

## The Power of Literacy: Read, Write, Think, Discuss—Disciplinary Literacy

Fairfax County Public Schools

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfYe6ndbVq8>

Paige Whitlock: Sam Bennett's words ring true in Fairfax County Public Schools. That's because a student-centered philosophy is the foundation for the engagement model. A structure that supports student learning through disciplinary literacy. Disciplinary literacy? Teachers do it every day. It is a complex set of skills that involves navigating the language and thinking processes of each subject area. As the experts of these skills, teachers construct and guide students and disciplinary literacy by planning instruction for students to read, write, think, and discuss content. Literacy is at the heart of the engagement model, where students do the work to build content knowledge. In the next few minutes, you will meet four teachers representing four different content areas who have adapted the engagement model to meet the needs of their students. Remember, learning is messy but whoever is doing the thinking, reading, writing, and discussing is the one getting smarter.

Meaghan Dobson: How many words here, one, two, three, four, five, six words, four of them are images.

Meaghan Dobson: So for me the engagement model is really about student agency and student ownership of their learning. I think the more time that we can give students to be, to become deeply invested in the work that they are doing, and not just handing in papers or completing a worksheet, the better we're able to help them develop as readers and writers and, and learners.

Meghan Dobson: What we did there is called making an influence.

Matt Lear: So we've been using the engagement model to get the kids to think about the math, talk about the math, do a little bit writing about their thinking, to really be thinking about what's happening in the problems rather than just doing the same type of problem over and over.

Ted Loht: Okay so blue markers going to be your consensus. I want to start hearing your lovely voices, I missed them. Go, talk.

Student 1: I agree with your idea.

Student 2: Would the electricity have to travel...

Ted Loht: It's not about coming up and showing them the right answer. It's about them trying to find an answer. Whether or not it's right or wrong, that'll come at the end. With the critical

thinking, the building, the problem-solving, watching them do it together, these are the skills that these students need.

Corey Thornblad: It says, has your thinking about FDR and the New Deal changed? This will be a quicker response. So based on the conversations you just had...

Corey Thornblad: In my classroom, what the engagement model means is that students are doing the work. And I don't mean a worksheet. I mean students are doing the thinking, they're doing the talking, they're doing the creating, doing the collaborating. I should be a facilitator of that but I should not be the person standing at the front of the room delivering the knowledge.

Ted Loht: I know the magic is happening when I look at a kid's face and I see them engaged and you can tell as a teacher if a student is engaged or is looking under his desk at his phone. These kids, with this strategy are engaged. I think we give these kids sometimes a bum rap about they can't do this, they can't do that. Give them a chance, you will see the lightbulbs go off, that's why we do what we do.

Meaghan Dobson: I think of this classroom as a one-room schoolhouse because we do have so many different levels of students in the class.

Meaghan Dobson: Some of the images that we wrote here up on the sentence strips...

Meaghan Dobson: We know every day we're going to start with a warm-up that gets students talking and thinking about either language or drawing conclusions. And then we're going to have the reading time. So that's very easy and that gives us a framework. And then the work time is organized around a larger goal, whether it's an essay, a presentation, and we just kind of think about what are the steps along the way. What are the mini lessons and those you really can't decide upon until you see where your students are.

Matt Lear: Who's ready for doing some sort of enrichment and what types of things need to be revisited. So we'll do a piece that's whole group where we're all kind of going over the same type of thing in a mini lesson. And then as the students go to different workshop activities, either one of us, or if there's two of us in the room, we might both pull a group to kind of hone those skills based on a formative assessment.

Meaghan Dobson: My advice for a teacher who is interested in moving towards more student engagement in the classroom would be just to give it a try. It might get a little bit messy. Every student might not be on task all of the time, but the benefits that students will get from having those opportunities to have some choice, to have some ownership, to really do the work, and to get smarter by doing the work far outweigh any, you know, minor shenanigans that might happen back of the classroom.

Matt Lear: It's been kind of a journey, I think I've been doing this seven years and it's changed every year. And I've kind of grown with this model, with this workshop model. From the

beginning, it's definitely evolved and each year that I learn a little bit more about how to get students engaged, how to get them thinking more, how to get them writing even in math class. I've seen the model kind of really flourish and really take off, and you can see it in what the students come up with. Even when they're given a problem they haven't seen, being able to think about the strategies that they have and use those strategies in a new problem situation.

Corey Thornblad: It doesn't have to be this all-or-nothing calculation. So I think like don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Corey Thornblad: We want to see something more like this. Ms. Hudson, what was your opinion about FDR?

Ms. Hudson: Well I thought FDR was cool.

Corey Thornblad: Why did you think he was cool?

Ms. Hudson: I don't know...

Corey Thornblad: We don't need to do everything huge. The little things that you do every day, if you add those up over time, they are getting by writing practice, they are getting reading practice. So I think it's completely doable. You know, I really think of myself first and foremost as a reading, writing, critical thinking teacher and then the content that I teach supports those skills.

Ted Loht: Let them guide each other. It is a different classroom than the one we grew up in and not only are they getting it, but they're building these really essential needs, these really essential skills that they're going to need as they move forward into the next century.