

Jeffrey Wilhelm

Given the current constraints on my own time and energy, I am able only to provide a cursory review upon a single reading of your document. I am certainly willing to provide more information at a later date if and as needed.

First, let me congratulate the committee on a needed emphasis on a community-wide framework. We know that literacy is not just a school-based set of academic practices, but that literacy applies to our lives as workers, as disciplinary knowledge-makers and problem-solvers, as citizens and democratic stewards, in our personal and conjoint social lives, etc.

I also find the consultation process to be powerful, democratic, and useful – a walking of the talk, as my own American students might say. Another “power move” is the recognition of how various layers from the macro-level of government and policy to the microlevels of classrooms and individual lives intersect and inform and influence each other – and the attempt to align these is intelligent and necessary.

I applaud the emphasis over the lifespan, of community and business, on access, and on what we Americans call “Social-Emotional Learning” and well-being. There is a salutary emphasis on “situated cognition” and meaningful contexts of using literacy in school and community and the world of work.

My area of expertise is in the fields of adolescent and adult literacy, so I have only one comment about the emergent and early stages of literacy described here. My own reading of the research would indicate that analytic phonics are more in line with the other recommendations here and more in keeping with Tasmania’s tradition of promoting inquiry oriented teaching and learning. My own reading of the research (and again, I am not an expert in this area) is that it is the SYSTEMATIC teaching of phonics that is essential to learning to read, and that analytic phonics have the advantage of helping students inquire into how words and language work in a context of use. I would urge Tasmania not to fall in the trap Americans have of being bludgeoned by the “Science of reading” folks. Research going back to Linnea Ehri’s seminal work shows that an overemphasis on phonics is not useful, not useful outside the context of engaged reading and inquiry, and that can be deleterious to engagement and future learning. I can provide more information and synopses if needed as I work on a publisher’s board that has reviewed such issues.

Onto my actual area of knowledge: adolescent literacy. I have to say that as impressed as I was by the pre-adolescent framework, I felt that it entirely petered out with very little appropriate understanding and support of the nature of adolescent literacy.

We know that literacy develops throughout a lifetime, and in contexts such as the workplace, disciplinary conversations, the community, personal and social worlds of all kinds.

When it comes to adolescent literacy, adolescents have unique needs and challenges, and they need explicit instructional support to continue to grow as literate beings in contexts and through topics that are meaningful to them in their current state of being . . .

For example, understanding how genres work, and how they make use of genre features and conventions as well as embedded text structures in order to organize texts and the reading experience for meaning and effect is a hallmark challenge of adolescent reading. After all, expert readers always read a text *as something – as a particular kind of text*. Just think of how you sort through your mail or email and decide what to read, what to throw away, how to read memo versus an agenda, what to attend to and how to interpret, etc.

Also, as adolescents read more complex texts they need to understand not only how genres and text structures combine in fluid ways, they also need to deal with increased inference loads. In the United States, a primary failing of our schools is to support students in their capacity to see and interpret complex implied data patterns in texts of all kinds. Our last several national assessments (NAEPs) show that fewer than 6% of graduating seniors from high school are adept at this, while nearly 80% are

proficient at literal decoding. I am fearful of systems that only teach learners how to decode; that prepares them only to comprehend what others say, and not to think with and about data. The dangers to deep understanding, as well as to democracy, are huge.

Reading in secondary schools and life requires knowing what to notice and how to interpret what a text codes you to notice. This is in part determined by genre and text structure. This also involves seeing data points across a text or data set, interpreting what the patterns might mean in ways consistent with disciplinary understandings. This is what seeing and interpreting/inferring complex implied relationships is all about.

A corollary to this in writing (and reading) is being able to evaluate the quality of evidence, and the reasoning (interpretation/inferencing) about the patterns of evidence as a writer – and being able to identify and evaluate these moves as a reader. This is essential to all disciplinary and civic reasoning. Disciplinary work and indeed democracy is based on respectful ongoing arguments about data and what the data mean and how they can be applied, reservations about data, reasoning, application, etc.

We all also know the challenges of encouraging adolescents to read (beyond digital and social media texts, at least!), as well as the dangers of social media. I therefore would suggest an emphasis on promoting pleasure in reading, and pleasure reading itself, from the earliest ages through adolescence and adulthood.

Given the pervasiveness and the allure of social media, I would also encourage an emphasis (for adolescents but also in early grades) on critical reading in the face of information pollution . . .

With all due humility, I have done considerable work reviewing and distilling research in many of these areas, and in adding my own research into the conversations.

For a review of learning theories, their implications, and how to put the latest research from across the learning sciences into practice with adolescents:

Wilhelm, J.D., Bear, R., & Fachler, A.(2020). *Planning Powerful Instruction: 7 Steps to Transform How We Teach – and How Students Learn* {Tag} A practical guide to using the EMPOWER framework to help you engage every learner, Grades 6-12. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Noticing and interpreting, genre

Wilhelm, J. & Smith, M.W. (2016). *Diving deep into nonfiction: Transferable tools for reading ANY nonfiction text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Genre and text structures and how they inform reading and writing

Wilhelm, J., Smith, M., and Fredricksen J. (2013). *Get It Done!: Writing and analyzing informational texts to make things happen*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

For dealing with information pollution

Wilhelm, J.D.,Smith, M.W., Appleman, D., Kesson, H. (in press). *Fighting Fake News: How literary reading can prepare us to critically read digital texts and the world*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.

Also see:

SHED (Stanford History Education Group) with Sam Wineburg: <https://sheg.stanford.edu/>

News Literacy Project <https://newslit.org/>

On evidence, evidentiary reasoning, reading and writing arguments:

Smith, M., Wilhelm, J., and Fredricksen, J. (2013). *Oh Yeah?: Putting argument to work both in school and out*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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dul would also suggest looking at the National Writing Project's C3WP initiative (College, Career and Community/Citizenship Readiness Writing Program)

<https://archive.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/programs/crwp.csp>

On the nature of pleasure in reading, the effect and power of pleasure, and how to promote it

Wilhelm, J. and Smith, M.W. (2014). *Reading Unbound: Why kids need to read what they want and why we should let them*. New York: Scholastic.