"You Can't Just Throw a Book at Me"

Minoritized Students' Experiences of
School-Based Literacy Instruction

For our time today

- Animating questions
- Theoretical and empirical perspectives
- Ethnographic case study background
- Study findings
- Current and future research directions
- Open discussion

1. How do minoritized youth experience school-based literacy instruction?

2. What are the implications for researchers, teachers and teacher educators?

Theoretical & Empirical Perspectives

Theories of Power & Resistance

- **Ideology**
  - "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 1986, p. 241)
  - Has a material presence (actions→ practices → rituals)
  - Most subjects "work all right 'all by themselves', i.e., by ideology" (ibid., 248).
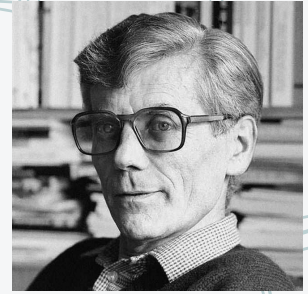
Strategies
- Institutional
- Depend upon space
- Used by the powerful

Tactics
- Individual
- Depend upon time
- Used by the powerless

*"What it wins it cannot keep... It must vigilantly make use of the **cracks** that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches them. It creates **surprises** in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse"* (de Certeau, 1984/2011, p. 37)

Theories of Power & Resistance, CONT.

- Ideology as impediment to social change

  - "Moral and educational and uplift suasion failed miserably in stopping the astounding growth of slavery in the age of King Cotton before the Civil War. **But success, apparently, does not matter when a strategy stems from an ideology.** Moral and educational suasion focus on persuading White people, on appealing to their moral conscience through horror and their logical mind through education. **But what if racist ideas make people illogical?**" (Kendi, 2019, p. 205)

Literacy + Ideology

- "Literacy" as an ideological project (e.g., Auerbach, 1992; Graff, 1991; Street, 1984)

- Literacy "...has always been deeply enmeshed in race" (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

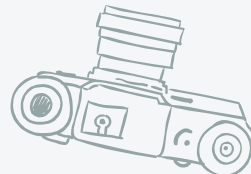- "Domesticating" vs. "Powerful" literacy education (Finn, 2009)

Minoritized youth + Reading in School

- Youth placements in remedial classes are not race- or class-neutral practices (Brooks & Rodela, 2018)

- Compulsory placement in low-track classes reduces opportunities for higher-order thinking; exposes students to harsher classroom climates; corresponds with lower achievement (Kanno & Kangas, 2014)

- Close attention to students' individual needs and desires increases self-efficacy (Glenn & Ginsberg, 2016; Hall, 2012; Houchen, 2013; Learned, 2018)

Putting it All together

"... [t]he neutral stance of literacy educators and researchers is the ideology that literacy research perpetuates, the mask that allows masking to go on" (Stuckey, 1991, p. 60).

Ethnographic Case Study Background

STUDY CONTEXT

Heartland High School

- Approx. 2,000 students
- 30+ languages spoken

Demonstration of Reading Examination (DRE)

- Remedial Reading Course Progression:
  - Reading I (literal comprehension)
  - **Reading II (inferential comprehension)**
  - Reading III (inferential/critical comprehension)
  - Reading IV (critical comprehension)

Ethnographic Case Study Design

Research questions:
- What are students in a remedial reading class learning about the nature of literacy?

- And, how does their compulsory membership in this program impact their sense of identity?

- Two Reading II classes
- Data Sources
  - fieldnotes from approx. 72 observations of two remedial reading classes
  - Two rounds of ethnographic interviews

Participants

Name	Demographic Information
Ms. Harper	Second-year remedial reading teacher, white and Cambodian; 23
Jordan	11th grade reading student, African-American, 16
David	10th grade reading student, African-American, 15
Gabriela	9th grade reading student, Mexican-American, 14
Mr. Baker	Remedial reading teacher and district reading curriculum coordinator, white, 37
Angelica	9th grade reading student, Mexican-American, 14
Guillermo	9th grade reading student, Mexican-American, 14

Study Findings

Literacy Ideology in Reading II

- ## Lack of belief in students' capabilities
  - "They're in a reading class cause **they're bad at it, cause they don't like it.** I have students say that to me sometimes, they say, 'I don't like reading.' It's like, no one in here likes reading! Here we are, all not liking reading together" (Ms. Harper, 10/09/2017).
- ## Autonomous model of literacy
  - "...in the Reading I curriculum, we're working on prefixes, and so if you're a teacher who wants to do a literature discussion or a lit circle in Reading I, you are gonna lose your kids because there is, **if we're thinking about the cognitive model of reading and they do not have in place the understanding of prefixes and how to use that to recognize words, we're missing what that student needs**. Let's do some more work on that and some scaffolding to see if I can get students to progress, um, before then we have some higher order thinking opportunities" (Mr. Baker, 10/10/2017).

Literacy Ideology in Reading II, cont.

- Nominally focused on "inferential comprehension," but majority of time was spent on "literal comprehension"

Domain	Material Actions and Practices	
	Summative Assessments:	*Formative Assessments and Class Activities:*
Literal comprehension	- SARP multiple choice - SARP extended response (literal) - DRE - Vocabulary Quizzes - Nonfiction Unit Final Project (summary portion)	- DRE practice exams - main idea formula practice - main idea statement formula practice - DRE "formula" practice - literal responses (Google Classroom) - timeline graphic organizers - vocabulary worksheets (e.g., Idea Completion) - nonfiction article summaries using the five framing questions - topic sentence practice - Notice & Note signpost recall
Inferential comprehension	- SARP multiple choice - SARP extended response (inferential)	- character analysis graphic organizer - inferential responses (Google Classroom) - Close Reading Strategies response form (Google Classroom) - identifying signposts worksheets
Critical comprehension	- SARP extended response (critical) - Nonfiction Unit Final Project (connection portion)	- compare/contrast graphic organizer - Critical Responses (Google Classroom)

Minoritized Students' Responses to Reading II Literacy Ideology

Resistance ← → **Submission**

Getting By

"No one can just throw a book at me and tell me to read it. I just have to, myself, find interest in the book."
--Gabriela

"Well, right now, I'm kinda reading the book, and I say kinda cause I'm not reading it, and at the same time I am. Sometimes I'm reading it, but I just don't focus on what it's talking about" --Angelica

"I talk a lot. And then, I sometimes eat a lot, and then I try to learn a lot. I part-, I part-, you know I raise my hand a lot, what's it called? Participate. Yeah, I do that, too."
--Guillermo

Resistance

- Ex: leaving the room; sleeping; listening to music/playing on phone

- To the class, spread out among octagonal desks in the media center, Ms. Harper asks, 'Questions?' David, in response, announces, "Not doing it." "Yes, you are," counters Ms. Harper (Fieldnotes, 10/30/2017).

Submission

"I'm a person that, if I don't try, I get a really, really low grade, but if I try and I still get a low grade, I'm just like, I tried everything! I tried, I put everything I could, and how did I get this grade?... I'm a person that doesn't like to give up easily, but sometimes there's times that I'm just like, it's gone, it's over." --Angelica, 14

Getting By

- Blend of submission and resistance

- Allowed students to work within the structure of the school day toward their own ends

- Ex: selling candy; bidding on eBay; using the bathroom; working on other homework

"Did you read chapter 28?" asks Ms. Harper

"Yeah," says David.

"What happened?"

"She got hit by a car. She's probably gonna die," he answers.

Ms. Harper seems satisfied with this response and calls over the next student (Fieldnotes, 10/30/2017).

Movement as literacy

Resistance ⟵————————————— Getting By —————————————⟶ Submission

Tactical literacies

- Students' decisions to move among the submission–resistance continuum evidence a sort of literacy unto itself

- *Tactical literacies*
  - Deep fluency of the various structures, routines, and patterns of the reading class
  - Refer to the ways minoritized students are able to "read" the school/classroom as a text
  - Are *tactical* in that they result in pilfering time (de Certeau, 1984/2011)

Tactical Literacies

Student Activities	Examples from Fieldnotes
Eat food (Pop tarts, candy, ring pop, almonds, elotes)	Ms. Harper asks, "Do you want some almonds?" "Please," states the student. She pulls a plastic tub of almonds out of her desk and hands them to the student. After a few minutes, the student exclaims, "Miss, I can't. It's like eating rocks. Thank you anyway" (Fieldnotes, 10/11/2017).
Watch TV/movies on Chromebooks (e.g., documentaries; teen vampire dramas; sometimes using subtitles)	The new girl is chewing on a green tootsie pop, her Chrome Book is open, and a video is playing, much like last time. However, this appears to be a different genre of show – maybe a news segment? I can see what appears to be a female news anchor and a ticker tape running along the bottom of the screen (Fieldnotes, 09/25/2017).
Text/snap someone	Gabriela & Jordan are whispering across the room to each other. They're not understanding one another, so Gabriela eventually taps on the glass screen of her smart phone with her long, polished fingernail as if to say, *I'll text you about it* (Fieldnotes, 10/25/2017).
Read *other* books	Another student, a girl sitting close to me, has a book open, but it's not one of the two assigned texts. Instead, it's *Flight* by Sherman Alexie. Ms. Harper notices this student is not fully on task and moves to her side, crouching down and redirecting her in a hushed tone (Fieldnotes, 11/27/2017).
Bid on eBay for a smartphone	A student at another table is bidding on a smartphone on eBay. I can see his screen from where I sit, and he's watching the bidding

Tactical Literacies & The Way Forward

"What if antiracists constantly self-critiqued our own ideas? **What if we blamed our ideologies and methods, studied our ideologies and methods, refined our ideologies and methods again and again until they worked?**... Antiracist power must be flexible to match the flexibility of racist power, propelled only by the craving for power to shape policy in its inequitable interests" (Kendi, 2019, p. 214).

Current and Future Research Directions

Current Projects

Book chapter (forthcoming):

"I wanna get out of here and never come back": Lines of flight in a remedial reading classroom. In A. Phillips & T. Gray (Eds.) *Agency in constrained academic spaces*. Lexington.

Empirical article (revise and resubmit):

Submitting, resisting, and getting by: Literacy and ideology in a remedial reading program. Submitted to *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.*

Practitioner article (under review):

Utilizing tactical literacies for classroom research. Submitted to *English Journal.*

READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY

Reading in "Purgatory": Tactical Literacies in a Remedial Reading Class

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ABSTRACT

I detail findings from an ethnographic study of a high school remedial reading class, with a particular focus on students' perceptions of what it means to be literate and how their mandatory enrollment in the course impacted their identities. Compounding students' experiences was the existence of a high-stakes reading examination that all students in the district must pass to graduate high school. Findings describe the contrast between school literacies that students learn in class and their own literate practices, which neither youth nor their teacher recognized as literacies, as well as the functioning of the remedial reading class as a sort of "purgatory" that holds and segregates students, the majority of whom are students of color and/or from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, for semesters on end. Still, students employed tactical literacies to subvert the teacher's directives and reclaim their time. These findings suggest that common approaches to remediation may be a cause of youth disinterest in reading and that youth literacies may be leveraged in service of broader literacy goals, although the school must first acknowledge them.

Future Directions

- Ongoing self-study in MIT 551: Literacies in the Disciplines

  - RQ: What are the impacts of an explicit focus on sociocultural theories of literacy on students' understandings of the meaning(s) and value of literacy within their content areas?

- Multi-site case study data analysis

  - RQ: What are the ways in which multilingual students interact with their physical and interpersonal surroundings within the space of the school?

- School-based project: What can "powerful literacy" look like in secondary schools?

Open Discussion

Thank you for coming!

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Literacies of Minoritized Youth

- Literacies of "attention, navigation, and critique" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 236)

- Often "camouflaged" in the classroom (Ives, 2011)

- Literacy practices as resources to be leveraged in pursuit of equity for minoritized youth (Skerrett, 2012).

Youth Studies

- Youth as an oppressed group (DeJong & Love, 2016)

- Youth resistance as "physiologically/ psychically health-protecting act[s] responsive to injustice" (Ruglis, 2011, p. 634)

  - psychiatrized as abnormal by adults (Barnhart, 2018)