

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a dark blue sweater over a checkered shirt and tie, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. He has a distressed expression and is covering his ears with his hands. In the background, other students are blurred, suggesting a classroom setting.

# RESTORATIVE LITERACIES:

WORKING *WITH* STUDENTS TO TEACH READING AND WRITING

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DEBORAH L. WOLTER, M.A.



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Deborah L. Wolter, M.A.  
Literacy Consultant



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# ABSTRACT

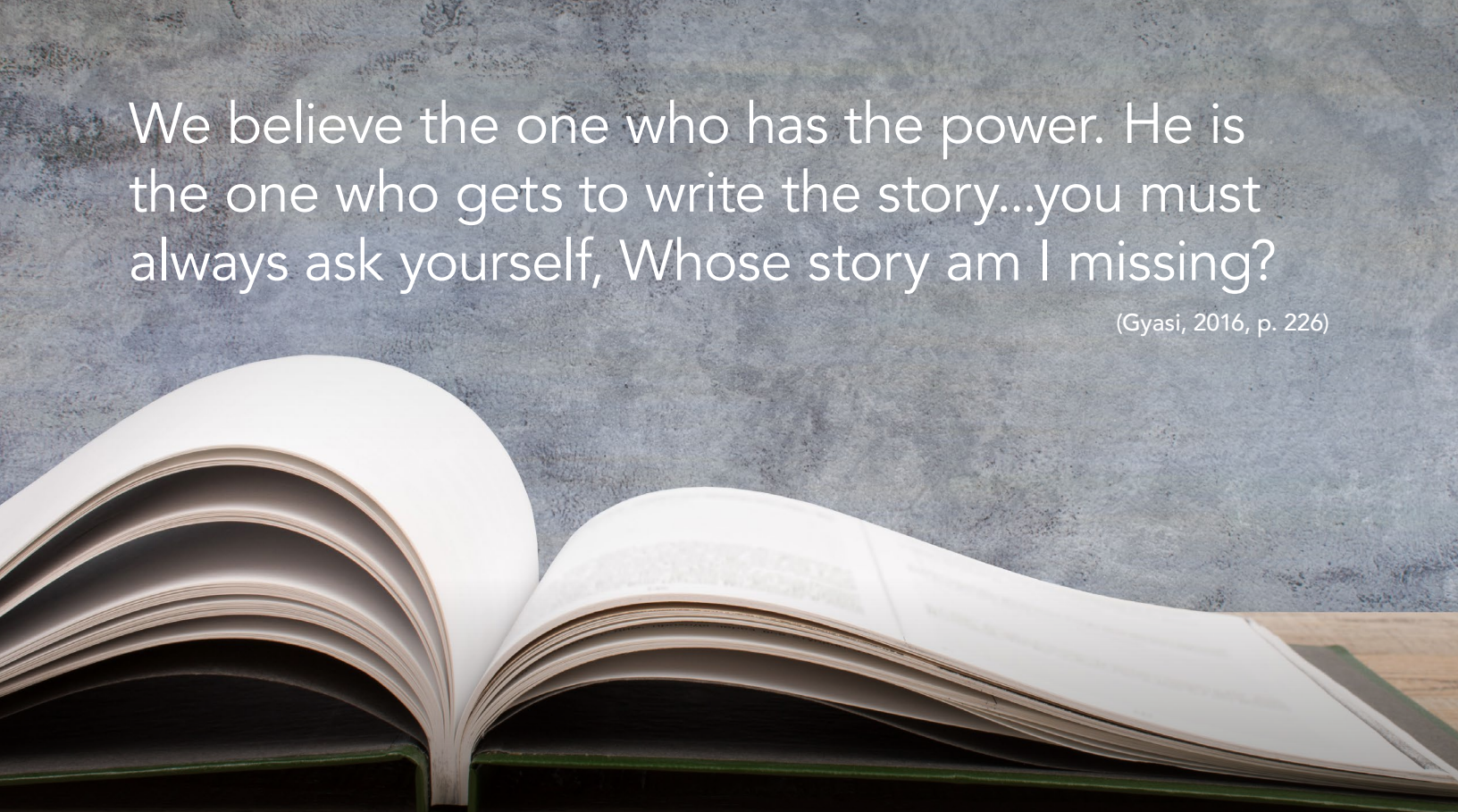
Restorative literacies merges research in literacy with restorative practices to offer an approach that engages and empowers students, maximizes exploration of literacies, and fosters positive literacies identities. Not prescriptive or dogmatic to a particular program or model, restorative literacies embraces a wide variety of cognitive and metacognitive processes for reading and writing. However, it begins uniquely with educators learning to notice and listen for the stories students bring with them to their formal education in order to disrupt deficit mindsets, center literacies learners, and uphold voices. The author draws on 30 years' experience to describe how she came to see the connection between behavior and literacy and how the Social Discipline Window inspired an approach to teaching literacy based on working with students. Citing extensive research in education and literacy, the paper also features an example of an educator learning how to teach in this agentive manner.





# INTRODUCTION

Becoming literate is a complicated human endeavor. Reading and writing are not “instinctive” like language (Pinker, 2003) but must be taught and practiced. Reading is more than decoding words and comprehending phrases and passages of text. Writing is more than sentence structures, spelling, the five-paragraph essay, and penmanship. Reading difficulties can have causes beyond simple word recognition and language comprehension. There is considerable overlap between word recognition and comprehension, including constructs such as vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and morphological awareness. Additionally, people mindfully regulate, or learn to regulate, their motivation, engagement, and strategies in a variety of ways to support their reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Although the primary responsibility for developing literacy is on our school systems, language and literacy skill sets are developed over time, place, and space (Milner, 2020). Furthermore, all children come to school with varying literacies that can inform instruction, growth, and understanding. To complicate the learning and teaching processes further, there was and is no national standard for reading *proficiency*, no definition of what constitutes grade-level texts, and no discussion about differing proficiency criteria across assessments (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023). The question of the best way to teach literacy is a question that is revisited and debated regularly in education.



We believe the one who has the power. He is the one who gets to write the story...you must always ask yourself, Whose story am I missing?

(Gyasi, 2016, p. 226)

Anyone involved in teaching reading and writing should consider adopting a restorative literacies approach for this important work. Restorative literacies merges research in literacy with restorative practices. It offers an approach to build and strengthen positive relationships between readers' backgrounds and perspectives and their variable skills, proficiencies, and fluencies; the multiple texts that readers encounter; and the authors of such texts. It is an intentional system of response, repair, and restoration in an education setting.

Restorative literacies is not an intervention or a curricular reading program. It is not prescriptive or dogmatic to a particular program or model; it is about building relationships and repairing harm if it has occurred in the process of learning to read and write. Restorative literacies embraces all manner of cognitive and metacognitive processes for reading and writing but uniquely they begin with the stories our students bring with them to our classrooms. Restorative literacies allows all our students to be humanely heard and, consequently, to connect with others and the material they encounter and to grow as critical readers and writers. I have found in more than 30 years of teaching literacy that this approach can be crucial for all our students, but it also benefits teachers, administrators, librarians, parents, and mentors.

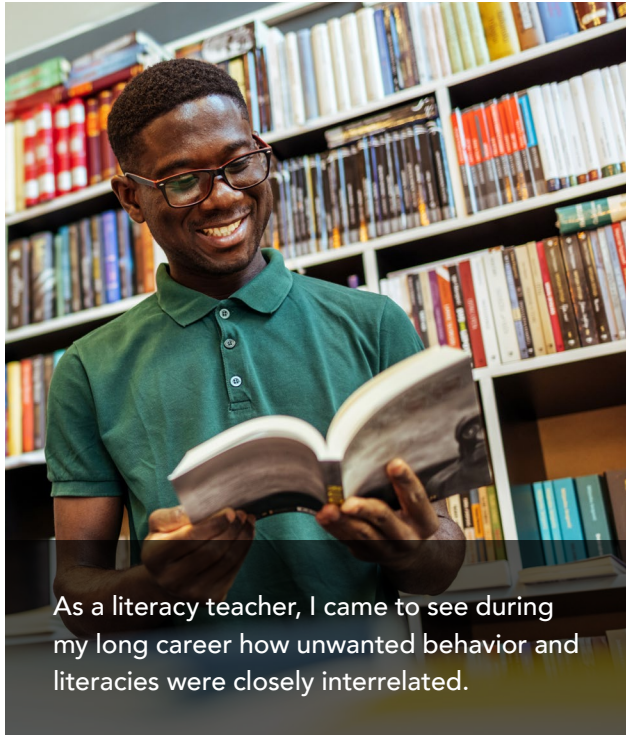
I use the plural, *literacies*, as opposed to *literacy*, in recognition of the multiple forms of literacies and social semiotics that exist beyond what it means to read and write as a basic and functional ability (Barton, 2017; Lazar et al., 2012; Campbell & Olteanu, 2023). Literacy can be interpreted in individual, social, cultural, geographical, historical, linguistic, and political terms (Harris & Hodges, 1995), reflecting its complexity. In addition, literacy has also come to include competence in specific subjects or fields, such computer, media, or cultural. The extent to which digital media technologies, for example, are thoroughly enmeshed in 21st century life makes simplistic dualisms such as digital/analog, off-line/on-line, imagination/simulation, and by extension body/mind and even human/nonhuman,

inadequate for educational research and practice in the wake of the rapid social and technological transformations (Campbell & Olteanu, 2023). All these various literacies may be part of our students' experiences when they start school. Students may have literacies that are not acknowledged and tested for in our traditional way of thinking about literacy but provide strengths that can support their growth as readers and writers.

Restorative literacies begins with stories and re-storying: our students bring stories about language and their literacies with them when they enter our classrooms. Unfortunately, these stories are framed either positively or negatively through observations, testing, and bias about their linguistic and literacies backgrounds. With a restorative approach, negative stories can be re-storied as positive strengths, ensuring students the agency upon which to grow. Critics of teaching restorative literacies might suggest that we do not have the tools or the time to make space for every student's story in order to teach them to read and write. I contend that we already do this. Currently, we categorize every student by their abilities when they enter the school system, then place them in specific learning groups—essentially constructing a story about who each student is but rarely going beyond surface measurements to hear their full stories.

By insisting that students fit into a specific frame made up of surface skills, such as fluency, vocabulary, decoding, and comprehension, we can miss all kinds of important information about their literacy experience and potential. Consider a 7-year-old with limited literacy in English but who can speak one or two other languages outside the classroom. Or a 12-year-old who hasn't had much access to books but argues with his friends about the best superhero in the comic books he reads or the various plot options in their favorite video games. These students show evidence of literacies that are not counted in the methods used to evaluate them but could be critical to their teachers to help them expand their competencies. Student stories also help illuminate the underlying cultural, linguistic,





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economic, political, and dis/ableist perspectives that structure our current methods of testing for literacy. By implementing restorative literacies, we can also confront inequities in schools, libraries, and communities; consider polarizing topics such as book bans (Meehan et al., 2023); and examine special education disproportionality (Ahram et al., 2021) and educational policy and mandates on dyslexia and phonics instruction (Johnston & Scanlon, 2021; Thomas, 2022).

In the following sections, I will discuss the specific skills that are needed to adopt a restorative literacies approach, interspersed with a story of four students and their teacher who learned how to foster restorative literacies (Story and Re-Storying). First, I offer some information about how I found this approach and, with it, greater success in working with my students.

As a literacy teacher, I came to see during my long career how unwanted behavior and literacies were closely interrelated. Like many young teachers, I first struggled with managing intense behavior issues with students. I started looking into restorative

practices after one of my students had a major outburst resulting in the destruction of my small resource room. My house plants and student chairs were upturned and thrown everywhere. Water bottles were hurled to the walls. Every single folder was taken out of its file drawer and scattered about. My lesson plans and children's books were ripped apart. My laptop computer and cell phone from my desk were thrown and smashed against the window of the door where I had stepped outside for my safety. It took me four reflective hours to put my room back together again. I was shocked and frightened by her sudden outburst. I could have seen my student as delinquent and demanded her expulsion or other serious discipline. Instead, I sensed that she was hurting deeply, because she was frustrated with and judged by her reading level. In addition, I had seen that even within a small group of students receiving reading intervention, instructional needs varied widely and were highly dynamic over time. At the advice of a social worker, I sought resources about using restorative practices with the hope of improving the connection between behavior and literacy skills. As I learned how to listen for and to the voices of students (and later, as a consultant and coach, to the voices of adults), I found that the greatest growth in reading and writing skills occurred when teaching and learning relationships were mutual in terms of empowerment over language, linguistics, and literacies; both teacher and student are equally involved in how a student finds a path to develop as a reader and writer. The specific skills I built in restorative literacies include disrupting deficit mindsets, centering literacies learners, upholding voices, and, most simply and immediately, learning how to notice and listen to my students' stories.

### DISRUPTING DEFICIT MINDSETS

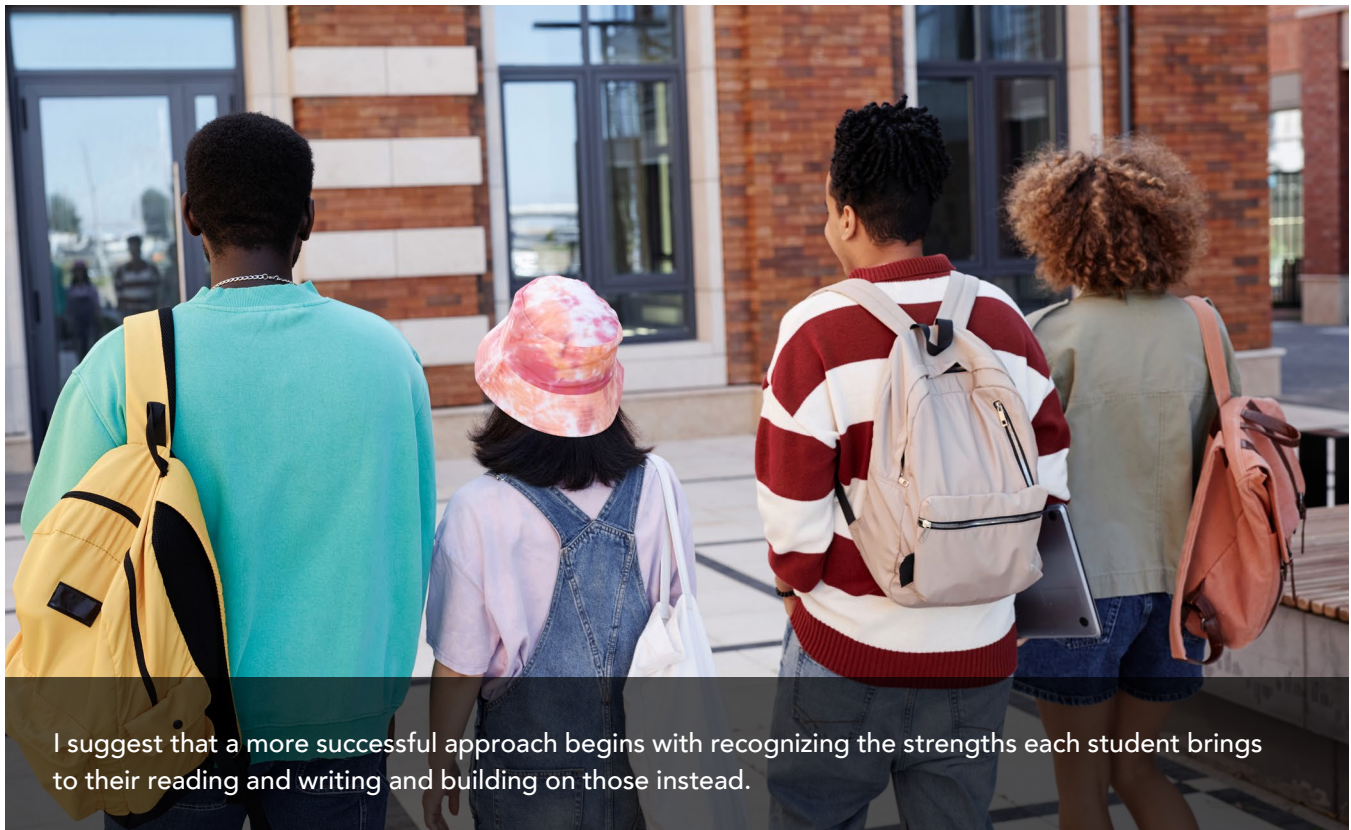
Every day in our schools and communities, people have multiple identities that connect, overlap, and interact: racial, cultural, linguistic, economic, political, and able. In addition, everyone carries a reader's and writer's identity. Many people may carry positive labels such as *proficient*, *effective*, or *fluent* or even as a *bookworm* or *poet*. But some students

are marked as scoring a reading level *below* their age or grade peers, may have *behavior* problems, or are thought to be *reluctant* readers. A significant number see themselves as *bad* readers, *terrible* spellers, *dumb* writers, *dyslexic*, or *learning disabled*. Labeling students with names such as a *Bluebird* or *Level J* identifies, and possibly stigmatizes, students in that they are not seen as individuals but through their membership in a group designated by reading levels. Almost every educator has a few students in their classrooms who fall into a group such as *needing intervention* or *special education*. In some cases, a *low tracked* or *resource room* will be a separate classroom filled with students considered as *challenging*. All these labels focus on attempts to build competency based on what skills are missing. I suggest that a more successful approach begins with recognizing the strengths each student brings to their reading and writing and building on those instead.

Restorative literacies acknowledges that everyone carries an accent and a dialect, and these can further add to the categorization and possible

stigmatization of individuals. For example, in the United States, they can range from the Boston or Brooklyn accent to the southern drawl or the Yooper dialect. Not only that, but people also speak the same language differently in different situations, such as in the workplace, at the local pub, or with young children. Many people code-switch their languages depending on who they are speaking to, and some people try to take accent-reduction classes to avoid the consequences of being heard as informal, folksy, or even unintelligent. However, while linguists have struggled to find an accurate definition of the word *accent* (Lippi-Green, 2012), it is widely used by the public in socially hierarchical ways, particularly among prominent people such as politicians, actors, policymakers, media personalities, and even educators.

Even as we try to teach English as a common language, the idea of what is correct or not correct is a fallacy or myth that has been challenged on a number of fronts. Linguistic justice, for example, challenges the notion that English usage is, or



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has ever been, uniform and asserts that attempts to standardize it are meant to eliminate cultural differences among speakers and writers. For Black Language speakers, for example, this amounts to linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization in schools and everyday life (Baker-Bell, 2020). American Sign Language linguist Jon Henner (2023) made clear: “How you language is beautiful. Don’t let anyone tell you your languaging is wrong. Your languaging is the story of your life.” Even though texts may be written in a form of English with spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and structure, all texts contain purposeful stylistic features and jargon associated with a discipline such as creative writing, journalism, or peer-reviewed scientific papers. By removing deficit mindsets about literacies and linguistics, restorative literacies helps us to see people, from young toddlers to doctoral candidates and beyond, as curious, exploring, expressive, and as developing readers and writers.

Additionally, Milner (2020) asserts that as a literacy and education community, we must question who builds knowledge, what counts as knowledge, and why we think that knowledge is constructed only in the science of reading.

Educators work hard to help readers and writers improve their skills by using scripted reading programs, “just-right” leveled books, ability groupings, and writing centers. In doing so, however, teachers can see students only through the limited and filtered lens of their methods. As author Anne Lamott (2018) noted, harm can occur with unwanted help or by trying to help people when they need to figure things out for themselves. “Help,” she says, “is the sunny side of control.” Instead, Kass Minor (2023) calls for teaching fiercely: “to be in community with students and yourself; it’s stepping outside of yourself and looking into your soul. And not just your teaching soul, but your soul *soul*, because those two things aren’t separate.” Restorative literacies asks



...how teachers teach reading must be determined by who teachers are teaching (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023).

### CENTERING LITERACIES LEARNERS

A large amount of research and study has been devoted to understanding literacy development, and the resulting data has been used to create many programs. However, very little of it has considered the individual’s multifaceted repertoire of literacies. Mandates for a particular and singular program or approach to teaching reading in schools is a flawed strategy because too many factors of literacies make learning an individualized process. Instead, centering literacies learners supports the argument that how teachers teach reading must be determined by who teachers are teaching (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023).

us to center literacy teaching by recognizing the individuals that our learners are, including but not limited to age, background, and ability.

### UPHOLDING VOICES

Plenty of books, journal articles, and websites exist for educators on education policy, multiple literacies, choice and voice in classrooms and libraries, reading volume, access to reading material, phonics instruction and reading strategies, and even responsive teaching, but restorative literacies is not just about growing readers and writers. At the same time, it is not



enough to simply listen, withhold judgment, provide encouragement, or offer intriguing books. Educators must consciously provide the opportunities and capacity for students to experience their own power for success (Wojtowicz, 2018). Restorative literacies expands the concept of “literacies” for some of our most disenfranchised and disengaged students through a model of compassionate listening, a community of care, and restorative practices.

Educators must first *notice* the stories that students are trying to tell because stories are essential elements in restorative literacies. When positioning classrooms and schools as neutral and safe spaces for stories to be told and heard, educators can bridge racial, cultural, and linguistic forms between homes, communities, and schools to acknowledge and build on authentic literacies for educational advancement. Individual stories shed light on experiences and perspectives, which educators can respond to and fully address individual learning processes, diversity, and even trauma. Listening to stories is healing, too, as we develop an understanding and empathy of multiple approaches to literacies and schooling.

## STORY AND RE-STORYING

Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Jayden (pseudonyms), fifth grade boys and the oldest age group of an elementary school, squeezed uncomfortably between small chairs and a low horseshoe table they had long outgrown. Each boy faced the same copy of a beginning reading book. On the cover was a menacing tornado approaching a farm. The boys were from three different general education classrooms but knew each other well from their neighborhood basketball games. They were all students of color. And all four had not achieved reading skills on an expected timetable. Carter and Trevor were labeled as “Level J students,” meaning that their benchmark scores placed them at a

beginning second grade reading level. Manuel had immigrated with his Spanish-speaking family and was quickly labeled as an “English Language Learning student.” And Jayden was a “reluctant reader” and “special needs” student, a label used lightly because he was the most vocal of the group, which meant he carried the additional label of “troublemaker.” Jayden had already started the day’s reading session, without even glancing at the covers of the books on the table, by complaining loudly, “More stupid sissy books!”

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**What do Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Jayden have in common? How are they different? Can you identify how labeling can result from deficit mindsets, ethnocentrism, color blindness, ableism, and linguistic bias?**

## NOTICING AND LISTENING

Stories are not always told at dinner tables, on stages and in films, in media, or through books. Stories are told within the walls of our schools, many in insidious or radical ways. How well do educators notice the stories that need to be heard, especially the diverse stories that are outside our own knowledge and experiences? For stories to be heard, they first must be noticed. Behaviors, disengagement, and even silence all carry unheard stories entrenched in apathy, resentment, and frustration.

Educators must explore the idea that students may experience turmoil at school, whether or not they experienced turmoil or trauma in their homes or outside schools (Johnson, 2019). Too many students pass through school feeling unknown, uncared for, unsupported, and disengaged. To feel safe, students need educators to actively listen without judgment, recognize and validate every student experience, affirm student feelings, and help students optimally process academic experiences (Howard, 2019).

At the same time, some children also experience exploration, exuberance, and joy—strengths that may come across as troublemaking (Fox, 2008). Unearthing joy recognizes and validates student experiences through culturally and historically responsive teaching and learning. It means that we see the wider world as the curriculum, curriculum as stories and storytelling, and curriculum as legacy and legacy building (Muhammad, 2023). Cornelius Minor remarked that, following the pandemic, we didn't need a return to the normal; we needed a return to the new. He suggested that teachers can accommodate individual student reading preferences and still reach their teaching and curriculum goals. If teachers have 32 students in their classrooms, there might be 32 different books being read. But teachers can teach concepts about theme, character development, and other skills that students could apply to all their different book choices. In other words, if there is a book a student loves, Minor wants them to read it (Gibbs, 2021).

As I learned from my own experiences, literacies and behavior are closely intertwined. The cognitive skills of reading and writing are almost always identified, especially through testing, but educators also must notice the interrelationship and reciprocity between behaviors and the language surrounding literacies. Such stories in schools are the proverbial “canaries in the coalmine,” for “troublemakers” are the ones educators can learn the most from (Shalaby, 2017). Troublemakers call out the need for educators to listen and listen fully.

When deviance or noncompliance is noticed as *informative*, as an exercise of power and free will, rather than as a *problem*, students are telling educators, loudly, visibly, and memorably, that the arrangements of their schools are harmful to human beings. It is dangerous to exclude these students, to silence their warning. Instead, educators can begin to think about what we can learn from these students, not what to do about them (Shalaby, 2017). Behind every “behavior problem” is a story that gives meaning to that behavior (Gold, 2016). Schools can be hurried,

unruly, and stressful places, not only for students but for educators, administrators, and parents as well. But mindfully noticing, listening, and responding to interwoven human stories is an underlying key to restorative literacies.

## STORY AND RE-STORYING (CONT.)

Every afternoon, Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Jayden arrived at their school's resource room for their hour-long reading lessons. They greeted each other with high fives, fist bumps, and the latest news. Each of them was reluctantly pulled from recess, gym, or science projects in order to catch up on their reading skills. Their resource room teacher, Ms. Williams (pseudonym), always found it difficult to settle the boys down for their daily reading lessons. Ms. Williams was not particularly fond of the scripted reading program, one that was mandated by the district for “low readers.” The heavy manual for the reading program contained highly structured and sequential units from which teachers were to instruct word-for-word with fidelity. Ms. Williams knew that learning to read proficiently and fluently was a complex process, but she also wanted to use restorative practices to connect with her four “challenging” students.

Jayden's tolerance for *stupid sissy books* reached its limit and he blew a fuse. He read the first page in the book about tornados and threw the book across the table; stood up, knocking over his chair; and stormed out the classroom door. Instead of calling for the principal and consequences for his outbursts, Ms. Williams decided to put her manual and the books away and invited him back in for a conversation. Jayden, however, insisted that the book be brought back out on the table. He would *show* her what was wrong with the first page. He noted that the cover had a real picture of a tornado and that the title of the book read *Tornado!* He told her he'd been



excited to read it, remembering the tornado that hit the area the previous spring. Jayden expected to read a nonfiction book filled with information about tornados and the meteorological conditions that form them, not a story about a “stupid” girl putting her “dumb” pony in a barn before an impending storm.

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**What does Jayden’s expectation of the book tell you about him? How does knowing this relate to his other behaviors such as anger, silence, and disengagement? What unconventional action did Ms. Williams take to get this information?**

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS’ STORIES

In addition to recognizing their students’ stories, teachers must consider their own stories, including possible biases, because restorative literacies is about acquiring skills in reading and writing while also embracing the racial, cultural, and linguistic view of literacies. Expressing vulnerability and a willingness to learn alongside their students is a crucial way to strengthen relationships with and among students and their literacies identities. In her

paper on the archeology of the self, Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz notes that

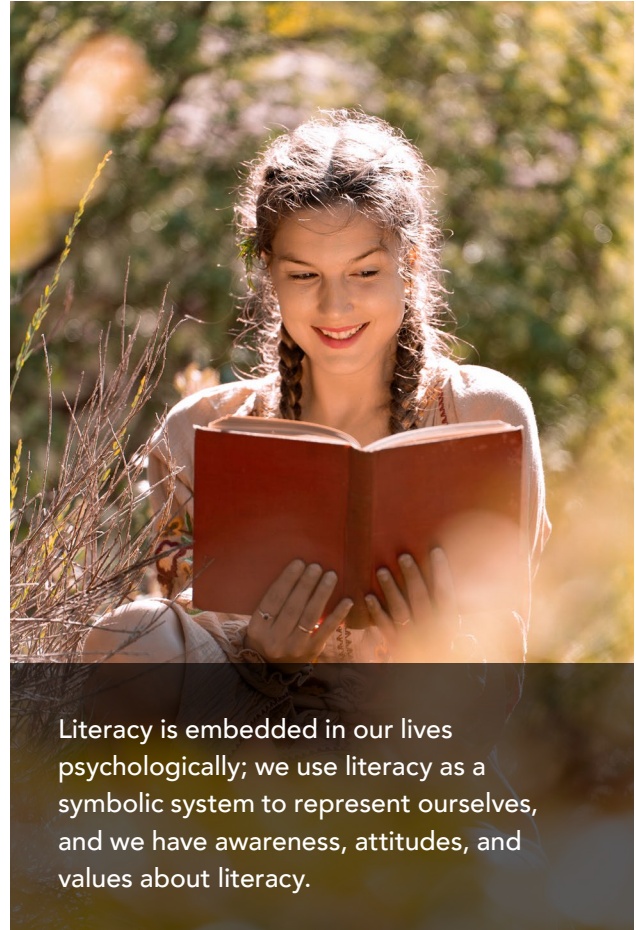
To teach someone, teachers must be open to the stories and life experiences their students bring into the classroom. Teachers must be familiar with their own story and do the work of self-awareness. If they are not open with their own story, if they do not think deeply about how these issues live within them, they will likely exact harm. (2021, p. 288)

All of us have stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. And we have stories that other people tell about us. For most people, there is a disconnect between their own stories and other people’s stories. For some people, however, this disconnect is significant and can result in misunderstandings, microaggression, marginalization, and discrimination. People, from the very young to the very old, desire to be heard—and *fully* heard with empathy, connection, and restoration (Wolter, 2021). Restorative literacies calls for educators to be constantly reflective of their own life experience and how their own stories have shaped their views of the world and other people, including ethnocentrism and the diversity surrounding them.

# THINKING ABOUT LITERACIES

## POWER AND LITERACIES

In addition to noticing and listening, educators fostering restorative literacies should reflect on the interrelationship between literacy, language, culture, identity, and power (Lazar et al., 2012). Policies in schools hold the systemic, structural, and institutional power to define what it means to be *on grade level* in all subjects including literacy. Those standards are established based on White, middle- to upper-class, English-speaking, able-bodied norms (Willis, 2023). A focus on *achievement gaps* without attending to underlying structural racism has resulted in numerous large-scaled educational reforms and implementation of reading programs and instructional methods with little progress (Merolla & Jackson, 2019). Dilapidated schools with leaking roofs, warped floors, broken windows, lack of heat, nonworking toilets, class sizes of forty-five to fifty students, significant teacher turnover and shortages, and especially lack of books, computers, and other literacy artifacts have left students with limited knowledge of literature, history, civics, art, music, science, mathematics, and technology (Bakuli, 2023). The concept of *learning loss* rather than *learning disruption*, particularly during and after the pandemic, implies that no one is learning unless they are physically present in schools (Harmey & Moss, 2023). Many states have *read-by-third-grade* laws and a set of assessments that determine what third-grade reading looks like, with unsettling consequences. Numerous studies on retention have found that stressful impacts on social and emotional well-being jeopardize progress on equity and even increase the likelihood of dropping out in high school (DellaVecchia, 2020). And the current media and political push on state dyslexia policies, phonics instruction, or the “science” of reading and writing without sufficient translational research that attends to a variety of instructional contexts and student populations may further place policymakers and educators in danger of perpetuating inequities (MacPhee et al., 2021). Consequently, continued



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reliance on established standards to teach literacies ignores mounting evidence that many other factors contribute to a student’s growth.

Conversations about literacies can be approached from social, psychological, and historical perspectives (Barton, 2017). Literacy is a social activity in which people have different literacies that they make use of in association with different domains of life. Literacy is embedded in our lives psychologically; we use literacy as a symbolic system to represent ourselves, and we have awareness, attitudes, and values about literacy. And literacy has a history: our personal history from early childhood onward, along with our collective social history



in which current practices are created out of past practices. Literacy is often defined as only the academic literacy necessary to achieve in education and society. However, restorative literacies includes concepts of literacy beyond just academic literacy and challenges the idea of one “right” way to read or learn to read.

## IDENTITIES AND LITERACIES

Everyone has literate identities outside of schools and workplaces. Literate identities are the ways people construct the self as a reader and writer across contexts and time as they engage in literate practices. In other words, literate identities are the views people have about what literacy is and who they are as readers and writers (Leighton et al., 2024). Too often, literacy is explained as a false dichotomy between literacy and illiteracy, in that people, especially students in schools, *can* or *can’t* or *will* or *won’t* read or write. However, the research on out-of-school writing demonstrates that the spectrum of literacies considered official and acceptable is narrower than the writing practiced beyond the classroom; people considered illiterate often *can* read and write, just not in the ways deemed necessary by their evaluators (Vaughan, 2020).

Therefore, reframing the question of *what* is literacy to *why* is literacy examines issues of privilege, identities, and empowerment (Narey & Kerry-Moran, 2021). Artifacts and practices of literacies are all around us, diverse in depth and breadth, ranging from easy to read to challenging and complex. These take multiple forms, such as grocery lists, street signs, documents, books, letters, texts, emails, social media, websites, and artificial intelligence, and they are written and read by people with far-reaching sets of experience, knowledge, and purpose. Being forged by *reading*, not forged by *books*, means that texts do not and should not shape us, but instead, we take responsibility for shaping ourselves, our responses, judgments, and thoughts through the process of reading (Beers & Probst, 2020).

There are undeniably literacies in which students participate with frequency, ease, and joy in their out-

of-school lives that are often not welcome inside the school building. Thus, the boundaries around in- and out-of-school engagement are social constructions, but their impact is no less real (Vaughan, 2020). Children of all ages write lyrics, poetry, journals, essays, memes, and messages. They read graphic novels, banned books, and all kinds of digital media. For example, BookTok thrives as an out-of-school literacy practice, not as a frivolous digital space for adolescents to escape to, especially during the pandemic. It is a critical site for digital literacies, identity formation, and community building centered around shared interests that are not always given agency in the mainstream or traditional school spaces (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). And in their out-of-school literate lives, students care deeply about historical and current local, national, and global issues. Viewing comments in forums where students share their concerns and perspectives shows this to be true.

In addition to recognizing how variables outside schools affect students’ access to and attainment of literacy, teachers should consider two questions: 1) how do educators choose texts, and 2) how important is contextual understanding to literacy (Johnson, 2019)? Even prior to the national uptick in banned books, educational gag orders, and instructional mandates, teachers generally tend to choose emotionally and politically safe books and other material for instruction and for their classroom libraries. Similarly, students, particularly those in elementary grades and struggling secondary readers, are provided books and reading passages based solely on their “levels” in terms of text complexity. But for many students, unfortunately, some of these books may offer no appeal, are unrelated to their life experience and interests, or, at worst, are exclusionary.

One reason that critical thinking is avoided at every grade level of public schooling is that it necessarily involves controversies (Noddings & Brooks, 2016). For example, the notion of colorblindness seems a laudable goal for a nation to aspire to. It presumes that individuals and institutions discount race when

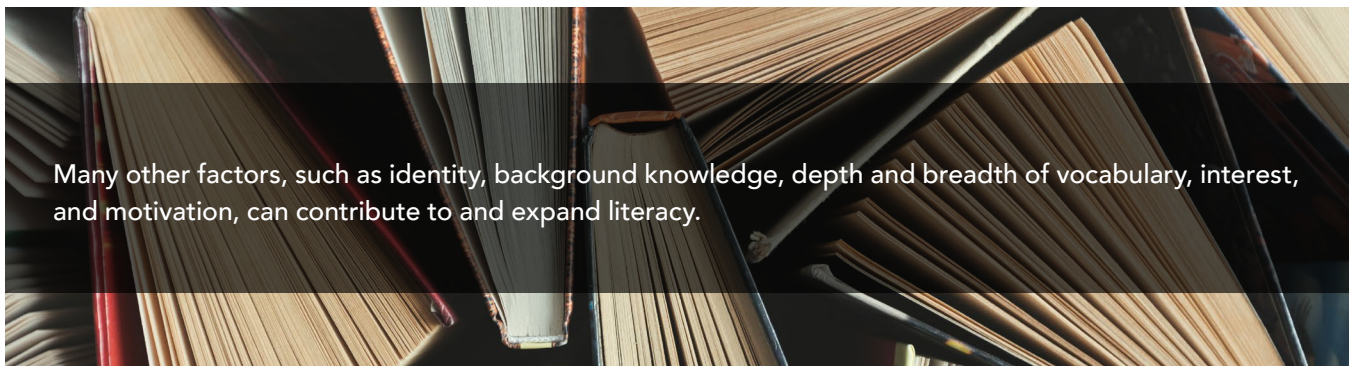
making decisions related to educational curriculum, instruction, assessment, employment, and housing opportunities, as well as public policy decisions (Ladson-Billings, 2021). At the same time, despite the advocacy efforts and evolution of terminology to avoid dehumanizing language about disabilities, disability euphemisms, such as “special needs” or “exceptional,” reveal discomfort with disabilities and can also be seen as infantilizing and patronizing (Andrews et al., 2019). Both colorblindness and euphemisms are forms of erasure that reject intersectionality, deny the reality of the lived experiences of people, and undermine social justice goals. A vicious cycle of social disconnection occurs by avoiding controversies in books and discussions about books, leading to a culture of compliance, ignorance, and unquestioned respect for authority.

In restorative literacies, the levels of the books or reading passages alone do not determine the identity of the reader in terms of their capabilities.

books) does not weaken the quality of literature instruction. Doing so can amplify and enrich students’ literary experiences, while both affirming students’ own lives and engaging them in worlds very different from their own (Zapata et al., 2018).

### OWNERSHIP AND LITERACIES

It is not enough to just provide intriguing books and digital content and independent reading time in schools. We also need to support the actual process of reading and writing. Restorative literacies allows and fosters a repertoire of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness and strategies toward meaning, comprehension, learning, and criticality. Metacognition is the knowledge of self, task, and genre in terms of being able to monitor, regulate, and direct self to a desired meaning in reading and writing (International Literacy Association, 2023). Metacognition is much more than just utilizing phonemic strategies such as sounding out letters or morphemes in unfamiliar words. Metalinguistic



Many other factors, such as identity, background knowledge, depth and breadth of vocabulary, interest, and motivation, can contribute to and expand literacy.

Many other factors, such as identity, background knowledge, depth and breadth of vocabulary, interest, and motivation, can contribute to and expand literacy. Restorative literacies necessitates that educators see that preserving space and time for choice and voice leads to voluminous reading. Volume, in turn, leads to building surface skills, such as decoding proficiency and fluency, and deeper meaning, including vocabulary and comprehension. And appealing and enjoyable books can be used as gateways to more books, even connecting to works that are assigned by teachers or schools. Extending the reach of literature beyond the classics (or leveled

awareness is the conscious mindfulness on the part of a language user that language can be viewed as an object in itself (International Literacy Association, 2023). When both metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness are utilized, readers develop an inner voice to negotiate the print and information being conveyed.

Disrupting persistent myths about teaching reading is crucial to restorative literacies. How reading should be taught permeates our cultural understanding at the most basic level, as shown by the widely accepted belief that good reading is



defined by the ability to decode letters, morphemes, and words accurately and fluently (Leland et al., 2021). Instead of simply telling students to sound out unknown words, a more productive approach is to teach a multitude of strategies. After all, writing style, text complexity, and vocabulary all have an influence on reading proficiency and fluency. The background knowledge and life experiences of readers of any age may or may not correspond with what they are attempting to read, even items on assessments, reading benchmarks, or standardized tests. Readers who are bilingual or speak a variation of English know that the phonemes and syntax of their spoken language do not always read exactly as the language presented in text (Barrett et al., 2023). But even monolingual speakers of English know that written text most often is not simply transcribed speech. This is why proficient and fluent readers who read aloud to an audience adjust some words and phrases as they speak.

Readers of any ability take corrective action by adjusting their speed, looking up words and concepts, rereading, and interacting in a nonlinear manner with complex material. For example, a peer-reviewed research paper written for an oncologist is significantly different from a pamphlet written for patients. But certainly, some lay patients may attempt to read and succeed in reading a research paper. Metacognitive and metalinguistic readers know that decoding leads to comprehension but also that background knowledge and comprehension support decoding at the same time. And they make sure they take away knowledge, pleasure, and ownership from their reading. Restorative literacies sees that people of all ages, grades, and abilities are motivated to confront and make sense of challenging material at one time or another.

### STORY AND RE-STORYING (CONT.)

*Tornado!* was not the book Jayden expected it to be. Ms. Williams admitted to Jayden that she had chosen *Tornado!* for its reading level as noted in the manual for the reading program.

She shared that she saw that Jayden must have felt disappointed. As their conversation became more comfortable, Jayden told her that he also got stuck on some of the words, like *silo*. The girl in the story was worried that the silo next to the barn might collapse in the storm so she was deciding which was the best *stall*, another word Jayden couldn't quite figure out, to move her pony to. Jayden noted that he could read the word, *s-i-l-o*, but didn't know how to pronounce it or what it was. While Jayden had some background about tornados, having experienced one near his neighborhood, he had little knowledge about ponies and how farms worked.

Meanwhile, Manuel piped in that he had never even heard of tornados; then Carter brought up dust devils and waterspouts. Trevor knew about farms and thought that tornados occurred only in the country, like in the book. He was surprised about the one that plowed through a town nearby. As Jayden, Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Ms. Williams talked about tornados and farms, Jayden, naturally curious about everything around him, became more interested in the very book that he had originally rejected. Ms. Williams later gathered a bunch of books about tornados, regardless of what "levels" these books were, and the boys devoured them together—and surprised Ms. Williams with their varying sophisticated reading skills.

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**How did Ms. Williams get Jayden to tell her why he was upset by the book he'd been given? How did Ms. Williams's conversation with Jayden lead her to learning more about the languages, cultures, identities, and literacies of all four boys? Can you identify where and how Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Jayden began to take ownership of their learning?**

# DEVELOPING LITERACIES IN A RESTORATIVE MANNER

As an educator, it's hard to acknowledge that classrooms and schools are not always safe places for students to play, be delightfully messy and stumble along the way, show their brilliance and artistry, and experience joy in their learning. All educators want their students to grow as literate beings toward their educational, occupational, recreational, and civic pursuits. Educators may be aware of insidious and persistent achievement gaps, disproportionality, and marginalization in education. However, while some students bring adverse experiences from their communities or homes to schools, it is crucial to acknowledge that some students experience additional harm at school.

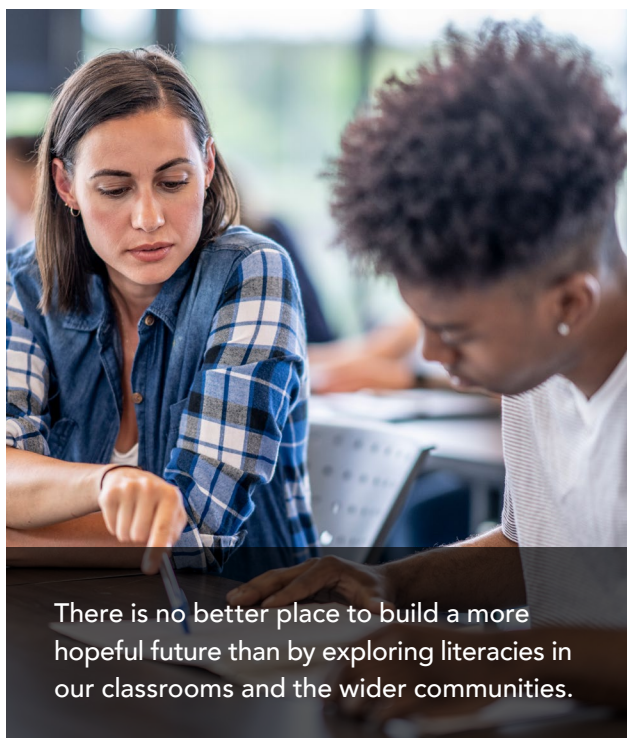
Harm to students can occur through institutional systems and structures that contribute to socially acceptable covert segregation (such as tracking and special education classrooms), zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, and standard curriculum that

does not adequately bridge, connect, and expand students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to academic literacy. As a result, we need to provide a *response* to students that recognizes this, as in culturally responsive teaching, but also work to *repair* direct or indirect harm they experienced and continue to carry.

A restorative space is needed, especially in a politically polarized, post-pandemic climate. There is no better place to build a more hopeful future than by exploring literacies in our classrooms and the wider communities. The underlying premise of restorative literacies takes its orientation from the Social Discipline Window of restorative practices, specifically, that educators learn *with* their students, not *neglect*, *teach to*, or provide *for* their students (Costello et al., 2019). It offers an open-minded, participatory learning process for everyone. While all four areas are observable in schools, there is much doing *to*, but doing *with* is most necessary to strengthen reading and writing skills and to develop a strong sense of identities in literacies.

## DOING TO IN LITERACIES

An approach to an individual or a group may not always seem punitive, especially when using literacy assessments, teaching methods, or reading programs that are purported as "research-based" to increase reading and writing skills. However, students can experience attempts at improving their reading and writing as a difficult and punitive process, particularly when assessment and testing are involved. Assessments can be both a blessing and a bane. Many people feel pride when successfully leveling up a unit, passing a quiz, acing a test, or finding their percentile ranking as better than average. However, anxiety and hypervigilance, including the dreaded stomachache or headache, may occur when facing unfamiliar words and passages in linguistically and culturally biased literacy assessments.



There is no better place to build a more hopeful future than by exploring literacies in our classrooms and the wider communities.



An obsession with standardized and mandated testing in the United States exacerbates systemic and pervasive inequities. First and foremost, standardized tests are products of, and benefit, our White middle-class culture in that linguistically and culturally diverse learners experience additional ramifications when test scores become the marker for student success, resulting in invisibility for those students who feel unseen and unheard (Elish-Piper et al., 2022).

Furthermore, literacy includes multiple integrated processes such as language development (listening and speaking); word analysis (phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, word identification, spelling, and emergent text concepts); reading fluency (word accuracy, phrasing, expression, intonation, and pace); reading, listening, and viewing comprehension; and writing composition and visual representation. When testing for just one area or a few areas, it is important to note that these are not discrete processes but are interrelated and dependent on the knowledge of the other processes (McAndrews, 2020). Most often, test scores reflect the test itself, not the whole of students' literacies identities and capabilities, their teachers or mentors, or the schools.

Some students are diagnosed as having dyslexia. Yet, while educational psychologists agree that difficulties in reading and writing exist, there is little global consensus over the operational definition of dyslexia. Inconsistencies involve whether school psychologists use a model of discrepancy between intelligence and achievement (now widely discredited), a response-to-intervention model, or patterns of strengths and weaknesses seeking a combination of underdeveloped cognitive and reading skills. Such inconsistencies can result in different identification or diagnostic outcomes (Sadusky et al., 2021). Since the understanding of dyslexia is marked by weak and unscientific conceptualization, definition, and operationalization, there may be impoverished practices in schools—social inequity in understanding and provision for many struggling

readers—resulting in reduced life chances for millions of students worldwide (Elliott, 2020).

A wide range of theories and models of reading processes and development serve as the authoritative basis for assessments and intervention. And educators are always faced with the human diversity in society in terms of character traits, abilities, preferences, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social class, geography, and political orientation. The paradox between assessment and inclusive education is that both assessment and inclusive education are highly dependent on cultural decisions; that is, what and who is to be assessed/included, how to assess/include, and what the implications should be in terms of policy and practice (Ydesen et al., 2022). However, numerous educational interventions have been organized around the premise that particular groups of children experience deficit cultural practices that ill prepare them for school (Lee, 2022).

A significant part of education systems involves grading procedures. Children need to progress from one grade to the next. They also need to achieve an adequate grade point average to be admitted into colleges, qualify for sports, or please their parents. Awarding a grade is typically a top-down process from teacher to student. Feedback on learning is usually received alongside a grade. Thus, grades become the primary prism through which feedback is received and interpreted. However, feedback is relational and must be built on a foundation of trust, consent, and safety. By contrast, rubrics as a learning tool (not as assessments or checklists), responsive teacher conversations, peer interaction, and opportunities for revision can provide feedback that is asset-based, honors students' identities, and leaves room for student agency (Austin et al., 2023).

Public outcry over what standards, assessments, rubrics, and intervention should be applied to children often does not reflect the results we see in education. Currently, for example, reading achievement is not in decline, student reading proficiency (however that is defined) is not at a crisis

level, and there is no explosion of students with dyslexia (Thomas, 2020). However, if we consider literacy research that studied race and racism, it enables us to understand the social, historical, and political dimensions at play, but also to explore more deeply how young people negotiate their identities, positioning, and knowledges through multiple literacies (Kinloch et al., 2019). We need to refocus our collective attention on understanding readers in a holistic manner and consider their strengths as well as challenges in literacy, embracing the complexity of reading and attending to how readers experience literacy instruction (Frankel, 2022). In restorative literacies, we humanize the experience of exploring both the messiness and delight of literacies.

### DOING NOTHING IN LITERACIES

No one should feel the need to check their cultural, linguistic, and literate identities at the doors of our schools, libraries, and organizations. Ignoring or neglecting the lived experiences, the rich and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, can bring about

erasure, invisibility, and distress for students trying to bridge their literacies with that of academic literacy being taught in schools. Racial color blindness, if it implies not seeing, is impossible for someone with typical sight. Learning to “not see” is more accurately an act of suppression or repression, with problematic implications for how we interact with others (Sapon-Shevin, 2017). Students with disabilities are often marginalized within the field of literacy, positioned as lacking even the capacity to be literate (Phuong et al., 2022). When the richness of diversity and range of abilities are viewed, positioned, and even tested against White, English-speaking, economically affluent, and able-bodied norms, schools tend to operate on deficit approaches, most often in the name of learning standards. When standards are used as points of objectivity, educators may unwittingly eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices that many students bring from their homes and communities. The term *culturally sustaining* requires that pedagogies be more than just responsive or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of



In restorative literacies, we humanize the experience of exploring both the messiness and delight of literacies.



young people. It requires that educators and mentors support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence (Paris, 2012). Restorative literacies fosters an inclusive environment that not only acknowledges but foregrounds students in all their identities and intersectionality.

### DOING FOR IN LITERACIES

Too often, when students are seen as struggling or disabled in their reading and writing abilities, they are prone to unwanted or unnecessary experiences of benevolence and paternalism. Like other prejudices, ableism also has a benevolent side that can manifest as pity, paternalistic protection, and unprovoked praise for everyday activities (Nario-Redmond et al., 2019). Benevolence is an action that occurs when people mean well and offer help to a person with a disability without asking first, listening to, and considering their actual needs. While kindness involves being friendly, considerate, and helpful, benevolence can be a microaggression that feeds into stigmas that people with disabilities aren't as "able" as everyone else. Observable forms of benevolence and paternalism in an educational environment include resource rooms or hallways as spaces of learning with lower expectations than the learning spaces of nondisabled peers; the use of paraprofessionals or technology serving as voice-overs, readers, note-takers, and scribes; educators choosing books and other reading material that are restrained and simple in nature; and people offering feedback that applauds minimal skills. In some cases, students can navigate their entire days of schooling without ever reading or writing at all. Restorative literacies practices bring out people's voices about their own stories, desires, and capabilities. They require all to listen fully and well, while never lowering expectations or automatically denying access and opportunities to participate as fully or differently to expand their learning.

### DOING WITH IN LITERACIES

The reality of the complexity and dynamic nature of literacies invites educators and mentors to

learn *with* students in a mutual, democratic, and restorative manner. Learning *with* young people does not mean adults stoop to permissiveness and being "friends" with them. Instead, educators and mentors acknowledge the agency of students and provide support to explore and expand concepts about language, linguistics, and literacies, including the academic literacy required for educational and career attainment. Educators, or anyone in a position of authority, can provide both high levels of nurturing and support *and* high levels of expectation and accountability by actively and mutually engaging with learners (Costello et al., 2019). In restorative literacies, all learners, including educators, administrators, and mentors, learn how to notice and listen for untold stories behind behaviors, silence, disengagement, testing, and mandates surrounding literacies. All can respond to and uphold multiple voices. Agency, leadership, identities, and power can be recentered when labels and categories are dismantled; when definitions of literacies are expanded beyond surface skills; when cognitive processes of reading and writing skills are flexibly scaffolded and practiced; when time, choice, and space for voluminous reading is provided; and when genius, exuberance, and joy are welcomed and embraced.

### STORY AND RE-STORYING (CONT.)

After Ms. Williams's positive experience with Jayden, Carter, Trevor, and Manuel, she began to reflect on her students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as their literacies identities. She also considered the power she held to teach and improve reading and writing skills. She learned more about Jayden's reading by not automatically sending him to the principal's office for his mild outburst. She changed her response by working "with" him in that situation to understand why he reacted the way he had. She wanted to know what had happened for all four boys, what had been *neglected*, *done to* or *for* these students. Upon delving

further and talking to Jayden’s classroom teacher, she discovered that when he came to a word or phrase and could not figure out its meaning, he quickly gave up. Jayden’s teacher, upon hearing of his outburst about ponies, silos, and stalls, recalled that when Jayden was reading a short test item during a trimester reading assessment on a computer, he had no idea what it meant to “board horses.” He read the words correctly out loud, threw his hands up in the air, spun his chair around, and called it quits. Jayden then returned to the test and randomly clicked on the rest of the items, resulting in a very low score. Unfortunately, the low scores placed Jayden in a low reading group that focused on phonics and other surface skills. In fact, Ms. Williams discovered he was a curious, proficient, and fluent reader on topics that were interesting and motivating to him. Jayden needed to know what to do when he got stuck on unknown words and concepts—and that getting stuck is common to all readers at all levels. The vicious cycle of disengagement and behavior problems began when he felt marginalized and demoralized by the watered-down reading instruction. Jayden’s outcry over “sissy books” was loud and clear.

Carter had a different story. When he was a second grader, he was able to point to and say every letter-sound relationship, read an entire list of second grade “sight words,” and even decode simple consonant-vowel-consonant words from a worksheet. But when provided a book, Carter held it up like a teacher reading aloud to a group of children on a rug. He had no idea that he could learn to read books silently to himself and this was taken to mean that he had a poor understanding of reading, and therefore, low literacy. Since Carter’s parents declared that their job was to raise a child and the

school’s job was to raise a reader, he had not experienced “bedtime stories”: turning pages, reading a full story, and reaping pleasure and knowledge from books. But Carter’s doting parents talked with him and his siblings, took him to interesting places, and enriched his background knowledge on all kinds of topics. Carter was a “delayed” reader but only because his toddler and preschool years were spent growing as a healthy and curious child without books. When Carter was placed in special education as a kindergartner, he was cooperative in being taught discrete phonics skills without the bigger picture of reading books for pleasure and learning.

Trevor’s story was also unique. His previous teachers reported that he was able to take a computer reading assessment three times a year and consistently scored above the 75th percentile. They also reported that his reading benchmarks were always close to grade level. But Trevor was a reluctant reader and began to fall behind. Therefore, he was given a series of tests to diagnose dyslexia. The tests had items that required him to read nonsense words and words in isolation. One test also scored his pauses, repetitions, and self-corrections as errors rather than as attempts to make sense of what he was reading. And unlike the computer tests and benchmarks, he was not allowed to return to the passages to double-check when answering literal and inferential comprehension questions. Since Trevor’s decoding scores placed him below the 10th percentile, he was diagnosed as having dyslexia. He was placed into a reading group to work on his decoding skills, even though he was already reading well but simply didn’t like what he was reading at school. Trevor was also diagnosed as having an attention deficit disorder. When Ms. Williams changed her



instructional approach to restorative literacies and he was choosing and reading interesting and challenging material, his symptoms disappeared.

Manuel's story started in third grade. Manuel had been assessed by reading a text aloud to his teacher. Not only had Manuel read aloud with an "accent," Manuel intentionally changed the syntax of his oral reading in English so that he could comprehend in Spanish, essentially attempting to translate to a second language as he read. Consequently, although Manuel was using complex linguistic capabilities and comprehension, his accuracy rate for reading each English word was slowed and he scored below 95%. For this test, if the accuracy rate for reading each word correctly within a specified time was under 95%, the reader should be considered to have little or no comprehension of the text. So, Manuel was assigned a lower reading level until he could achieve the required accuracy rate. Without

acknowledging Manuel's linguistic capabilities and comprehension, his scores placed him in a group that used "easier" books containing simpler sentence structures. Manuel saw that he was reading, in his terms, "baby books." He immediately became embarrassed and lost his identity as a growing and challenged reader.

All four boys were placed in Ms. Williams's group as "struggling" or "low" readers for widely different reasons. Yet, she had been trying to teach from a single scripted reading program.

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**How was Ms. Williams able to see beyond the labels and categories assigned to Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Jayden? Can you identify the neglect and harm done to each boy? Can you see how Ms. Williams was beginning to shift away from the systemic and structural status quo in her school?**

# CIRCLING IN LITERACIES

Too often, educators have conversations about teaching subjects rather than about the cognitive and linguistic processes of reading and writing. And it's become accepted practice to group students by their test scores or perceived abilities for differentiated teaching. By contrast, restorative circles places everyone of all ages and reading abilities on a level playing field, removes embedded power structures and stratification, and shares the trials and tribulations along with the pleasures and joys of literacies.

Participants in the circle can discuss choosing books to read. How does one find books on the topic of their interests? What genre would they like to read about their topic? How do people check

a historian, writing about mathematics, collaborating on a persuasive op-ed, or putting together detailed instructions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?

People can mull over the use of paper versus digitized versions of texts. Do we read texts on paper differently from electronic versions? Do students like electronic features such as direct links to word definitions or alternate spellings that some devices provide? How can they minimize distractions from hyperlinks and pop-ups?

They can think about an author's purpose for writing. How does one go about drafting, revising, and



Gathering in a circle, students can discuss various ways to tackle unfamiliar words, both decoding and determining their meanings.

the text to see if the reading looks manageable or appropriate for them? What would be the purpose for reading a specific book?

Gathering in a circle, students can discuss various ways to tackle unfamiliar words, both decoding and determining their meanings. What can one do when stuck on a word? Read forward a bit or go back a bit to re-read? Sort it out by morphemes? Look up the definition? Ask around? How do we negotiate multiple languages and linguistic features when the phonemes and syntax of our spoken language does not match the language present in the text?

Students can use a circle to discuss disciplinary literacy. What is the difference between thinking like

editing? How does it feel to be vulnerable in sharing or writing about a story? When is it valuable to dodge conventions of print and add stylistic features? How do we choose and cite other people's writing?

Everyone can discuss ways of preparing for reading and writing. In what ways do we get comfortable for reading? Brew some tea and find a favorite chair? How do we motivate ourselves to get started with writing tasks or projects? Jot notes in a journal? Stick with a routine?

Possibilities for restorative literacies circles are endless. Meeting in a circle can be validating and transformative for everyone, but especially for those who carry negative readers' and writers' identities.



## STORY AND RE-STORYING (CONT.)

After reading all kinds of books about tornados, the boys eagerly decided to write about their experiences with the tornado that had recently hit the area for their unit on narrative writing. The Common Core State Standards for fifth grade required using narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, and pacing; employing a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events; adding sensory details; and providing a conclusion. In other words, the standard required clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization of the content are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Ms. Williams saw the boys struggle and began to have doubts about her instructional approach that focused only on spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. A significant turning point came when she arrived home to find her husband frustrated in the throes of writing his doctoral dissertation. The room was dark. His head, covered in a hoodie, was down on the desk. His laptop was closed in front of him and by his side were an empty coffee cup, articles, and papers. Crumpled up paper was strewn all over the floor. Like her students, he, too, was struggling to write so that his dissertation was clear, coherent, and appropriate to its task, purpose, and audience.

Ms. Williams saw an opportunity for a restorative circle. She invited her husband to visit her classroom and chat with her boys about how writing was cognitively demanding and an emotionally vulnerable task. Instead of offering a presentation or pep talk,

Ms. Williams shared a snapshot from her cell phone of her husband trying to write at his desk. Her husband and the boys quipped, bantered, laughed, and frowned about the processes of brainstorming, organizing, writing without worrying about correctness, sharing their progress, getting ideas and suggestions, revising, and even accepting help from copy editors and proofreaders. And that taking a break for a quick game of basketball was also helpful. While the work was sometimes frustrating, the boys developed agency, strategies, and the mental and emotional stamina to complete their projects.

Using restorative practices, Ms. Williams began to dismantle the boys' labels and categorization in their general education classrooms and in the entire school. Before long, the boys began to thrive. Their academic scores and grades significantly improved. And their time in a separate resource room was reduced. By the winter term, all four boys never missed their recess, gym, or science projects. Most importantly, the four boys preserved their cultural, racial, linguistic, and literacies identities, all while meeting the academic literacy goals of their school.

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**Can you identify the key points at which Carter, Trevor, Manuel, and Jayden came to be viewed as *readers and writers* alongside their peers? Can you identify how noticing, listening, disrupting conventional mindsets and approaches, upholding voices, and centering literacy on the learner contributed to the boys' development as readers and writers?**

# EXPANDING OUR VIEW OF LITERACIES

Problems in reading and writing don't always point to a cognitive disability such as reading disorders, dyslexia, or illiteracy. When the focus is solely on standards, assessments, diagnostics, intervention, ability grouping, and scripted programs, we miss the rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds students bring to their formal education. And we miss the possibilities to support them to become strong and literate participants in a global world.

Restorative literacies practices can build brave spaces where young people's voices are lifted up and celebrated. Our students can leave their classrooms with lessons to take out into the world to interrupt the inequities there (Perry et al., 2022). Restorative literacies practices are not an additional burden for teachers; rather, they require that we lean into our love of literature, our passion for learning, the rewards of relationship and community-building, and the joy of experimentation (Faughey, 2023). In restorative literacies, we can:

**See that everyone confronts challenging and complex texts.** Learning about multiple forms of literacies, including academic literacy, is a fitful process filled with many elements and skills to process and practice. As children, and even adults, decode; determine meanings of new words; access background knowledge, life experiences, and languages; confront text complexity; maintain fluency; comprehend, critique, draft, revise, edit, and reflect, other issues come into play. None of these areas are learned or practiced in a vacuum nor do they fall into a rigidly sequential manner. Mistakes, miscues, and errors in reading and writing are often

duly noticed, counted, graded, and corrected. Instead, we can view these areas as a lifelong—and delightfully messy—learning process on diverse or increasingly challenging texts.

**Expand the canon in our schools.** Schools generally tend to stick with emotionally and politically safe books and other material for their classroom libraries. Teachers tend to choose “just right” leveled books for students based on curricular recommendations or guidelines. But for many students, these books may be dry or exclusionary. In addition, avoiding controversies and challenges limits exploration of a wide range and depth of literacies. The wealth of the literacies all around us can be used as hooks for learning about strategic reading and writing, as well as for fostering both comprehension skills and critical thinking.

**Develop positive identities as literate beings and as humans.** Facets of literacies, including academic and disciplinary literacies found in schools, are multilayered, interwoven, and continually built upon over a lifespan. In our literacies-rich society, all people, from young to old, are *readers* and *writers* of multiple forms of texts on many levels from many sources. People with positive identities have healthy relationships between themselves as readers, the texts they read, and the authors of such texts. They are curious, invested, and make personal growth in literacies by leaps and bounds. By using a restorative literacies approach, we can support their development as readers and writers in our schools and beyond.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing, authoring, and publishing require a responsibility to share our own stories. I am White, communicate in English, grew up and continue to live and work in an area rich with diversity and resources, and have always had food on the table and a bed to sleep in. Even though I am totally deaf in both ears, I do not pretend to know the intimate experiences of others who encountered harm in the form of historical or current oppression, microaggression, marginalization, or discrimination. Restorative practices requires us to be reflective of who we are, our perspectives, and the lens we look through. And restorative practices requires acknowledging our village who listen to, care for, and grow with us. I would like to thank Margaret Murray for inviting me into IIRP's circle and for her thoughtful insights, expert editing, and friendship throughout the writing of this paper. In addition, many thanks to Angela Carter, Mike Azzalina, Whitney Howarth, Lauren Bailey, Zeau Modig, and Alexis Van Saun for their kind suggestions, sharp editing and beautiful design that brought clarity and joy to this project.



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