The Social Wave

For many of us who had been immersed in cognition, the social wave was an epiphany or breakthrough that was equivalent to changing our schema for or lens with which we examined reading and moreover literacy. In the 1970s and 80s, significant advances occurred in our understandings of and approaches to teaching reading and writing. At the same time, we were developing an increasing awareness of the role of social factors in a range of psychological activities that had previously been shaped more by a consideration of individual differences than social or cultural contexts. During this era, the social had largely been positioned by educators as a variable influencing learning to read, rather than a key facet of the nature of reading itself. The social thus tended to be studied as a separate factor (one of many) and as a mediator—a means to an end, but not as an end unto itself or as integral to the nature of reading or literacy itself.

Perpetuating this orientation was a primary focus on the learning of the individual or individuals, instead of the event. Our notions of learning thus tended to be tethered to an "inside the head" view of reading (i.e., related to individual skill and strategy development)—a view that predominated in terms of teaching and testing. In keeping with This "inside the head" perspective defined reading development as a progression of a set of skills and strategies—treating the social as fixed, separate, and external rather than integrated in the process of reading itself. The social was still seen as a relevant mediating factor; indeed, during the height of the cognitive revolution, as schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Anderson & Pearson, 1983) became, for a brief period, the dominant paradigm, most of the key studies demonstrating the power of schemas (abstract conceptual frames hypothesized to organize knowledge in long term memory) were based on studying the impact of social and cultural schemata, such as weddings, religious rites, or ethic discourse traditions). This was also the period in which a number of learning theorists were spurred by translations in the 1970s and 80s of the research of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues (e.g., Wertsch, 1985), who had highlighted the nature and the significant role of the social in mediating development of the individual—the "in the head" learning. Consequently, "inside the head" views of reading largely entrenched and positioned the social as serving learning (i.e., as opposed to the integrated social model of learning)—recognizing the social's mediating role in the service of reading improvement.

This emphasis on the social as a mediator to learning tended to be emphasized despite a growing interest in the connections between reading and writing. The reading and writing

connection, at its very foundation, was tied to two key social dynamics: 1) The notion that meaning making involves inherently social transactions between readers, writers, readers-as-writers, writers-as-readers, and others; and 2) The recognition of the important classroom practices of dyadic conferencing and classroom communities in relation to reading and writing development. Yet despite increasing interests in and awareness of these connections—highlighting the inextricable and significant link between the social and learning to read—the orientation to an "inside the head" approach prevailed (albeit with the understanding that social elements only serve as key mediators).

Around this time there was also a heightened realization of the power of learning in the company of others (movements such as cooperative learning as promoted by David Johnson & Roger Johnson, or Robert Slavin as well as recognition of the influence of teaching practices on students' participation (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Slavin 1980). Accordingly, a number of researchers examining participation structures in the classroom found that classroom reading activities involved an array of structures that could be examined through a social lens. Similarly, the situated character of learning also became a focus of study, as a new brand of psychology, which eventually morphed into what is now called the learning sciences (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018) examined whether or not approaches to teaching were aligned with how learning occurred in the real world, which is often much more social and collaborative than the underlying models of learning in schools. For example, based upon a comparison of how learning occurs in the real world versus its occurrence in schools, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) argued for an orientation to learning that was situated; embedded in the social. Table 1 illustrates their comparison of learning among "just plain folks" (JPL), "students," and "practitioners."

Table 1.

Just Plain Folk versus Practitioner versus Student Activity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

	Just Plain Folks	Students	Practitioner
Reasoning with	Casual stories	Laws and theories	Causal models
Acting on	Situations	Symbols	Conceptual situations
Resolving	Emerging and complex problems & dilemmas	Well-defined problems	Ill-defined and complex problems

Producing	Negotiable meanings Socially constructed understandings	Fixed meanings Immutable concepts	Negotiable meanings & Socially constructed understandings

Brown et al. argued for the importance of learning from a practitioner orientation, with forms of collective problem solving and collaboration with others. But again, the social served as a means of socially constructing skills and meaning rather than functioning as an integrated, socially-based form of learning. In other words, the value of the social was in promoting better individual development.

Making the social wave

Foundational to the social wave were anthropologically-based perspectives applied to communication, including literacy. From the perspective of some, the advent of writing systems was deemed as a lifeline to development—advancing reasoning abilities as well as economic, social, and political advantages. Some argued that literate communities were advantaged in ways that contributed to what they deemed to be a great divide between the literate and non-literate in terms of reasoning, apart from the social networking advantages that were afforded. (For an example, see Jack Goody's 1968 discussion of the development of writing and its social nature and consequences). To some extent, while the social nature of literacy was highlighted, notions of a great divide were put to rest by Scribner and Cole's (1981) analyses of the unique Vai communities in Liberia (which included literate and non-literate peoples). Their attempts to assess abstract reasoning suggested that there was little social and economic advantage or difference in reasoning abilities across literate and non-literate populations. Countering the view that literate communities, Scribner and Cole demonstrated how different literacies might prompt different social affordances but no distinct advantages in reasoning. In other words, there was no evidence of a literate advantage befitting the characterization of a great divide.

In a related vein, Dell Hymes and John Gumperz advanced a number of studies examining literacy in use by enlisting what they deemed an "ethnography of communication" or "interactional sociolinguistics" within selected speech communities (e.g., Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1992; Gumperz, 1967; 1981; Hymes, 1964; 1976; 1994). For example, in an effort to unpack the forms of prestige language forms versus other language forms they highlighted the prowess of speakers of less prestigeous dialects including forms of code

switching that might be enlisted by speakers of less powerful dialects as they move across codes (prestigious and less-prestigious) in a form he termed diglossic.

Discussions of differences in these codes extended to schooling. Indeed, such issues and debates were brought to the fore in discussions of language differences (as contrasted with the more common attribution of deficit) by Labov and others (Labov, 1969; 1982), in conjunction with concerns around matters of dialect. One memorable example was the infamous federal court case in the U.S. in which African American parents sued Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School in Ann Arbor (Michigan) for denying their children an education as a result of interactional problems tied to their dialect (see Side comment III 4 b 1; Fiske, 1981). The plaintiffs in the Ann Arbor case were able to show the cumulative effects of the school personnel's ignorance of their children's backgrounds, especially with regard to language, on decisions related to opportunity and placement. They highlighted the extent to which a school or teacher's lack of understanding and failure to enlist a socio-cultural lens unfairly position language differences as deficits, and in turn restrict the opportunities that students are afforded. The case also highlighted how these issues manifested themselves in the views of the public. As Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1992), who discussed the aforementioned Ann Arbor case and a number of other studies of learning, argued:

> This work showed how these aspects of the communication system provided for or denied access to learning in situations when the actual verbalized message was only one part of the total system (Erickson, 1979; Florio, 1978; Philips, 1972). Work that continued in this vein showed that the differences in instructional practices and misunderstandings between teacher and ethnically different students were mostly the product of interactional constraints, not conscious prejudice. Misunderstanding both linguistic messages and implicit cues provided reinforcement for differential instruction and learning, unless these culturally coded messages could be understood (McDermott, 1974). These studies alerted us to the communicative character of the social system of the classroom and , most important, to the fact that access to learning opportunities is determined socio-communicatively and is not initially a matter of cognitive understanding of language differences. (p. 165)

Side comment III 4 b 1.

The Ann Arbor case drew national attention. As reported in The New York Times *(Fiske, 1981) at the time:*

> *In his decision, Judge Joiner said that ignorance of this dialect on the part of teachers can create "a psychological barrier to learning" in students. "The child may withdraw or may act out frustrations and may not learn to read," he wrote. "A language barrier develops when teachers, in helping the child switch from the home (black English) language to standard English, refuse to admit the existence of a language that is the acceptable way of talking in his local community."*

> *The plaintiffs hailed it as a "major victory" that could be used elsewhere to force changes in the education of poor black youngsters. The school board said it was "confused."*

> *To implement the decision, Judge Joiner and school officials agreed to a plan under which 40 teachers at the King School, where the plaintiffs were enrolled, would undergo 40 hours of "consciousness raising" about black English." (The case did not - as many persons assumed - require teachers to use black English as the language of instruction).*

> *…*

> *The decision aroused considerable attention in the academic community, and several national conferences have been conducted on the education of dialect speakers. By contrast, the hopes of the plaintiffs and their representatives that the Ann Arbor case would set a precedent for decisions elsewhere requiring schools to take special actions in behalf of children coming from homes where standard English is not spoken have proved vain.*

> *One exception came in January when Federal District Judge William Wayne Justice, in ruling that bilingual programs in Texas public schools were seriously flawed, declared, "Both the language and the cultural heritage of these children were uniformly treated with intolerance and disrespect."*

> *…*

> *The allegation of insensitivity to the students' "home language" was based on a relatively new section of the United States Code that says students cannot be denied equal educational opportunity by the failure of a school to "take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs." (paras. 7–9; 16–17; 22)*

At the same time, colleagues of Hymes and Gumperz, extended their work to studies of communities and families making visible the social interaction patterns of different families as they relate to matters of schooling. Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) report of her nine-year study of two communities (which she called Trackton and Roadville) documented her explorations—through observations, conversations, and interviews—the material differences between how parents and teachers interacted and provided literacy experiences for their students. Heath highlighted how literacy is embedded within social interactions and the different ways in which it is constituted across communities and schools.

Relatedly, Victoria Purcell-Gates (1995) engaged in an extended study of family members living in southern Ohio who were largely illiterate. Her study identified the social ramifications of illiteracy for these family members and their children, including how it influences their interactions within the family, in the workplace, and in and with schools. These and other studies provided extended analyses of literacy embedded within and across social settings, delineating the nature of the social fabric that supports literacy. Essentially, she demonstrated how literacy involves social dimensions and dynamics tied to the interrelationships of students, their families, and schools. They illuminated the possible estrangements likely to occur when social norms are counter to expectations and experiences not unlike the findings that emerge when readers encounter texts that are not relevant to or based upon the familiar.

A number of scholars enlisted more micro-ethnographic, socio-linguistic techniques to explore classroom exchanges that delineate the social dynamics occurring between teachers and students and among students themselves. For example, in their analyses of the discourse of students in reading classrooms, David Bloome and Judith Green (2015) argued for a shift in how we conceptualize literacy to be socially constituted (in contrast to the earlier view that it was just another factor influencing individual development), as well as a shift in how it might be studied. For a social model to truly be realized, they argued the unit of analysis should be the event rather than the individual. Further, they contended that events should be examined across time and space, taking into account intertextualities as well as actions, reactions, and ongoing interpretations and exchanges.

An exemplar of research in this area with implications for rethinking the nature of learning has been the work of Ann Haas Dyson (1988). Her research focuses on the social construction of meaning by young children, offering an illustration of how the worlds of students are negotiated. Her work analyzed preschoolers' writings, their worlds, and the worlds of their peers—along with the various resources that might together be used to explore and construct the imaginary worlds that emerge in their shared stories. Dyson examined how writing was embedded within networks of symbolic and social relationships. Her observations suggested that rather than through linguistic and cognitive pursuits, children find coherence by engaging across multiple individual and collective worlds—building connections with others in a web of multiple text worlds. Her accounts underscored the extent to which social dimensions interface with and are fused with literacy, bringing the social lens to the fore of literacy research (see Side comment III 4 b 2).

Side comment III 4 b 2.

As Dyson (1988) noted:

I followed Mitzi and seven of her primary-grade peers over a two-year period, observing them as they composed imaginary worlds. I focused on the interrelationships between children's creations of written text worlds and their use of or response to forces outside those worlds but within the situational context of the classroom—particularly other symbolic media (drawing and talk) and other people (particular peers). Rather than focusing on how the children's written messages became disembedded, I examined how their use of writing was embedded with a network of supportive symbolic and social relationships.

Based upon the project's findings, I argue her that children's major developmental challenge is not simply to create a unified text but to move among multiple worlds, carrying out multiple roles and coordinating multiple space/time structures. That is, to grow as writers of imaginary worlds and, by inference, other sorts of text worlds as well, children must differentiate, and work to resolve the tensions among the varied symbolic and social worlds within which they write—worlds with differing dimensions of time and space.

Surface appearances to the contrary, there is sense and order to children's apparently disorganized texts. To discover that sense, though, we must take a long view, a developmental view, considering children's past and future efforts, and a broad view considering the symbolic and social forces that surrounded and shaped those texts. (p. 356)

Adding momentum to the social movement, James Gee (1990; 2000), Brian Street (1984; 1993; 1995; 2003) and others suggested the need for a new era in literacy. In particular, this perspective developed into something like a movement that even came with a name (New Literacy Studies) and a manifesto (New London Group, 1996) in which a collection of scholars around the world (list names) argued for a conceptual paradigm shift befitting the New Literacy Studies (NLS) moniker, one in which literacy was redefined as encompassing social practices rather than constituting a set of technical skills. Growing out of their opposition to an "autonomous view of literacy," in which literacy was seen as learned outside of the social context, NLS scholars argued for an orientation to literacy practices that recognized socially-constituted texts, or "discourse," thereby highlighting their social existence. Street suggested there was need for an "ideological" reckoning with literacy's context-dependent power-relationships across a system of practices. As Lankshear and Knobel (2011; see also Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; 2007) argue:

…the sociocultural approach to literacy overtly rejects the idea that textual practices are even largely, let alone solely, a matter of processes that 'go on in the head,' or that essentially involve heads communicating with each other by means of graphic signs.

(pp. 12–13)

Building on these notions, Barton and Hamilton (1998; 2000), who were involved in detailing literacy in everyday life, indicated that "in the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). They suggested that "literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relationships between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Accordingly, Barton and Hamilton (2000) offered six tenets of literacy:
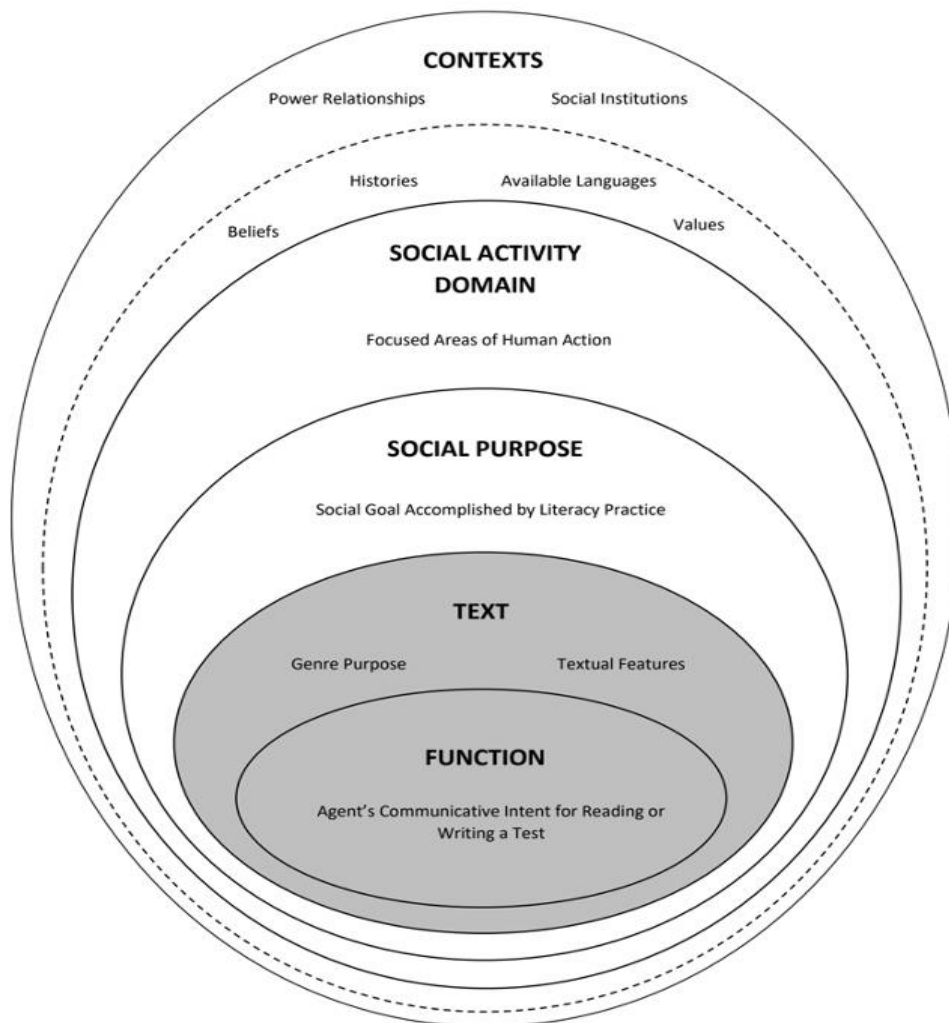
1. Literacy involves social practices mediated by texts.
2. Different literacies are associated with different areas of life.
3. Literacy practices (their role and influence) are shaped by our social institutions and the power relationships.
4. Social goals and cultural practices embed and drive literacy practices.
5. Literacy is historically situated.
6. Literacy practices are not fixed, but change and new ones form through processes of informal learning and sense making. (p. 8)

In a similar vein, Purcell-Gates—in conjunction with her Center for the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS)—derived and analyzed data across multiple case studies in an effort to chronicle, archive, and delve into cultural practices of literacy across multiple sites. The work undertaken by Purcell-Gates and her colleagues led to the development of a model (Figure 1) that represents the theoretical relationship between literacy events and literacy practices (Purcell-Gates, Perry, & Briseño, 2011). As Purcell-Gates, Perry, and Briseño (2011) describe it:

> The central, shaded layers of the model represent observable literacy events, beginning with the agent's intent for reading or writing, and then moving to the text itself. For example, a woman may read through an online employment database to identify job openings. Together, this function or communicative intent (locating job openings), along with the actual text (online employment database), mediate the agent's purpose, or social goal, for engaging in the event. In this case, the woman's purpose is to apply for (and, ideally, to obtain) a job. This immediate social goal is shaped by larger domains of social activity, which are in turn shaped by various other layers of context. Applying for and obtaining a job occur in the social domain of Working. This domain is, in turn, shaped by other contextual layers. (p. 451)

Figure 1.

Model of a literacy practice (Purcell-Gates, Perry, and Briseño 2011: Analyzing Literacy Practice: Grounded Theory to Model). The areas shaded in gray represent an observable literacy event while the unshaded areas represent inferred aspects of literacy practices that represent the context shaping the event.

CONTEXTS

Power Relationships   Social Institutions

Histories   Available Languages

Beliefs   Values

SOCIAL ACTIVITY DOMAIN

Focused Areas of Human Action

SOCIAL PURPOSE

Social Goal Accomplished by Literacy Practice

TEXT

Genre Purpose   Textual Features

FUNCTION

Agent's Communicative Intent for Reading or Writing a Test

Discussion

The advent of a social wave required that scholars step back and look at the nature of literacy development—with the aid of socio-linguistic approaches, cultural lenses, and a variety of research tools and methodologies (i.e., ethnography, discourse analysis, historic analysis, etc.). The shift marked a new wave in literacy—from the cognitive to the socio-cognitive to the socio-cultural. Indeed, psycholinguistics gravitated to a socio-psycholinguistic view of reading building upon socio-linguistic and social semiotic

perspectives (Harste & Burke, 1978). The end result—socio-cultural perspectives had a huge impact upon theories of literacy. Over time, these analyses illustrated that social dynamics and purposes themselves are integral to reading practices, and not separate from them. Moreover, whereas the initial research focus on the social tended to remain primarily concerned with the role of individual cognition, the social wave shifted the focus to encompass interpersonal, intrapersonal, and collective meaning making.

These developments represented the widespread recognition that meaning making was not exclusively cognitive, nor was it just a "within the head" phenomenon or enterprise. Reading was deemed situated—inseparable from the social circumstances involved. A sociocultural perspective suggested that reading involved a network of exchanges across time and space. These exchanges extended to readers individually and collectively, as they interacted with one another across and through assemblages of text, image, speech, etc. (often greatly enhanced and transformed with digital advances).

The social wave was also foundational to other developments in literacy as more and more educators applied sociological perspectives to reading and literacy. Attention began to be paid to how learners within cultures develop in their engagement in social literacy practices-the socio-cultural dimensions of learning within communities. For example, a number of educators developed models for teaching and learning that attempted to bridge this divide—offering the promise of some fidelity with socio-cultural ways of knowing. They included the Funds of Knowledge "after school" initiative of González, Moll, and Amanti (2006); Kathy Au's (1980) exploration of an educational model in the Hawaiian context; and Susan Philips' (1983) work on participation structures in the classrooms of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in Oregon; and work in Canada by First Nations educators enlisting indigenous ways of knowing (Archibald, 2008; Hare, 2007). Worth noting too is the notion of productive pedagogies in Australia (see Lingard, Hayes, & Mills, 2003); Kris Gutiérrez's (2008) notion of a Third Space; and the Maori education model (see: Bishop, Ladwig, & Berryman, 2014; Smith, 1997; 2002; 2015).

In this age of globalization and increased mobility, emphasis has also been given to how one is positioned within, outside or across worlds. Foci extends beyond local literacy to the cross-flows that arise across borders within society or with global channels, especially in the age of the internet. Some (Brandt, 2001; 2009; Brandt & Clinton, 2002) have questioned the situation-specific notions of localized literacies proposed, arguing for a shift that also addresses how literacy practices have some transferable potential (e.g., accommodating the global flow of new literacies via online social networking and other digital engagements).

These developments are discussed in later chapters focused upon critical literacies, globalization and digital literacies.

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