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Literacy: Varied, Dynamic, and Multidimensional

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LITERACY: VARIED, DYNAMIC, AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL

The very nature of literacy has long been contested, especially in school settings where most literacy learning is thought to occur. Historically, the attention has largely focused on reading, with writing taking a back seat and relegated to the upper grades and English classrooms. These great debates have encompassed a variety of issues. However, they almost always involve questions concerning the role of letters and sounds, the effectiveness of teaching young children—or those who struggle—various phonic strategies so as to be able to “sound out” and correctly spell various words, and the function of grammar in the writing process.

It is important to note that the “answers” to these issues and the corresponding instructional responses have had a differential impact on various children, families and communities. In fact, the answers at times have depended on the socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and linguistic attributes of the communities involved. Additionally, governmental policies have not been neutral on these issues as seen in various federal educational commissions, publications, and funding of particular kinds of literacy programs (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; NICHD, 2000; United States Department of Education, 2001, 2002, 2009).

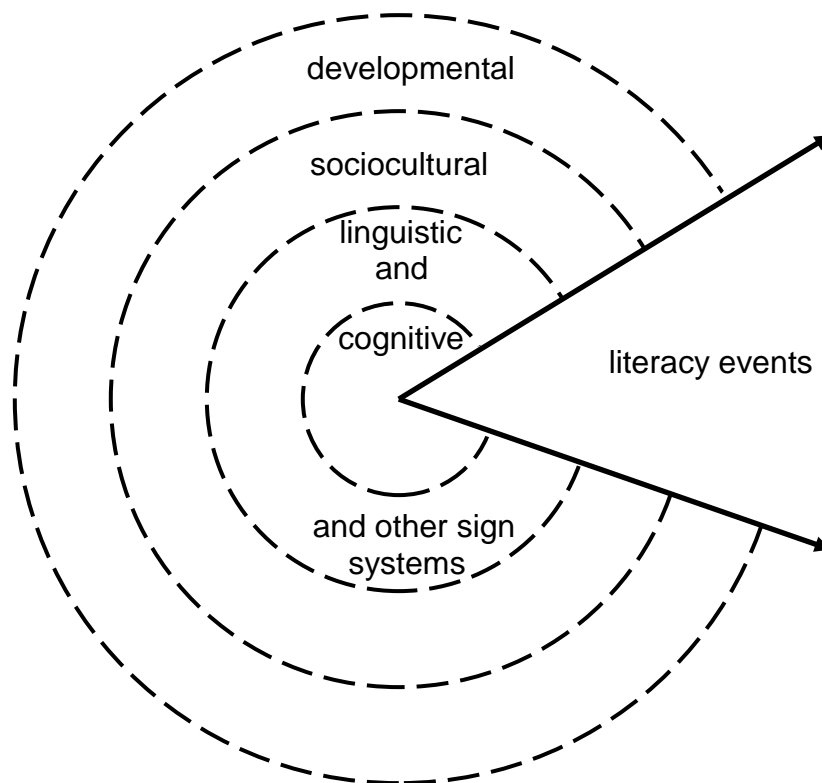
This is not to say that other dimensions of literacy have not been addressed. The seminal literacy research of the 1970s and 80s (e.g., Heath, 1982, 1983; Michaels, 1981; Scollon, & Scollon, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1978; Street 1984; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) focused attention beyond the text and the individual to the sociocultural nature of literacy and literacy practices of various communities. In essence, this research embedded texts and individuals within society (Vygotsky, 1978). Although research in this area is robust and continues to this day, its impact on governmental policies, funding, and classroom practice has been limited (e.g., Goodman, Calfee, & Goodman, 2014; Shannon, 2013, 2014). This is the case despite the increasing diversification of U.S. society on any number of indices.

If we are to understand both the role and impact of literacy in—and on—classrooms, families, and communities within U.S. society, it is important that we first understand the very nature of literacy itself—what literacy is and what literacy can and cannot do on the individual and social level. This involves moving beyond—but not excluding—the role of sounding out, spelling it right, and being grammatical. Such a move requires an examination of literacy through a variety of lenses. These lenses allow us to capture the varied, dynamic, and multidimensional nature of reading and writing. It is upon this nature that public policy,

funding, and schooling should be grounded.

The dimensions represented in Figure 1 (Kucer & Silva, 2013, Kucer, 2014a) provide a visual overview of the four lenses to be used in the examination of literacy. In this rendering, every literacy event—i.e., instance of literacy use—is envisioned as involving four dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental. Being literate means having the ability to effectively and efficiently negotiate these dimensions of written language within particular situations. Reflecting and extending the work of Luke (1995) and Kucer (1991), the linguistic dimension conceives of the individual as “code breaker” and “code maker,” the cognitive as “meaning maker,” the sociocultural as “text user and text critic,” and the developmental dimension as “scientist and construction worker.” Literacy users draw upon all four of these knowledge sources when engaged with any written language event.

Figure 1
Dimensions of Literacy



More specifically, at the center of the literacy act is the cognitive dimension, the desire of the language user to explore, discover, construct, and share meaning. Even in those circumstances in which there is no intended “outside” audience, as in the writing of a diary or the reading of a novel for pure enjoyment, there is an “inside” audience—the language users themselves. Regardless of the audience, the generation of meanings always involves the employment of various mental processes and strategies, such as predicting, revising, and monitoring. Interestingly, the cognitive dimension can transcend languages. Users of literacy employ many shared mental processes and strategies whether reading or writing in their first or second language (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Genesee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2006; Goldenberg, 2010). Regardless of the language, readers and writers as meaning makers *create* and *construct* rather than pick up or transfer meaning.

Surrounding the cognitive dimension is the linguistic and other sign systems dimension: the physical vehicle through which these meanings are explored and expressed. Literacy depends on such language systems as graphophonemics, syntax, semantics, and text organization. Proficient language users have a well-developed understanding of how these systems operate and are able to employ them to meet their meaning making goals. Not limited to language alone, readers and writers also make use of other sign systems, such as color, sound, illustration, movement, etc. More than ever, literacy is a multimodal act involving various sign systems. The reader or writer must coordinate these transacting systems with the cognitive meanings being constructed. Readers and writers as code breakers and code makers employ many different *multimodal systems* rather than a single system or mode to explore and express meaning.

Literacy events, however, are more than individual acts of meaning making and language use. Literacy is a social act as well. Different groups use literacy in different ways and for different purposes. Therefore, the meaning and language that are built and used through involvement in various literacy practices are always framed by the social identities (e.g., ethnic, cultural, gender) of the individual and the social context in which they operate. Readers and writers are text users and text critics; they engage in *multiliteracies* and their corresponding *practices*. The meanings generated through these literacies and practices represent *perspectives* rather than truths.

Finally, encompassing the cognitive, linguistic and other sign systems, and sociocultural dimensions is the developmental. Each act of literacy reflects those aspects of literacy that the individual does and does

not control in any given context. Potentially, development never ends, and individuals may encounter literacy events that involve using literacy in new and novel ways. These experiences offer demonstrations, opportunities, and engagements for literacy learning that results in developmental advancements. Readers and writers act as scientists and construction workers as they actively build an ever-evolving understanding of literacies and their corresponding practices. *Becoming* literate rather than being literate more accurately describes our ongoing relationship with written language (Leu, 2000). Table 1 summarizes the overview of these four dimensions.

Table 1
An Overview of the Dimensions of Literacy

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Linguistic and Other Sign Systems	Text	Code Breaker and Code Maker	A focus on the communication systems—language, art, music, mathematics, movement—through which meaning is conveyed. <i>Multimodal systems</i> rather than system.
Cognitive	Mind	Meaning Maker	A focus on those mental strategies and processes used to build meaning. <i>Creating and constructing</i> rather than picking up meaning.
Sociocultural	Group	Text User and Text Critic	A focus on the social identities and how various groups use literacy to negotiate and critique their transactions with the world. <i>Multiliteracies</i>

			rather than literacy; <i>literacy practices</i> rather than practice; and <i>perspectives</i> and <i>ideologies</i> rather than truths.
Developmental	Growth	Scientist and Construction Worker	A focus on those strategies learners use to build an understanding of the linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of literacy; the demonstrations and mediations provided for learning the linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, dimensions of learning. <i>Becoming</i> rather than being literate.

In the remainder of the article, each of the dimensions is more fully developed. Special attention is given to how the dimension relates to individuals, families and communities that may have been marginalized due to their socioeconomic status, cultural values, linguistic, ethnic and racial characteristics, educational attainment, etc. To facilitate understanding, each of the four dimensions is addressed somewhat separately. However, it must always be remembered that in actuality, the dimensions are embedded or embodied in one another, as represented in Figure 1. Each dimension impacts and is impacted by all the others. Additionally, the dimensions are used in tandem; that is, real-world literacy always involves all four of the dimensions operating together. We need, therefore, to resist the notion that particular dimensions, such as the linguistic, are learned or used before others, such as the sociocultural, when the individual reads or writes.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that individuals are typically unable to consciously and explicitly talk about much of their dimensional knowledge. They are, however, able to employ these resources when transacting with print. This implicit knowledge is in contrast to school knowledge, which learners must be able to explicitly “talk about” in very

direct ways in order for it to be recognized or “counted” as knowledge. Such a distinction between implicit and explicit knowledge is important to recognize as we examine the nature of literacy and consider ways to help students, families, and communities develop the implicit knowledge that undergirds all literacy use.

The Linguistic and Other Sign Systems Dimension: The Reader and Writer as Code Breaker and Code Maker

In the discussion of the linguistic and other sign systems dimension, three issues are addressed: the nature of language, dialects, and literacy in two languages.

The Nature of Language

The linguistic and other sign system dimension represents all the individual understands about how written language operates as a vehicle for communication. Smith (2004) has termed this visible aspect of language the surface structure. The surface structure consists of various systems or cues (Goodman, 1996), such as text structure, genre, semantics, syntax, orthographics, and graphophonemics. As the word “system” implies, there are rules for how the cues are organized internally and how they interact with one another. The syntactic cue system, for example, represents the rules that govern the grammatical arrangements of words within the sentence. Similarly, the orthographic system specifies the spelling patterns within words and the graphophonemic system reflects the relationship between letters and sounds. Based on literacy experiences—or lack thereof—in various communicative contexts, the individual may have more or less knowledge of, or control over, particular systems than others.

Individuals, however, do not typically encounter individual systems of language or cues in isolation—except perhaps in school contexts. Rather, they encounter “texts,” units of meaning of any size that form a unified whole and that are intended to communicate to some community of people (de Beaugrande, 1980; Gee, 2012; Halliday, 1973, 1974). These texts may be nonlinguistic as well as linguistic. Paintings, photographs, dances, musical scores are all texts or “configurations of signs [cues] that provide a potential for meaning” (Smagorinsky, 2001, p. 137). More important is the fact that many texts are multimodal; they contain linguistic as well as nonlinguistic sign systems. Pictures, tables, figures, colors, various font sizes and shapes are frequently part of what makes a text a text (Waller, 1996). The advent of computer technology has expanded the multimodality of texts as well. The use of sound and video, along with the

embedding of hypertexts, expands our notion of what texts are traditionally thought to be (Kinzer & Leander, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2002; Wysocki, 2004).

It is beyond the scope of this article to delineate all of the various cues available to, and used by, readers and writers. However, the graphophonemic system—letter and sound relationships—will be briefly addressed because of the privilege it has received in many reading programs within our schools. This is especially the case in schools with high rates of poverty and low educational attainment. Students in these situations oftentimes receive “linguistically reduced” instruction and remediation because of an over concern with letters and sounds (e.g., Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2002).

The graphophonemic system expresses the rules for relating letters and sounds within the language. In English, this relationship involves 26 letters and approximately 44 sounds. The challenge is that there are far more individual sounds in the spoken language that must be systematically linked to a much more limited number of letters. A rule system for the linking of letters and sounds must account for this discrepancy.

There have been a number of attempts at generating a rule system that accounts for letter–sound relationships in English. The research by Berdiansky, Cronnel, and Koehler (1969) is particularly noteworthy and revealing. The researchers examined the letter–sound relationships in 6,092 one- and two-syllable words in the comprehension vocabularies of 6- to 9-year-old children. For this corpus of words, 211 letter–sound relationships were found (83 for the consonants, 128 for the vowels). One hundred sixty-six rules existed (60 for the consonants, 106 for the vowels), each representing at least 10 instances of the given letter–sound correspondence. Accompanying these rules were 45 exceptions (23 consonants, 22 vowels). This research largely corroborates work by Clymer (1996), Emans (1967), and Bailey (1967).

As is readily apparent, any attempt to teach and or learn all of the rules and exceptions as the sole basis for reading and spelling development would be difficult at best. Further compounding the issue is that the rules fail to account for a variety of dialects. Even when the rule can be applied, it may lead to a pronunciation that is at variance from that of the reader or writer. In such cases, the child may apply the phonic rule correctly, yet still fail to recognize or spell the word correctly. However, it is not uncommon for children living in poverty—who frequently speak nonstandard forms of English—to receive literacy instruction with a strong

emphasis on phonics and a focus on letter-sound correspondences (Block, et al., 2004; Duke, 2000; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). Because of this emphasis, other language systems such semantics or text structure are ignored and other reading strategies beyond sounding out—e.g., use of context—are not addressed. At this point, a short discussion of dialects is warranted given their connections to various communities.

Language Variation or Dialects

Dialects represent the impact of the sociocultural dimension on that of the linguistic. Every individual speaks at least one dialect based on the community within which he or she holds membership. Linguistically, dialects are simply differences in the linguistic rules for how the language operates within a particular language or discourse community. Nonstandard dialects are as rule-governed and internally logical as standard forms and can effectively express the ideas of the social groups that use the forms (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007; Harmon & Wilson, 2006; LeMoine, 2001).

This is not to deny that particular variations of English have more status, power, or cachet than others. In fact, standard English might more accurately be termed the “power dialect” because it reflects the language used by dominant groups in U.S. society. All dialects are not held to be of equal value or worth. A wide range of judgments (e.g., socioeconomic status, educational background, innate intelligence, and morality, to name but a few) are made about an individual based on his or her language use.

Traditionally, the low rates of literacy attainment of particular groups have been attributed to, among other things, dialect. The use of nonstandard forms of English is perceived as interfering with and therefore inhibiting reading and writing development. However, in general, dialect has not been found to interfere with the making of meaning through written discourse. Rather, literacy abilities are highly correlated with economic status, the educational level of the parents, and teacher and curricular responses to the language forms the students bring to the classroom. Teacher response can be particularly problematic when they fail to recognize the well-formed linguistic system of the nonstandard dialect spoken by the children. The lack of teacher acceptance and negative judgments about the students’ language forms then become impediments to their literacy development (Delpit, 2012; Young, Barrett, Young-Rivera, & Lovejoy, 2014). Not surprisingly, those groups with high economic and educational status tend to speak a standard form of English and are more fully welcomed into the linguistic life of the classroom.

Literacy in Two Languages

There is little doubt that the linguistic dimension of the first (home) language impacts the development of the linguistic dimension of English language. However, we need to move beyond the notion of “language interference” when children bring a home language into the classroom. The nature and extent of the impact of the nonEnglish language varies based on the similarities between writing systems, oral proficiency in the second language, as well as the individual’s literacy development in the first language (Genesee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2006; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995, 1996). On the linguistic level, first language literacy knowledge actually supports or facilitates second language literacy development when there is similarity in surface level features—e.g., relationship between letters and sounds, spelling patterns, grammatical ordering of words, structuring of discourse. When a linguistic feature is shared, what is learned in the first language can be used in a supportive manner to the second. However, dissimilarities, if applied, can also serve as impediments.

It is important to acknowledge as well as to stress that all children, regardless of linguistic background, bring a developing control over at least one spoken language system into the school. Children do not enter the instructional context without knowing how to talk. For those children who have encountered two languages in the home, they bring developing knowledge of both languages to the classroom. Despite what is popularly believed, these children do not confuse the two languages. Rather, from the very beginning, the children develop two separate linguistic systems and know when to appropriately use each language within various communicative contexts (Edelsky, 1986; Genesee, 1989; Goodz, 1994; Hornberger, 1989). When code switching—the use of two languages in a communicative setting—does occur, it is frequently because students lack the vocabulary in the second language, the person being addressed knows both languages, or, as a bilingual colleague noted, because it just “feels” better to say it in one language than the other. Even here, code switching occurs more frequently in spoken than written discourse (Dressler & Kamil, 2006).

When bilingual students struggle with their English literacy development, the struggle seems to be with comprehension, not basic decoding skills. One reason for this is because of the reductionistic reading curriculum these students frequently receive. The instructional focus is on teaching letter and sound correspondences. Little emphasis is given to the cognitive dimension and strategies for making meaning (Freeman & Freeman, 2011).

The Cognitive Dimension: The Reader and Writer as Meaning Maker

An examination of the cognitive dimension of literacy moves us from a focus on the language itself to an examination of the mind of the individual. A cognitive discussion of literacy concerns those mental processes and strategies the individual engages so as to construct meaning. The cognitive dimension is divided into three sections. The first addresses the role of perception in the literacy processes. Second, the cognitive strategies involved in reading and comprehending are discussed. The examination of the cognitive dimension concludes with a look into the mind of the writer.

Readers Perceiving

Although contested by some (e.g., NICHD, 2000; Stanovich, 2000), many researchers argue that the perception of any particular system of language—e.g., letters, words, syntax—is impacted by the linguistic context in which the system is embedded (e.g., Cattell, 1885; Paulson & Freeman, 2003; Rumelhart, 2004). Goodman (1993, 1996) and Smith (2004), among others, have argued that readers selectively “pick” from the graphic display. Not all available print is processed; rather, the brain selects just that which is necessary for the construction of meaning. Perceptual information is not limited to the graphics of a particular word. Readers also utilize the syntactic and semantic environment—i.e., context—within which any word is embedded as well as their background knowledge. Word identification is therefore impacted and facilitated by multiple sources of information, print and nonprint.

The very nature of words themselves, according to Weaver (2002) and Wilde (2000), contributes to the reader’s ability to engage in selective sampling. Consonants are far more important to identify than vowels because they provide the reader with more information about a word’s identity. Additionally, the number of rules for linking letters to sounds are fewer and far more systematic and regular for constants than for vowels. Similarly, the beginnings and endings of words are more useful than the middles in cueing word recognition (Kucer, 2011b). Readers can better predict a word from its beginning and ending than from its middle. When it comes to perception and reading, all letters are not created equally.

Readers Reading

The reading process is based on a relationship between a reader and writer. The process unfolds within the environment that brings the reader

to the text in the first place. This situational context gives rise to the literacy event, influences the individual's purpose for reading, and has a direct impact on how the print on the page is sampled. Based on this sampling, the reader employs various strategies to construct meaning. These strategies might be understood as being similar to the tools a carpenter uses to build a house. The carpenter employs hammers, saws, and rulers to nail, cut, and measure the wood that will form the house. Similarly, the reader samples visual information, predicts meaning, and integrates meanings into a coherent whole (Goodman, 1996; Goodman & Goodman, 2004).

Throughout the entire process of constructing an understanding of the text, the reader monitors and evaluates the meanings being generated. The reader asks such questions as, "Does what I am reading make sense?" "Does it sound like language?" "Does it meet my purpose for reading?" "Does it make sense in the situation?" Continuing the carpenter analogy, it would be similar to the carpenter looking at what was being built and evaluating whether it reflected what was intended. When the answer to such questions is "no"—that is, the use of the reading strategies has not been completely successful—the reader has a number of options available (Kucer, 1995; Kucer & Silva, 2013). The reader can:

- stop reading and rethink what was read,
- reread previous portions of the text,
- read ahead to gather more information,
- read on to see if there is need to revise,
- form a tentative prediction and read on to see if it makes sense,
- substitute a different meaning,
- sound it out,
- ignore the problem,
- seek assistance from an outside source (e.g., dictionary, encyclopedia, another reader),
- use text features (e.g., illustrations, charts, graphs, headings and subheadings),
- or stop reading altogether.

The linking of letters and their corresponding sounds is one strategy that all readers utilize. However, readers use this strategy judiciously given the many other strategies available as well as the rather unreliable relationship between letters and sounds in English. This is in contrast to the literacy instruction commonly received by many children living in poverty or students whose home language is other than English. Their toolboxes are filled with letters, sounds, and sounding out, and little more (Freeman & Freeman, 2011; Moustafa & Land, 2002).

Reading in Two Languages

Reading in two languages is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in the United States. The bilingual population is extremely diverse and the degree of biliteracy can vary among bilingual students (Brisk & Harrington, 2000). To address all these possible variations is beyond the scope of this article. The focus here is on the cognitive processes used when individuals are proficient readers in their home (first) language and in the English (second) language.

Biliterate students are not engaged in altogether different processes when reading in two languages. In general, there is a positive and supportive relationship between the processes and strategies used in the first and second languages (Allen, 1991; Cummins, 1991; Fitzgerald, 1995; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995, 1996; Weber, 1996). Individuals who are proficient in two written language systems are frequently able to successfully employ strategies used in the first language for use in the second language (Freeman & Freeman, 2006). In both languages, readers monitor their processing through such metacognitive procedures as evaluating, revising (e.g., rereading, reading on, substituting), and predicting upcoming meanings and structures. Biliterates make inferences, draw conclusions, and ask questions. In English as well as in the home language, readers draw on their background knowledge of content and the systems of language to make sense of the ideas being encountered. Vocabulary items that are similar in both languages—i.e., cognates—such as the Spanish word <producto> for the English word <product> are also relied on.

Differences in biliterate readers are evident as well. Biliterates may translate—code switch—from one language to the other, and this translation occurs in both directions. Occasionally, miscues made in English can be attributed to the use of syntactic knowledge of the first language. This is especially the case when the reader has a strong spoken command of the first language and less command of the second. The ability to use first language strategies in second language is strongly associated with well-developed English oral language as well as developed literacy in the home language (Genesee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2006; Geva, 2006; Lesaux & Geva, 2006).

Although readers successfully employ a wealth of available strategies when reading in both languages, the extent to which monitoring and revision strategies are necessary may vary. It is not uncommon for biliterates to encounter unknown vocabulary more frequently than monolinguals. This problem may be compounded when encountering

academic text in the second language. In addition to lexical items, biliterates engaged in academic text can encounter unknown grammatical structures or unfamiliar text structures (Scarcella, 2002). The cognitive energy required to make such repairs may limit the attention the reader is able to apply to understanding the overall meanings of the text. In general, biliterates tend to monitor comprehension and engage reading strategies more slowly (Fitzgerald, 1995).

Readers Comprehending

The idea that comprehension is a constructive process of meaning making is well established in the research literature (e.g., Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Fox & Alexander, 2009; Kintsch, 1998; Pearson, 2009; Rand Reading Study Group, 2002; Smagorinsky, 2001). Readers, as active participants, are conceived as building an understanding of a text based on such factors as their background, the purpose for reading, and the text itself. Reader background reflects not only linguistic and cognitive experiences with the world, but sociocultural encounters as well. Given such activity on the part of the reader, it should come as no surprise that the meanings ultimately constructed may not be limited to only those represented in print.

Comprehension is built on making connections, whether they are text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world. Such connections frequently result in readers who "go beyond the information given" (Kucer, 2011a, 2014b). Some reader meanings may match those of the author, some may be modifications, and others may represent entirely new ideas. This synthesis occurs because "the knower, the knowing, and the known are seen as aspects of 'one process.' Each element conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually constituted situation" (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 3). Text meanings, once conceived as static, are now understood as dynamic and even variable in nature.

Although it is often believed that, in general, readers share an understanding of what a text "says," this sharing of meaning may not be as extensive as commonly thought. A transactional view of comprehension sees such variance in readers' understandings as a natural part of the comprehending process. Different readers may understand the same text in radically different ways and these ways may not always match those of the author. The notion of any text containing its own autonomous meaning independent of reader and context is therefore suspect. A reader may *fully* understand a text, but understand it *differently* than the person asking the questions (Kucer, 2015; Rumelhart, 1984).

The prior experiences of the reader—i.e., background knowledge—

exert a powerful influence on how the reader transacts with the text and how the text is ultimately understood (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Kintsch, 1998; Tierney & Pearson, 1994; Weaver, 2002). Comprehension is as much about what the reader brings to the page as it is about what the author puts on the page. In fact, the impact of background on comprehension is so powerful that it can “trump” all other factors, such as poor processing abilities or unfamiliarity with the structure of the text.

It is important to remember that background knowledge is culturally coded and linked to issues of power and status (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). It emerges out of the individual’s transactions with the world and the various groups in which the reader holds membership. This being the case, the children of some communities bring experiences to school that are reflected in the texts read, whereas others do not. All too frequently, a disconnect between texts and readers occurs when students come from disenfranchised communities and are expected to comprehend texts that do not reflect nor value their experiences. These students may lack the relevant background knowledge to bring to school texts and fail to comprehend, regardless of their reading abilities (Collins, 2011; Duto, 2009; Ebe, 2010; Hicks, 2002; White, 2009).

In many ways, The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) focus on the standardization of knowledge. The concern is that this standardization may blind teachers who work with diverse student populations to the value of the experiences their students bring to the classroom (Compton-Lilly & Steward, 2013; Orellana & Rodriguez, 2013). The acceptability and worth of all experiences, knowledges, and abilities are sifted through the CCSS rather than judged on their own merits.

Writers Writing

Similar to what occurs when readers read, the process of writing is also impacted by a number of factors and the relationship between the writer and the reader. The writer operates within a context of situation that influences the individual’s purpose for writing. The author’s purpose and the audience for whom the text is written are ultimately reflected in both the author’s use of language and the content presented. The more that the author and reader share the same purpose, language, and background knowledge, the smoother the process of writing.

Based on purpose and audience, the writer searches his or her background knowledge for information relevant to the communicative context. This search continues throughout the entire process of writing.

The writer engages a variety of strategies, such as organizing ideas, planning future meanings, selecting language that reflects the meanings to be expressed, to transform this background into written language.

It is important to keep in mind that writing is not a linear, step-by-step process. Rather, our current understanding conceives writing to be much more transactive and recursive in nature (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 2000). Writers shuttle back and forth in their use of the strategies. As the writer attempts to find the appropriate language for his or her meanings, for example, new ideas or insights may be discovered. This in turn may result in modifications, i.e., revisions. Similarly, as the writer ponders the meanings that have been put into language, the need for revisions may also be discovered. Writing is not simply a think it → say it process.

As writers initially attempt to discover and formulate their meanings and get them onto the page—or screen—they typically will withhold judgments that would initiate revision. The focus is on generating and organizing their main ideas, not on such things as grammar, spelling, word choice, and penmanship. This stance allows for the free-flow of ideas and the exploration of knowledge that might be relevant for the writing task. Only once the text is “right with the writer” do surface level revisions tend to predominate (McCutchen, Teske, & Bankston, 2008).

Throughout the entire process, the writer monitors and evaluates the meanings being generated. The writer asks: “Does what I am writing make sense?” “Does it sound like language?” “Does it meet my purpose for writing this text in the first place?” When the answer to such questions is “no,” the writer engages in revision strategies. In many respects, revision strategies are at the heart of the writing process. Similar to the reader, the writer also has a number of options from which to select (Kucer, 1995; Kucer & Silva, 2013). The writer can:

- brainstorm possible ideas or alternatives,
- reread what has been written so far,
- skip to a part of the text where the writer knows what is to be written and return later,
- write it as best as possible and return later,
- write it several different ways and select the best one,
- write whatever comes to mind,
- talk about it with a friend,
- read other texts to get some ideas,
- or stop writing for a while and come back later.

Revisions can result in a number of modifications. Information can be deleted or new information added. Existing meanings can be substituted

with other meanings or meanings can be synthesized and combined. Writers may also revise through the reordering of relationships among ideas or giving more or less prominence to particular meanings through refocusing.

The Sociocultural Dimension:

The Reader and Writer as Text User and Text Critic

The sociocultural dimension of literacy shifts attention from the text (linguistic) and the mind (cognitive) to that of the group (social). It represents the reader's knowledge of how to use texts in socially appropriate ways and the ability to read and write critically. Not simply an individual act of language and cognition, literacy use also represents patterned social acts of a group. Literacy practices are recurring events within a particular community or social group (Heath, 1983; Reder, 1994; Scribner & Cole, 1978). Therefore, literacy is not autonomous. Rather, texts and minds are embedded within literacy practices, are socially situated, and ideologically formed (Gee, 2004, 2012; Street, 2001). Literacy occurs not simply because an individual possesses and applies the necessary linguistic and cognitive strategies and processes, but because group membership requires it (Devine, 1994).

Two aspects of the sociocultural dimension are relevant here, the nature of literacy events and practices used by various social groups to mediate their interactions with the world and the nature of texts and critical literacy.

The Nature of Literacy Events and Literacy Practices

By our very nature, we are social beings and belong to various groups. We all belong, for example, to cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, gender, and family groups. We may be part of religious organizations and possibly hold membership in such psychological groups as being a jock, brain, or hipster. Our social identity consists of the totality of the various groups in which we hold membership.

Literacy practices are one expression of the knowledge, values, and behaviors of any group. Each group "has rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge in literacy events" (Heath, 1982, p. 50). Each group sponsors the use of particular texts and their reading and writing in particular ways (Brandt, 1998, 2001). Therefore, the literacy behaviors of the individual express the literacy practices of the various social groups of which the individual is a member. Table 2 (Kucer, 2013, 2014a) contains a list of typical reoccurring literacy practices that have been found in a number of studies (e.g., Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Heath, 1983; Taylor &

Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Table 2
Some Common Literacy Practices

<i>Type of Practice</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Genre Examples</i>
Daily Living	Literacy activities that relate to ordinary family life, including obtaining food, maintaining shelter and health, finances, shopping, paying bills, care of children.	Shopping lists, bills and checks, budgets
Entertainment or Recreational	Literacy activities that relate to passing the time in an enjoyable or interesting manner.	Television guides, theater listings and reviews, magazines, newspapers, books
Spiritual	Literacy activities related to worship or metaphysical endeavors.	Hymnals, bulletins and newsletters, scripture reading, order of the service guidelines
Work-related	Literacy activities related to one's place of employment.	Office memorandums, order forms, applications, policies and procedures guidelines
Social-interactional	Literacy activities related to written communication with friends or relatives; literacy used to build and maintain social relationships.	Friendly letters, e-mail, greeting cards
Educational	Literacy activities related to	Textbooks, reports

	increasing one's knowledge.	and papers, "how to" materials, school forms, academic journals
News-related	Literacy activities to gain information about local, state, regional, national, or world events or third parties.	Newspapers and news magazines, flyers and bulletins
Archival-related	Literacy activities related to materials that are saved and referred to when necessary.	Report cards, birth certificates, paid bills, insurance policies, telephone numbers, leases

Schools are primary sites for literacy sponsorship in American society. Both adults and students expect that literacy will be formally taught and sustained throughout the students' academic careers. Like any institution, schools have specific rules or norms for how language is to be used and how texts are to be formed. These rules and forms may affirm, build on, and extend the way in which language is used in the learner's home and community, may require adaptation in language rules and forms, or may directly contradict home language patterns (Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981).

A central feature in many classroom lessons is the initiation-reply-evaluation (IRE) sequence. As documented by Cazden (2001) and Heath (1983), the teacher initiates the IRE sequence by asking a question. In contrast to authentic questions, it is clear to all involved that the teacher knows the answers to the questions being asked. A student is then identified to respond or reply to the question and the teacher explicitly evaluates the adequacy of the response.

As well as norms for literacy lessons, there are also rules for what text meanings are to be privileged. In the early grades, the focus is on the asking and answering of "what" questions, for example, "What did the boy do after he planted the seed?" Selective attention is given to the segmentation of language and meanings in the text as they are discussed and analyzed. Students are expected to listen as an audience to the questions and answers and then to respond and display what they know when called on. This display of knowledge, however, may be limited to the factual meanings in the text that the teacher has solicited; the

incorporation of nonschool experiences into the answers is oftentimes discouraged.

This focus on text meanings—privileging the text over what the reader brings to the page—is prominent in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; Shanahan, 2013) currently being implemented in most states. The instructional strategy of close reading requires that interactions with, and responses to, text must be grounded on textual evidence. However, instructional strategies that too often expect readers to focus on text-based meanings alone may risk producing readers who passively interact with text in a surface level, literal manner. It may also discourage students from bringing their cultural experiences to the text because they are not valued (Kucer, 2015).

The Nature of Texts and Reading Critically

Knowing how to appropriately engage in the literacy practices of the various communities in which one holds membership is one aspect of the sociocultural dimension of literacy. The second is the ability to read the word and the world through a critical lens (Freire, 1998). Texts and their meanings represent and are sponsored by particular groups representing particular ideologies or beliefs (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998; Brandt, 1990, 1998; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Pennycook, 2001). As such, texts, whether encountered inside or outside of the classroom, have the potential to significantly impact both literacy and concept development. Because meanings are seldom if ever neutral—they always assert a particular perspective related to a particular individual as a member of a particular group—text meanings reflect particular worldviews of particular groups. Just as important, meanings have the ability to cover up other meanings, to suppress other stories, other voices. Meanings reveal as well as conceal.

The Eurocentric knowledge that many Americans have about colonial explorations of the Western Hemisphere, for example, covers or hides meanings that represent an indigenous perspective (Bigelow, 1989; Bigelow, Miner, & Peterson, 1991). Use of the words *discover*, *New World*, *savage Indians*, and *America* position both Europeans and native peoples. Alternate positions and perspectives are reflected in such words as *steal*, *homeland*, *one with nature*, and *civilized*. However, these words and the views they represent are oftentimes not encountered in school and other institutional discourse. When the origin and nature of knowledge are viewed from this perspective, the “socialness” of knowing is made visible. Knowledge is understood to be socially constructed and promoted by like-

mindful individuals. Knowledge reflects a particular view, a particular position of writer and reader, at a particular point in time, and within a particular context.

As discussed in the cognitive dimension, we found that readers construct meanings from their transactions with written discourse. This transaction is conceived as being among reader, text, and author. As part of this transaction, the individual's own particular background knowledge impacts in a very direct way how any text is comprehended. However, readers and writers have multiple social identities. These identities reflect and are formed by the particular experiences that members of the group have had with one another and with other groups in the wider society. Therefore, the background the individual brings to the page represents not only his or her own unique experiences, but also the experiences of the various groups to which the individual belongs. These group identities impact how the individual interprets any piece of written discourse. The cognitive transaction is widened beyond the individual and conceives of reader, writer, and text as reflections and products of relevant interpretive communities.

Given the positions that authors endeavor to make readers assume, proficient readers engage in critical analysis as they work their way through text. They reflect on such issues as: 1) Who made, constructed, or originated the perspective and ideas in this text? 2) Who might benefit from this perspective and these ideas? 3) Who might need to learn this perspective and these ideas? 4) Why might someone choose to learn this perspective and these ideas? 5) Who might be harmed from this perspective and these ideas? 6) What alternate perspectives and ideas might be constructed? Through such questions, readers attempt to make explicit that which is oftentimes implicit in nature (Heffernan & Lewison, 2005; Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008).

The Developmental Dimension:

The Learner as Scientist and Construction Worker

The developmental dimension addresses how the learner becomes a code breaker and code maker, a meaning maker, and a text user and critic. It concerns both the processes as well as the participants involved in the learning of the linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of literacy. This relationship between the developmental dimension and the other dimensions is why in Figure 1 the developmental engulfs or is wrapped around the other dimensions. Each literacy event reflects those

dimensions of literacy that the individual does and does not control in any given situation.

Learners are actively involved in the developmental process, building an understanding for themselves of the way written language operates linguistically, cognitively, and socioculturally. The individual goes about learning language much as a scientist goes about developing scientific knowledge: through data collection, rule generation, rule testing, and rule modification. The individual attempts to make sense of the language through generating hypotheses or rules for how a particular aspect of the language might operate. Using these hypotheses as a guide, the learner engages in language use and receives communicative feedback from others. Based on the feedback provided, the hypotheses are modified as warranted. Adults and more capable literacy users play a mediational role in this process, supporting and scaffolding the learners' engagements with literacy.

Until recently, the notion of the learner generating rules for understanding written language was largely ignored. Written language development was thought to come about through direct, segmented, and skill-by-skill instruction. However, we now know that learners also attempt to make sense of the print that surrounds them (Dyson, 2003; Lindfors, 2008; Maderazo & Martens, 2008). There is little evidence to suggest that written language is learned through imitation to any great extent. The individual's stance is not to replicate or copy the language that is encountered. Rather, the learner attempts to understand the social and cognitive meanings being expressed and the systems of language that serve as the avenue for their expression. Through such attempts at understanding, the language is constructed.

Teachers' behaviors and the materials they use are the primary mediational vehicles within most classrooms. Mediations represent the support structures or scaffolds that are built around a learner (Bruner 1986; Gee, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). These configurations, similar to those surrounding a building under construction, provide the social assistance necessary for the learner to meaningfully engage in the particular undertaking at hand, such as in reading a book to locate specific information. The power of such scaffolds is that the learner encounters the entire activity within a meaningful, purposeful context. And, although the learner may be capable of engaging in only portions of the activity, he or she is aware of the scope of the unfolding literacy event.

With time, experience, and growing competency on the part of the learner, the teacher begins to lessen the support provided—deconstructs the scaffold. The learner is encouraged to take on responsibility for certain

aspects of the activity that were once performed solely by the teacher or by the teacher and learner working collaboratively. As the scaffold is dismantled, what the teacher once did is now the responsibility of the learner. Strategies and processes that were once social and external in nature become internal, autonomous, and self-governing.

Interestingly, the type of literacy mediations various groups of students receive tends to vary based on the status of the groups. Students from middle class, college-educated homes are far more likely to receive instruction that is more multidimensional in nature. Not only are students taught about letters, sounds, and sounding out strategies, but they also receive instruction about text structure, use of background knowledge and context, reading and writing for meaning, and engaging texts critically. In contrast, students from poorer, less educated communities tend to receive instruction focused on language parts and phonic strategies. This unequal distribution of knowledge about literacy tends to reflect the unequal distribution of economic wealth and sociocultural status in our society. It also means that the instruction received by such low status groups is less engaging, interesting, and motivating as instructional materials are focused less on meaningful texts and more on pieces of language.

Keeping Literacy Complex for All Communities

There is little debate about literacy and its varied, dynamic, and multidimensional nature. Readers and writers draw upon their linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural resources as they crack and make the code, generate meaning, and use and critique written language. The instructional challenge for our schools is to maintain this complexity for all students, regardless of the communities to which they belong. Despite what literacy curricula may indicate, there are many paths to literacy and no one-size-fits-all. Schools, as middle class institutions, need to be cognizant of the fact that their literacy ways may not reflect the ways of their students. Students should not be sidelined simply because they do not fit into school literacy norms and standards. This is not to say that students should not have opportunities to learn the “mainstream” ways. However, respecting and beginning where students are located is the most fruitful place to initiate instruction.

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