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ABSTRACT

The language of a literate classroom is profoundly impacted by that which is included, excluded, ignorantly condoned, and perpetually presented with distortions. The article analyzes seven comprehensive frameworks: (1) diverse voices; (2) identities of the language users; (3) present and absent curriculum; (4) cognitive structures influencing thinking; (5) critical thinking and questioning; (6) chronological, geographical, and linguistic knowledge shaping schemata; (7) realities of society rather than issues; and (8) verbal and nonverbal language. These frameworks shape the development of the functional paradigms essential to developing literacy competencies in school classroom environments and lifelong literacy among learned people. (Includes a figure; contains 34 references.) (Author)

Running head: THE LANGUAGE OF A LITERATE

The Language of a Literate Classroom: Rethinking Comprehensive Dimensions

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Abstract

The language of a literate classroom is profoundly impacted by that which is included, excluded, ignorantly condoned, and perpetually presented with distortions. This article analyzes seven comprehensive frameworks: (1) diverse voices, (2) identities of the language users, (3) present and absent curriculum, (4) cognitive structures influencing thinking, (5) critical thinking and questioning, (6) chronlogical, geographical, and linguistic knowledge shaping schemata; (7) realities of society rather than issues, and (8) verbal and non verbal language. These frameworks shape the development of the functional paradigms essential to developing literacy competencies in school classroom environments and lifelong literacy amongst learned people.

Language – Classrooms – Literacy

When we engage in what society has labeled literate activities: reading -- writing -- speaking -- listening, we construct, create, and reconstruct meaning based on previous and current life experiences. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, a literate person is a well informed and educated person. Thus, rudimentary reading and writing skills insufficiently define a literate person. Becoming a literate person is an evolutionary, and for many a lifelong process.

Since both written and spoken languages are important to the integrity of literacy, let us review some obvious aspects of language. We know that language is <u>not</u> static. We know that visual and auditory language enable communication between senders and receivers. We also know the power of nonverbal communication. We know too, that language is a dynamic social constructivist interactive process of meaning making. Furthermore, we know that meaning making requires our use of the schemata -- prior knowledge -- life experiences -- cognitive structures within our heads, and we use that inside the head information to make sense out of visual and auditory information that we take in. Yet too often, alleged approaches for understanding and fostering literacy are encased in static models of language which use myopic lenses to first examine and then discuss literacy attainment. Under the best circumstances, school classrooms should be environments which promote and facilitate students' literacy development. The remainder of this article identifies and discusses eight

frameworks which this author offers as dynamic comprehensive structures of human dimensions that inculcate literate behavior in classrooms.

Eight Frameworks for Literate Classrooms

1. The language of the literate classroom develops when diverse voices are heard without hegemony.

2. The language of a literate classroom is in the identities of the language users.

3.The language of a literate classroom is evident from that which is present and absent.

4. The language of a literate classroom requires reexamination of images and cognitive structures of the mind that have been created by one's socialization and educational experiences.

5. The language of a literate classroom facilitates critical thinking and questioning.

6. The language of a literate classroom evolves from chronology, geography, and linguistic knowledge which shape schemata about the realities of society.

7. The language of a literate classroom becomes stymied when realities of society are merely regarded as issues.

8. The language of a literate classroom is understandably verbal and non verbal.

These eight frameworks are more comprehensive than the scope of any

current tests which allegedly are barometers for assessing literate behavior. The purpose of this article is to indicate how the language of classrooms impacts functional paradigms essential to the metamorphous of literate people.

1. The language of a literate classroom develops when diverse voices are heard without hegemony.

All genres of literature propel voices, be it those of the characters in fiction; be it first person narration in autobiographical works, poetry, essays or editorials; or be it the third person viewpoint, observation, assessment, or synthesis of information. Even within expository/ informational genres, the allegedly objective statements of fact are actually the perspective or viewpoint of the author. In other words voice is not limited to narratives, although it is most frequently associated with that literary format. In all forms of literature the author's choice of words provides a voice, and these voices within literature genres shape classroom curriculum. With that being the case, some essential questions to ask about literature for the classroom are: Who is telling the story or presenting the information? Why is the information being presented? From the writer's perspective, are the characters depicted as subjects or objects? Which events and episodes are presented with purposeful intent, and why are they presented as such? What images are created by the author of Africans and African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics - Latinos(as) - Chicanos(as), Europeans and European Americans, and Asians and Asian Americans? What images are created of women, men, and children? Are the literature selections

providing *authentic, realistic,* or *detached-observer voices?* Let me give some clarity to what I mean.

{Insert Figure 1}

Authentic voices are likened to diamonds. Authentic voices provide genuine perspectives because those individuals have the expertise, life experiences and group identity membership insights to provide authentic realism to the words, tenets, accounts and interpretations of the text they are creating. Within the parameters of authenticity there is diverse range of representative voices whereby some authentic voices have more eloquence than others. *Realistic voices* are likened to zircons. They resonate the voices of keen observers whose written works may be excellent or superb; their writing is realistic, whatever the genre, and in some cases laudable authors give brilliant presentations which may outshine some authentic voice authors; nonetheless like a zircon, which looks and functions in many respects like a diamond <u>but is not a diamond,</u> so are the voices

of realistic observer accounts in both fiction and nonfiction discourses. *Detached observer voices* generally hail from those who write from afar thus, the people, events, and activities frequently appear as distant and one-dimensional. Unlike authentic and realistic voices, detached observer voices tend to view certain people, events, and activities as remote objects of the discourse rather than subjects within the genre. Any one or a combination of the following human constraints: ignorance, naivete, supremacy conditioning or privilege status enable detached voices to marginalize - impersonalize - minimize information about the people, events, settings, themes, differentness, and historical connectedness so integral to any discourse. The significance of voice, who is telling the story, is so important because point of view is an essential basic literary element and yet, all too often, many people attempt understanding others who are culturally and ethnically different from themselves by reading, listening, and using descriptions provided by those who can, at best, only provide a detached observer's point of view.

Diverse authentic and realistic voices exist in almost all genres of literature and in the discourses of philosophy, linguistics, social sciences, fine arts, mathematics, natural sciences, drama, psychology, education, and music. However, finding and locating such diversity often requires aggressive digging and searching, since many publishers and too many repositories of information have retained a European centered monocultural position in that they see themselves as curators and determiners of what information allegedly creates cultural literacy. Such positions have supported the entrepreneurial hegemony as

to what is regarded as valuable, considered the "classics," promoted as usable, and presented as "factual" for creating a universal majority. Monocultural Euro-centered sanctions of scholarship have narrowly shaped, thus incompletely defined the "paper curriculum [1] " of K-12 and higher education. It is this limited viewpoint which is currently and will continually be challenged and questioned in response to affirming an inclusive holistic world view. Both teachers and students need to become cognizant of the diverse voices which give dimensional reality to the points of view in the literary genres and the viewpoints in the discourses used for content subject area curriculums in schools.

2. The language of a literate classroom is in the identities of the language user.

All people are individuals and all individuals have multiple group identities. Without question, group identities and the interactions of those group identities shape an individual's identity. Furthermore, anyone's individual identity neither precludes nor minimizes that same person's multiple group identities. According to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1993), how one "perceives things will depend on the base from which he operates. The act of seeing can be hampered or limited by the point at which one is located when trying to see" (p. 82). Both group memberships and individuality are essential to one's centering and sanity. Centering is an important quality of identity.

Some of the salient groups to which people identify include: gender, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, the human race, religion/non religion,

peers, and various physical challenges. Gender, is a reality of birth and it fosters identification patterns, practices, and physiological patterns of behavior. **All** people are ethnics deriving ethnicity from our familial ancestors and within every ethnic groups there is much diversity. All people have a complex culture. which provides the blueprints - prototypes - imprints - the DNA - for language, behavior, beliefs, and praxis which are acceptable, as well as those which are unacceptable within a given cultural group. Far too often, representative icons (e.g. clothing, foods, artifacts, stereotypic features and patterns of behavior) are misconstrued as the conceptual symbolism of a given culture. At best symbols, can only be marginally representative of symbolism. Furthermore, while some people like to either believe or think there is high culture and low culture, these perceived and canonized culturally superior paradigms confuse what Carter G. Woodson (1966) called "differentness" (meaning: distinct, diverse, unique, not alike) rather than superior or inferior. To some extent, the identity terms: Native-American, European-American, African-American; Asian-American, Hispanic [2] -American, and Pacific-Island American help our current categorical understanding about the lineage and the connectedness that so many United States born and immigrant citizens revere as a part of their cultural identity.

Socioeconomic status (SES), based primarily on monetary income, creates economic status groups. Generally educational attainment and employment are viewed as significant correlates of high socioeconomic status even though the correlations between the highest incomes and education, or the highest incomes and job status might be misaligned. Religious / non religious affiliation, a right

guaranteed to all United States citizens by the First Amendment to the country's Constitution, provides the basis for another significant group identity. Although there is really only the human race, racial identity dichotomization (Bernal, 1985; Bell, 1992; and Hacker, 1992) remains a significant group identifier. Peer groups constitute still another identity and these groups form or evolve because of chronology, interests, education, occupations, social needs, and self fulfillment, to name a few. Peer groups enable individuals to identify with others for common purposes and relevant reasons. The physically challenged category defines the most unique group because it is all-encompassing of all other group identities described above. For all intents and purposes, physically challenged group membership requires either a self identified or medically diagnosed handicap, disability, or challenging means of doing day to day physical maneuvers.

As human beings work at comprehending uniqueness, commonalities, diversity, and differences, it is critical to understand that we cannot, nor should we want to, "factor-out" or "control for" criteria related to group identities. When attempting to understand people within our society, we must come to grips with the following introspection questions.

1) Is it easier to accept one from a group rather than accept the group to which he or she is a member? Why?

2) What is the rationale for accepting an individual, while at the same time denunciating a group in which that person is a member?

3) What capabilities enable one to work with, understand, respect, seek out

the expertise and realize the different talents of others?

The domains of both individual and group identities are pertinent to the range and depth of the language within a literate classroom.

3. The language of a literate classroom is evident from that which is present and absent.

Within the classroom what teachers say and do and what they do not say and do has a profound impact on students. Classrooms as social community environments, too frequently become places where marginalization is sanctioned. Refusal to marginalize those who are in, as well as, those who are not in a given classroom requires hard work. While marginalization is most overt by those reaping the benefits of privileged status inherited from Anglo-Saxon ancestral lineage (Wellman 1977, McIntosh 1988, Alba 1990, Hacker 1992; and Wa Thiong'o 1993), oppressed and marginalized individuals must also work hard at not exercising marginalization mentality and oppressive patterns of behavior on other oppressed and marginalized groups. An example is appropriate here.

> For a few moments during a casual lunch conversation with a friend, the discussion focused on an upscale shopping mall in our area. I commented about the hooked nosed people, which I innocently and ignorantly intended to describe the somewhat snobbish folks from diverse ethnic groups who frequent the mall and spend more money on a trendy clothing item than many American families spend for a month's groceries. A few days later my friend came to me and said, "I was really bothered and shocked by

your comment at lunch the other day." I was puzzled and she graciously agreed to educate me. My "hooked nose" descriptive/reference was an insulting remark to her because it reinforced a negative stereotype about Jewish people. Introspectively, my glib use of the hooked nose phrase was the result of ingrained ignorance about the pejorative genesis of the term. Numerous insulting expressions, like this term, permeate our daily language frequently to the chagrin of many listeners. I gladly stood corrected and will remain grateful to my friend for giving me a valuable life lesson.

These two days of language encounters were also reminders that ethnic, racial, and religious insults are not unanimously understood by the people who have been recipients of institutional prejudice, discrimination, oppression, racism, and marginalization. The words we use create frames of mind. Words impact recipients. Words also provide messages about the user, particularly when they make ignorant comments. However, it is not the ignorance that is problematic, but it is the arrogance that some people use defending their ignorance that is symptomatically a problem (Walters, 1994b, p. 20).

The language of a literate classroom necessitates that all members of the class work hard at speaking about others with the respect and dignity that they in turn expect others to speak to, with, and about them.

Classroom activities are also shaped by the interactions between the paper

curriculum, teachers, and students. Since teachers as individuals and group members are shaped by all of their identities, whenever they implement that which is presented under the umbrella of the "paper curriculum," they are not the neutral beings which research frequently implies. Students likewise, are shaped by their multiple identities and reams of quantitative research have focused on their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and so forth, as learning variables. In too many cases, the researched student subjects' identities became the predictors of success or failure for them and future groups of students. Too often, the data revealed that school environments nurture those who are supposed to do well by providing them with opportunities to practice success and to be successful; whereas, too many unsuccessful students are continually reminded that the predictors indicate that they cannot and will not be successful. The educational environments for too many unsuccessful students are conducive to anything but success. Nonetheless, there is reason for optimism because it is the students for whom the curriculum and pedagogy within classrooms exists; focused purpose and commitment can effectively guide the development of future literate classrooms.

Teachers, students, and curriculum have also been conditioned by racism, a term which angers many, confuses some, and is ignored by others. Racism, while generally defined asymmetrically from the perspective of the impact on the victims, has a significant but almost ignored impact on those who perpetuate it (Morrison, 1992) and those who benignly and unconsciously benefit from either the overt or the covert practices of it. At this point, the definition of the words

racial, racist, and racism are most appropriate, because those concepts guide beliefs and patterns of human interactions relevant to that which is present and that which is absent within classrooms. Racial means pride in self and others who are like you racially. Racist means using race to subordinate those unlike you in a pejorative and demeaning way. And, racism is the systematic and systemic patterns which are based upon and entrenched in ideological practices of supremacy. Both racism and racist have become terms too frequently and glibly used to address many of the demonstrative prejudices and biases resulting from racial pride identification. However, pride and unilateral bias by individuals in a group toward other members of their group cannot be confused with systemic dominance and institutional supremacist preservation of the status quo which are precursors for racism and racist practices. Additionally, racism is most perverse in the idiosyncratic ideologies governing the practices of the "majority" whereby they covet the right to define those outside the "majority circle" and establish the rules for who becomes "acceptable minorities" to that majority.

The language of the literate classroom unquestionably evolves around that which is evident and that which is both consciously and unconsciously omitted.

4. The language of a literate classroom requires reexamination of images and cognitive structures of the mind that have been created by one's socialization and educational experiences.

Images in the mind created from the thousands of cognitive structures inside the head help us to make sense out of the world. Yet, whenever schematic

structures are predicated on inaccurate information for viewing the world and the people in it, these inside the head organizational structures foster misinterpretations, create confusion, and perpetuate mayhem relative to the realities of the world. The geographical Mercator Map, an extremely distorted representation of the land masses of the world, illustrates this point very well. In contrast, the Peters Projection Map, which was first published in 1974 (Kaiser, 1987 & 1993), and the February,1994, National Geographic magazine world map insert supplement promote geographical literacy with reasonably accurate representations of the land masses and thus all of the connected images and ensuing frameworks possible.

Distortions embedded in the literature and content subject textbooks used in schools more often than not facilitate formulation of both incomplete and inaccurate cognitive structures for constructing a world view of people, places, events, and episodes. According to a study by the National Council of Teachers of English (Applebee, 1993), literature selections for whole class studies in public high schools in the United States were almost exclusively (99%) by white authors, with 87% of the books written by males, and inclusive of only a few contemporary writers. In 1990, Sleeter and Grant analyzed 47 textbooks used in grades 1 through 8, with copyright dates between 1980 and 1988, in the areas of social studies, reading and language arts, science and mathematics. Their analysis concluded that the White wealthy male experience continues to dominate curricula (Sleeter and Grant, 1994). It is questionable as to whether the impact of literature, in the literary sense and within the realm of content subject

informational discourse, is as great today as it once was, because television, movies, and other audio visuals provide people with vicarious life experiences and create images of the world and its people. Additionally, these visual mediums can reach millions of people via one transmission. Nonetheless, reading for literary experience, information, and to perform a task, still retains its dominance as a measure of educational achievement and learned behavior. Since the existing "classics" and "canon" provide a limited world view, critically thinking and humanistically grounded minds must continue to question and challenge the unidimensional validity of cognitive structures which lack a holistic world view.

A non-scientific litmus test represents how having information can facilitate understanding and lacking information can foster misunderstanding of others. This simple test requires one to name 4-5 prominent people (alive or deceased) who are: artists, writers, educators, politicians, historians, scientists, physicians, and so forth, and whose partial identity can be described by membership in either a cultural, ethnic, gender, or religious group. This task, while not limited to the following identity groups, might include: Hispanic / Latino(a) / Chicano(a); Jewish; Black / African American / African; Native American / American Indian; White/European American /European; Asian American / Asian; Pacific Islander; Christian; Muslim; Women; and Physically Challenged / Handicapped / People with Disabilities. The task might even be modified to allow participants to indicate friends, family members, or acquaintances should they not be able to identify "prominent" people whose

identity in part is within the specified groups. In all probability the results of this non-scientific survey will prove to be most revealing even among many of those who pride themselves in being "educated" - "literate" - "an informed citizen" - "white middle class."

Freire particularly, challenges conventional wisdom about literacy when he states:

> A political illiterate - regardless of whether she or he knows how to read and write - is one who has an ingenuous perception of humanity in its relationships with the world. This person has a naive outlook on social reality, which for this one is a given, that is, social reality is a fait accompli rather than something that's still in the making (p. 103, as cited in Sleeter and Grant, 1994, p. 209-210).

The above brief discussions illustrate the impact of socialization and educational experiences. Whenever a person's cognitive structures result from inaccuracies and distortions, the brain is short-changed of thinking potential. A serious challenge for those at work in a literate classrooms is to persevere at minimizing misjudgements and misrepresentations that short-circuit thinking capabilities.

5. The language of a literate classroom facilitates critical thinking and questioning.

Profound wisdom often comes from the minds of children as does this

insight provided by a fifth grade student who asked, "Why is it that the classroom textbook devoted two pages to the Boston Tea Party and only one paragraph to the Trail of Tears, when no one died in the Boston Tea Party, yet over 4000 people died on the Trail of Tears?" (Changing Minds, Winter/Spring, 1992, p. 4). No one can question the critical higher level thinking that this youngster was engaging in at that point in time.

Kathryn Au (1993) provides another insightful dimension about critical thinking whereby a seemingly irresponsible adult failed to advance a student's higher level thinking.

> As part of a unit on explorers, a Native Hawaiian student in the ninth grade chose to write about the Polynesian voyagers who first discovered and settled the Hawaiian Islands, instead of about the first contact with the islands made by a European, the British explorer James Cook. Through his reading, the student learned that at several periods between about 900 and 1400 A.D., Polynesians made the voyage back and forth between Hawaii and the Marquesan Islands and Tahiti, using sophisticated skills of non-instrument navigation. As a Polynesian, he felt a sense of pride in the accomplishments of these explorers. When the student turned in his paper, his teacher accused him of "rewriting history" and gave him a failing grade. The student's research was accurate, but the teacher evidently saw his job as that of reinforcing a mainstream perspective on history and so failed to appreciate and learn from the understandings the student

introduced" (Au, 1993, p. 31).

While the above student certainly engaged in critical thought for investigative research, his teacher apparently did not. Furthermore, "the student and his family correctly perceived this incident as an example of how schools typically honor the accomplishments of some groups but ignore the accomplishments of others, (Au, 1993, p. 31)."

Critical thinking and questioning can be disruptive to the neat compartmentalization and departmentalization of knowledge areas that are perpetuated by content subject area courses in curricula within precollege, college and post college programs. Even though all the trends, qualitative practices, and rhetoric for improving education, particularly in the schools and universities in the United States, are in support of critical thinking, higher level thinking, analytic thinking, evaluative thinking, and synthesis of information for application purposes, all too often the prevailing academic patterns discourage interdisciplinary thoughts, connections and relationships. Such thinking and practices necessitate that content experts share and interchange knowledge domains of disciplines. Critical pedagogy for infusing interdisciplinary dimensions must also encourage and respect students' thinking along those same lines. In recent years there has been a great deal of interest, with modicum activity, related to thematic instruction in the elementary and middle schools. Yet, for the most part, subject areas are regarded as discrete domains of knowledge and that subject area turf is guarded by the gatekeepers of the

disciplines both at the precollege and college educational levels.

Multicultural literacy provides a good example of this tenet. Some feel multiculturalism only belongs in literature classes. Others believe it is a part of history courses. Still others feel any multicultural initiatives should constitute separate courses because the topic bears little if any relationship to the actual content of specific courses. Likewise, there are those who wish anything and everything related to multiculturalism would just go away! Rather than to avoid the term (which frequently occurs once a concept becomes commonplace in either educational or societal rhetoric), substantive multicultural frameworks are considered. Academic scholars (Asante 1991; Swartz 1992; McCarthy 1993; and Sleeter and Grant 1994) present multiculturalism as a holistically complex and humanistically centered phenomenon. All embrace historical and contemporary knowledge dimensions for shaping paradigms which enrich educational settings and promote curriculum programs comprehensively beyond those which sustain "business as usual, with a few cosmetic changes."

Critical thinking requires multifaceted knowledge bases derived from multidimensional sources of information. Critical thinking necessitates inter-connectedness of information for interdisciplinary applications of knowledge and the ensuing practices. Mainstream scholars, who have long claimed universality of what was really Eurocentrism plus coveted multicultural dimensions engulfed as universals without crediting the sources and origins, must realize that the thrust and leadership for advancing thinking in these areas is neither dependent nor entrusted exclusively, or even predominantly, to European centered scholars.

6. The language of a literate classroom evolves from chronology, geography, and linguistic knowledge which shape schemata about the realities of our society.

Chronology as one organizer for schemata enables understanding of the ethnic and cultural realities of our society by providing sequential windows and slides of data. With that being said, a very brief discussion of KMT (Kemet; Ancient Egypt), one of the oldest, if not the oldest, recorded history of humanity bears appropriateness to this sixth framework.

Continually mounting evidence indicates that Ancient Egyptian civilization is approximately 10,000 years old, which is twice as old as once believed. But even using the conservative date of approximately 5,000 years which is the long accepted chronology for the pyramids at Giza, the longevity and historical legacy of indigenous African people predates the Greco Roman impact on the world. Records, of the MDW - NTR (Medu Netcher [Hilliard, Williams, & Damali 1987; Karenga 1990; Browder 1992; & West 1993]) in hieroglyphics, on temple walls and tombs, coffins and sarcophagus and the papyruses that remain in Egypt and those which have been taken to museums in Europe and North America (and perhaps elsewhere) reveal "its culture to be antecedent to developments in world science, religion, education, art, architecture, etc." (Hilliard, 1992, p. 11). You do not have to be a recognized scientist, historian, archeologist, anthropologist, or even literate in MDW - NTR to make sense of the evidences that are glaringly apparent from an initial study, and at best cursory observation possible during

even the first visit to antiquity sites in Egypt. By creating a time line, which any elementary school age youngster can be taught to do, and then plotting information in the order in which it occurred, it is possible to begin making sense of the abundance of data from the MDW - NTR, the temples and tombs, the statues, tenekus (obelisks), and other archaeological evidence at the antiquity sites throughout Egypt. A timeline, a simple chronological yardstick, gives order to the thirty dynastic periods into which scholars have divided the history of KMT. The ancient indigenous African civilizations provide their own documentation of their influence on later world civilizations. This primary source evidence, left by the ancient Kemites, is particularly important since they are records which precede the Greco Roman initiatives. This evidence challenges western civilization historical ideology which applauds the Greek and Roman accomplishments as almost solely responsible for advancing later civilizations. The enormous influences and contributions of KMT profoundly impacted all that came after the dynastic periods; and these influences and contributions continue to have a significant impact on the academically dichotomized sciences, mathematics, histories, arts, musics, medicines, architectures, literatures, to name a few, that make up the curriculum in the academies today. Schemata must be derived directly or indirectly from chronological accuracy, rather than ethnocentric particularism.

Both chronology and geography become seamless entities pertinent to realities of society. Living in our contemporary civilization of the 1990s, we would no more want information depicting the decades and centuries of the past

300 years or so to be chronologically misplaced; in other words, presented out of time order or omitted in either a brief or extended summary. We also would not want our history to be geographically misplaced. Thus, it is essential to respect both the geography and the chronology of events and accomplishments of previous decades, centuries, and millenniums, particularly as a means of making sense of the data and aligning information to depict truthful accounts of the past. Cognitive dissonance should rattle the minds of those who continually perpetuate the association of the indigenous Ancient African KMT (Egyptian) civilization with European geography [4] and the somewhat contemporary geographical descriptor, the Middle East. KMT, a classical Ancient African civilization which has had unequaled profundity on all that came after, must be accurately positioned chronologically and geographically in order to illuminate today's world in the light of centuries of yesteryears.

Linguistic knowledge or the lack thereof, provides significant schema influencing the understanding of realities of our society. All too often, people who are monolingual approach those who are developing a second language such as "standard English," with ethnocentric arrogance and ignorance. Similar biases are also prevalent among mondialectal speakers toward those who are attempting bidialectal competence Practicing teachers have indicated that "standard English" fluency is an indicator of intelligence (Walters, 1994a). Such thinking has profound implications for classroom practices if left unchallenged and not realigned to the principals of sound pedagogy. While "standard English" is perceived as the language needed for employment and educational and economic

advancement in the United States, standard English is simply a language, rather than language, therefore it is not synonymous with intelligence.

Schemata for understanding, appreciating, and respecting the ethnic and cultural diversity within our society are deeply entrenched and inseparable from the historical, linguistic, and categorical components which formulate the cognitive frames of mind that humans use to make sense of their world.

7. The language of a literate classrooms becomes stymied when realities are merely regarded as issues.

Reconsidering the geocultural groups presented earlier: Native Americans, European-Americans, African Americans; Hispanics /Latinos(as) / Chicanos(as); Asian Americans; and Pacific Island Americans – these groups illuminate realities of the population in the United States. Yet most often, the "majority" vantage point (promulgated so that both "majority" and "minority" spokes-people use the term) labels and collapses into a "collective minority": geocultural groups (other than European-Americans), recent immigrants, "isms," the physically challenged, females, and homosexuals. Thus, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic / Latinos(as) / Chicanos(as); Asian Americans and Pacific Island Americans; recent immigrants; and "ism groups (e.g. ageism); " the physically challenged; females; homosexuals, and possibly other groups constitute the categorical collective minority. First of all, it needs to be clear that categories exist to sort and sift people. Second, categories are used to identify individuals and groups of people who are realities, **not** issues. Simply put, as an African American female,

I view myself as a reality of society and humanity and will not remain mute when others classify me as an "issue." Third, any one whose partial identity can be described under that collective minority category readily knows that while discrimination, oppression, racism, and homophobias are all inhumane approaches to people, the systemic problems arising from each are neither synonymous, nor interchangeable, nor bearing the same degrees of adversity to the victims. Therefore, the umbrella of the collective minority becomes an enigma and an ineffective, if not worthless, categorization for framing directives for humane initiatives. Furthermore, when minority and majority are used primarily as ethnic descriptors, those who are categorically the majority are actually a minority in a global framework. Groups, be they ethnic, racial, geocultural, gender, religious, intellectual groups, and so forth, cannot sit back and allow others to define their reality.

8. The language of a literate classroom is understandably verbal and nonverbal.

Both verbal and nonverbal languages are complex, rich, culturally bound, contextually relevant, and dynamic frames of communication. Bowers and Flinders (1990) address framing as taken-for-granted aspects of day to day language. The characteristics of framing are implicitness, dynamism, and essentiality. Implicitness is the daily social interactions which are understood, most of the time, without an announcement that stipulates that the communication is a joke, an interview, a class lesson, and so forth. Dynamism the second

characteristic of framing, depicts the ongoing process, changing and evolving nature, and fluidity of negotiations and renegotiations between the parties communicating. Essentiality represents the necessary condition for language. Framing is significant to both verbal and nonverbal language. According to Carlos Ovando (1993), a specialist in bilingual and multicultural education, "language is much more than a set of words and grammar rules. It is a forceful instrument for giving individuals, groups, institutions, and cultures their identity" (p. 216). Unequivocally, language is complex; language is rich; language is cultural; language is valued; language is devalued. While it is unnatural to dichotomize verbal and nonverbal languages, particularly as parameters for the language of a literate classroom, some separation is appropriate for this discussion.

Verbal language

Verbal language, spoken and written words, has a lot of credence in education. Words alone are powerful. Maya Angelou's (1969) eloquence reminds us that, "Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning" (p. 82). To intentionally elicit frames of mind and cognitive structures, five sets of words and phrases are presented. As the reader of this article, you are asked to do some introspection about the words in each set. Consider using the question(s) accompanying each set to self analyze your own frames of mind that are evoked by the words in a given set. This may require you to drop your politically correct guard or armor to do truthful – honest introspection.

Set I: What comes to your mind when you hear or read the following?

Issues of . . . issues in . . .

diversity

multiculturalism

minority concerns

The limited contextual information: issues of. . . or issues in . . . preceding diversity, multiculturalism, and minority concerns is the framing context frequently used with each of these concepts. It should be apparent that an issues framework is an extension of the point I made earlier about neither regarding myself as, nor tolerating those who perceive me as, an issue. I will continue to question the rationale of those who do, and I challenge readers of this article to ask why this prevails. More importantly, why bother to care or not care to challenge such frameworks?

Set II: How do you interpret line A?

A. accepting celebrating understanding infusing

How do you interpret line B?

B. handling managing tolerating accommodating

ethnic -- racial -- cultural differences

Connotations from the verbal terms accepting, celebrating, understanding and infusing present positive images not evident from the images generally evoked from the verbal terms handling, managing, tolerating and

accommodating. This becomes particularly pronounced when any one of the terms is coupled with ethnic, racial or cultural differences.

Set III: How do you define these terms?

integration segregation

reverse discrimination

Integration is often viewed as unidimensional assimilation. Integration is a conceptual framework that, for many, must retain a comforting edge of the "majority" being in greater numbers than any others. For instance it is common for schools to be considered integrated when there is a 5 to 20 percent African American and Hispanic / Latino(a) / Chicano(a) student population amidst 95 to 80 percent European Americans. However, when the composition reflects 65 to 80 percent African Americans and 35 to 20 percent European Americans then the school becomes known as a predominantly African American school. It is then an "inner city" school and thus is no longer considered an integrated school. It has become a "changing school" and many of the children are "at risk." The same type of logic seems to apply to neighborhoods. Whenever the neighborhoods that I have lived in were predominantly White with some Black families, the neighborhood was considered integrated. When the balance tipped, generally with the help of realtors and investors, so that the Whites were in fewer numbers than the Blacks, then the neighborhood was considered a "changing neighborhood" and it went on to become an "inner city" neighborhood.

Segregation is frequently confused with self selection and self selection is sometimes called "self segregation." Racial segregation in these United States,

legislatively sanctioned Jim Crow, separated the races. Racial segregation had severe, often deadly, consequences for Blacks by Whites. Legally condoned and systemically practiced segregation existed from the late 1880s, following the twenty year period or so of "freedom" after the constitutional amendments resulting from the Civil War. It was not until the wave of legislative activities beginning with the Brown vs. the Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954 that legal segregation began to be dismantled. Segregation within the historical context of the United States is not equal to self selection that individuals and groups exercise of their own accord. Such self selections sometimes called "self segregation" is evident with religious groups for example: Catholics - Lutherans - Muslims; or ethnic groups for example: Chippewa - the Jewish people - African Americans - Irish Americans. There is an appropriateness to self-selection because of a specific group's identity needs.

Reverse discrimination is an oxymoron. Discrimination means showing difference or favoritism. Affirmative action and equal employment opportunity practices have brought about accusations of "reverse discrimination." At best the term reverse discrimination is perplexing and ambiguous.

Set IV: What do each of these words mean?

bicultural bidialectal bilingual

Would each term in this set represent a cognitive strength? Why?

Bicultural, bidialectal and bilingual are all terms that reflect dualism. A bicultural person has the ability to comfortably function within two

different cultural groups. Bidilectal means knowledge of two functional dialects. Bilingual denotes linguistic talents to comprehend two languages. Simplistically, two is better than one. Two depicts competency that one lacks. This reasoning has profound implications for monocultural, monodialectal and monolinguistic people who criticize those working toward cultural, dialectal, and linguistic dualism. Those working toward dualism expend effort, energy and cognitive facility that the "monotype" person can not even perceive because their mono-functioning parameters fail to provide a frame of reference for comprehending dualism. Bilingualism in this country, as connected with bilingual education, English as a second language (ESL), and limited English proficiency (LEP) programs, has evolved to frequently connote negative images. However, again, a world view is necessary because it correctly supports bilingualism as a communicative strength, rather than the linguistic weakness paradigms created by the purposes and practices of the ineffective bilingual educational programs. This is by no means a condemnation or indictment of all bilingual programs. Surely there are bilingual educational programs which respect and honor the primary language while facilitating a second language. You would think that any person who only speaks English and who has been in an environment where English was not spoken or written, would be sensitive and respectful of the people who are able to speak English <u>and</u> the language of the immediate area. Unfortunately many of us have witnessed our fellow citizens display chauvinistic, pompous, superior postures toward those in this country, as well as toward those in countries abroad, who are attempting to speak English or who readily speak

English with the accent of their first language.

Set V: How do you explain these terms?

racism white privilege

Racism, discussed earlier, is presented again because racism and white privilege represent extremes on a continuum. Racism, while so very complex, must be understood within the context of white privilege. Assumed practices and inherited rights which happen for most Whites at birth, take on particularities for Blacks, and possibly other people of color, shortly after, if not at birth. What is perceived as bastions of white privilege become civil rights struggles, or arenas where "you must prove yourself to demonstrate that you are just as good as . . . ," or as it is stated in some communities, "you must be twice as good to get the same job or recognition." The covert practices of racism are often misunderstood in light of connecting them with the overt practices. Overt racism, now "politically incorrect," can be somewhat challenged in the courts of law with a modicum of success. Covert racism lurks where it is not expected as well as where it is expected; yet, it is increasingly difficult to prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The five sets of words exemplify how our understanding of words in our spoken and written language enhance, limit, or bias literate understanding. Language in all of its complexities is fascinating and functional, thus another point relative to this verbal language discussion.

Language in the United States which yields cash in the workplace and

guides the formality of written discourse is generally mislabeled "standard English." The "standard" label is misleading because language is constantly changing. For several decades now there have been discussions, court cases, arguments, and educational curriculum positions, to name a few, about "standard English" in schools. Sometimes teachers become confused and that confusion misguides their efforts. In attempting to protect the self esteem of students, teachers go to extremes. One extreme is apparent when teachers choose to ignore the cultural communication styles that students bring to the classroom and insist on "standard English" as the acceptable "universal" means of communication. Such teachers want students to be able to effectively communicate or "function" in the larger society. This zealousness for the "right way to speak" results in pejorative treatment of those who are yet to learn to speak forms of "standard English." The other extreme is apparent when teachers favor their students' primary speech, for example, any number of Black, Appalachian, Shaker, Hoosier, Quaker, pidgin, or various Creole dialects as students' "true voices" and therefore do not help or expect students to acquire knowledge bases for reading, writing, speaking in "standard English" because to do so is to be "oppressive." Extremes are seldom good frameworks for effective pedagogy. Students need teachers to understand that they come to school with communication styles and skills which serve them quite well in a non-school environment. Furthermore, these students have demonstrated foundational linguistic competence. These students are most capable of acquiring additional dialectal language skills commonly referred to as "standard English." To do so

they do not have to, nor should they want to, give up their primary communication styles which serve them very well within their home and and community environments. In this respect, students need to develop and acquire language flexibility savvy, or stated another way, communicative bidialectalism, and to understand that they are capable of having several communicative voices. Many successful adults do just as the brief vignette below illustrates.

> My aunt Aun was a New York telephone operator during the days when the operators literally "plugged in" at the switchboard. Frequently, Aun would call her sister, my mother, when she had a break. As children, my brothers and I could tell if she was calling from work, because when she did she had her operator's voice, which was complete with "eloquent" grammar, diction, and vocabulary. Because break time at work was short, when either of my brothers or I would answer the phone, we would tell my mother to hurry to the phone because Aun was at work. However, on the days that she would call from home, her speech pattern was a more dialect relaxed means of communication. On those occasions, my brothers or I would call my mother to the phone, telling her that it was Aun and that she was at home. In short, her communication style indicated her location. Once, Aun inquired as to how we kids knew whether or not she was at work, when she had not told us. Both my brother and I said, almost simultaneously, "When you're at work, you sound formal and when you're at home you sound more like yourself." We knew the difference

(probably she did too) and we were just little kids!

Aun's bidialectalism, also known as code switching (Baugh, 1983 and Smitherman, 1994), illustrates what is true for so many African American people I know. That is, they learned another dialect without relinquishing their first one, and they know when and why they need to use a particular dialect communication style. Contemporary educational developers of programs and policies could learn a lesson or two from the wisdom available from the many stories like Aun's.

Nonverbal language

Nonverbal language manifests itself in many ways such as: the gestures; near or distant body proximity, which is contingent upon the cultural praxis and or the one-on-one chemistry between individuals; a touch or lack of touch; the intensity of the touch; an embrace or lack of embrace; and so forth. Nonverbal communication does at least three things. First, nonverbal language frequently facilitates spoken language, such as pointing in the direction of, while giving explanation or directions. Second, nonverbal language may communicate in the same manner as verbal language, as is the case with a yes or no nod. Third, nonverbal language can very well communicate that which words cannot, as is evident in a smile, frown or scowl. While some discussion is offered at this time, it is done with due respect for the communicative effectiveness and power of nonverbal language. It is also clear how difficult and inadequate it is to attempt

verbal clarity about nonverbal communication.

Bowers and Flinders (1992), addressing nonverbal communications in classrooms, postulate that nonverbal communications involve intent and the use of cultural patterns of expression often not recognized by either the sender or the receiver of the message. Additionally, much of the communication process is related to nonverbal behavior that occurs below the level of consciousness. According to Hall (1959), culture is inseparable from the nonverbal dimensions of language. Furthermore, he states, "There is no way to teach culture in the same way that language is taught (p. 25)." Hall's culture connection gives an important perspective to nonverbal language and he uses the subject of racism to illustrate this point.

> To categorize all behavior as racist sidesteps the issue that not every white is consciously or even unconsciously racist but will, regardless of how he feels, use white forms of communication (both verbal and nonverbal), if for no other reason than he simply does not know any other. While blacks could teach whites to use black nonverbal forms, this is very difficult to do, because of a built-in tendency for all groups to interpret their own non verbal communicative patterns as though they were universal (Hall, 1976, p. 75).

Hall (1959) also reminds us that it is most difficult to accept the fact that one's own cultural patterns are literally unique rather than universal. It is most

reasonable to conclude that the language of a literate classroom is profoundly impacted by the interacting frames within the plethora of verbal and nonverbal interactions which regularly take place.

Concluding Remarks

Rightfully so, developing literacy competencies is one the most important educational charges for classroom teachers. Promulgated in the schools and continued throughout the lives among learned people, literacy becomes the vehicle for learning, knowing, and acting responsibly in a diversely complex world. The examples throughout this article discussed: (1) the significance of diverse authentic and realistic voices, (2) the relevance of group and individual identities, (3) what is present and absent in school curriculum, (4) the impact of frames and cognitive structures for constructing meaning, (5) how to promote critical thinking and questioning, (6) how schemata have historical, geographical, and linguistic lynch pins, (7) the inappropriateness of viewing realities of society as mere issues, and (8) the complexity of verbal and non verbal language. These seven frameworks, relevant to the language of a literate classroom, impact functional paradigms essential to the developing and lifelong pursuits in literacy.

As this century concludes and the new millennium begins, literacy has evolved to mean reading, writing, and learning capabilities which individuals must continually develop to enable realistic participation in a technological society. Presently our society has a vast reservoir of knowledge in many text forms and repositories. The term texts means the traditional printed formats of

books, magazines, newspapers, documents, and manuals. Thus, text encompasses all the genres of literature such as: narration, biography, autobiography, essay, poetry, drama, fiction and nonfiction. Text includes content subject area textbooks and many of the other materials of the paper curriculum. Text also includes the printed materials in all areas of business, public service settings, and society in general. However contemporarily speaking, the meaning of text extends well beyond, the once conventional formats just mentioned. Text also means the multiple forms of graphics and the images from videos which can easily interface with the accelerating range of computer transmissions available on the information highway. The Internet, CD-ROM, and private and public domain data bases, are but a few of the technological systems which have unleashed the limits and redefined conventional premises about reading and writing and what constitutes literate process behaviors. The frameworks presented in this article, in synchronization with the literacy demands necessitated by multiple types of text provide foundational leverage to direct and redirect, and to focus and refocus thinking tantamount to holistic literacy.

Footnotes

[1] The paper curriculum includes materials: textbooks and other forms of literature, media graphics, curriculum guides, and the syllabi or course outlines.

[2] Geocultural is the term used in the Portland Public Schools' African-American Baseline Essays.

[3] Hispanic is a language descriptor frequently used to describe most Spanish speaking people residing in the United States whose family lineage in not geographically from Spain. Those whose lineage is from Spain tend to be classified as European. Latino(a) and Chicano (a) are frequently preferred ethnic and cultural identifiers rather than Hispanic.

[4] Recently while reviewing a book by Aveni entitled the Ancient Astronomer it was noted that the author devotes a chapter to Africa's socialized astronomy, stating that ". . outside of Egypt, our knowledge of Ancient Africa's first astronomers is scant (p. 91)." The author geographically aligns information about the Nile Valley and the ancient Egyptian calendar with western civilization accomplishments by misplacing the ancient Egyptian information in the chapter entitled "Taproots of Western Astronomy."

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Voices

Whose voice is telling the story?

AUTHENTIC

diamonds

OBSERVERS

REALISTIC

zircons

(appear real and will suffice, but they are not real)

- **Objectify**
- **Marginalize**
- **Impersonalize**
- **Minimize**

{Figure 1}

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Oakland University
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