and given that they have much greater allegiance to the teaching mission (over and above the research imperative), they might be convinced more easily that it is their job not only to prepare students for more specialized instruction but also to help them become reasonably well-rounded citizens (Farris, 2009).

I do not know on what basis this claim is made, but the first part of it does not gibe with my own experience as a high school history and biology teacher, as a teacher educator, and as a high school classroom researcher. The high school teachers I work with are strongly committed to their disciplinary roots, although they do see a difference between the work of the disciplines and what they can introduce in secondary school subject areas (cf. Conley, 2008; Douglas, Moje, & Bain, 2009). The question for me is not whether high school teachers are able and willing to engage in disciplinary literacy teaching, but to what extent are university faculty—both disciplinary and teacher education faculty—providing the kind of education necessary for high school teachers to do this kind of work?

A related issue, which I address at the end of my original piece (Moje, 2008), is the extent to which the current structures of schooling, from the timing of the school day to accountability measures, allow high school teachers to engage in such work. My experience suggests—and indeed motivated my call for the foregrounding of the disciplines—that middle and high school teachers are committed to their disciplinary roots and are eager to engage their students in literacy practices that serve to advance their disciplinary learning. Moreover, secondary school teachers believe that learning in the disciplines and subject areas will produce well-rounded citizens.

That, in the end, is the point of my commentary: Literacy theorists, researchers, and teacher educators would do well to consider approaching secondary literacy instruction from the standpoint of the people who teach in the secondary school subject areas. Their concern is the disciplinary learning of their students, and the organization of secondary schools suggests that both middle and high school teachers see their subject areas (and themselves) as connected to the disciplines. I have yet to meet a secondary school teacher who does not know whether he or she is in the science department or the English department. Secondary teachers know whether they are teaching physics or biology, U.S. history or economics, 19th-century British literature or research writing. Are they all disciplinary experts? No, but secondary school teachers

are advocates of learning in their subject areas, which are framed by the disciplines.

Finally, I'd like to address Heller's suggestion that even if the ideas of disciplinary literacy teaching were useful, the work would be too difficult to accomplish. I doubt he really believes that one should give up on a goal of educational change simply because it is difficult; after all, it is difficult to change discriminatory practices or eliminate poverty, but we continue to try. What he appears to be saying is that he does not think the benefits of disciplinary literacy instruction outweigh the costs of making what I acknowledge to be rather sweeping changes. My original piece may have played into that thinking in that, by outlining the challenges we all face in making such changes, I may have dissuaded some readers from seeing the possibilities. My goal in outlining those challenges, however, was not to suggest that the work is hopeless. Rather, it was to distribute the effort required so that the change I propose is not laid on the backs of teachers. The current efforts to engage secondary teachers in literacy strategy instruction are focused largely on the teachers themselves, without attention to the systems and cultures within which they work.

Thus, I concluded my piece with a focus on persistent challenges—playing off Cuban's (1986) still relevant analysis of the persistent institution of secondary schooling—to remind readers that this cannot be the work of teachers alone. It is the responsibility of all those involved in K–16 education, including classroom teachers, parents, school leaders, teacher educators, and university faculty members in the disciplines. Yet, there is great hope. There are numerous models of disciplinary literacy instruction, some of which I mention in the original piece and some of which are detailed in other venues (e.g., Coffin, 2006; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Lee & Spratley, 2010; McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009; Moje, 2007, 2010; Moje & Speyer, 2008; Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Some of these models are not limited to secondary schooling, instead focusing on children as early as kindergarten (Cervetti & Barber, 2009; Cervetti, Pearson, Bravo, & Barber, 2006; Guthrie et al., 1996; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004;

Palincsar & Magnusson, 2001; Pappas, Varelas, Barry, & Rife, 2002; Romance & Vitale, 2001).

Moreover, those of us interested in secondary literacy instruction can and should take heed of the work of colleagues who study education in the disciplines. Science educators and scientists, for example, have long collaborated to engage young people in inquiry, or project-based, science instruction that replicates the work of scientists (e.g., Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Krajcik et al., 1998; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 1997). Historians and history educators have engaged children and youth in working with primary sources and producing historical accounts and arguments (e.g., Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Bain, 2005, 2006; Leinhardt, 1994; Wineburg & Martin, 2004; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Mathematicians and mathematics educators have collaborated to develop mathematical inquiry that engages youth in translating everyday discourse into mathematical discourse (e.g., Hall & Jurow, 2006; Moses & Cobb, 2001).

Literacy educators have only to connect with these efforts, but we need to first understand that literacy instruction at the secondary level should be in the service of learning in the subject areas and that all students—not just those who are assured of advancing to postsecondary education—have the right to become critical thinkers across the curriculum.

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