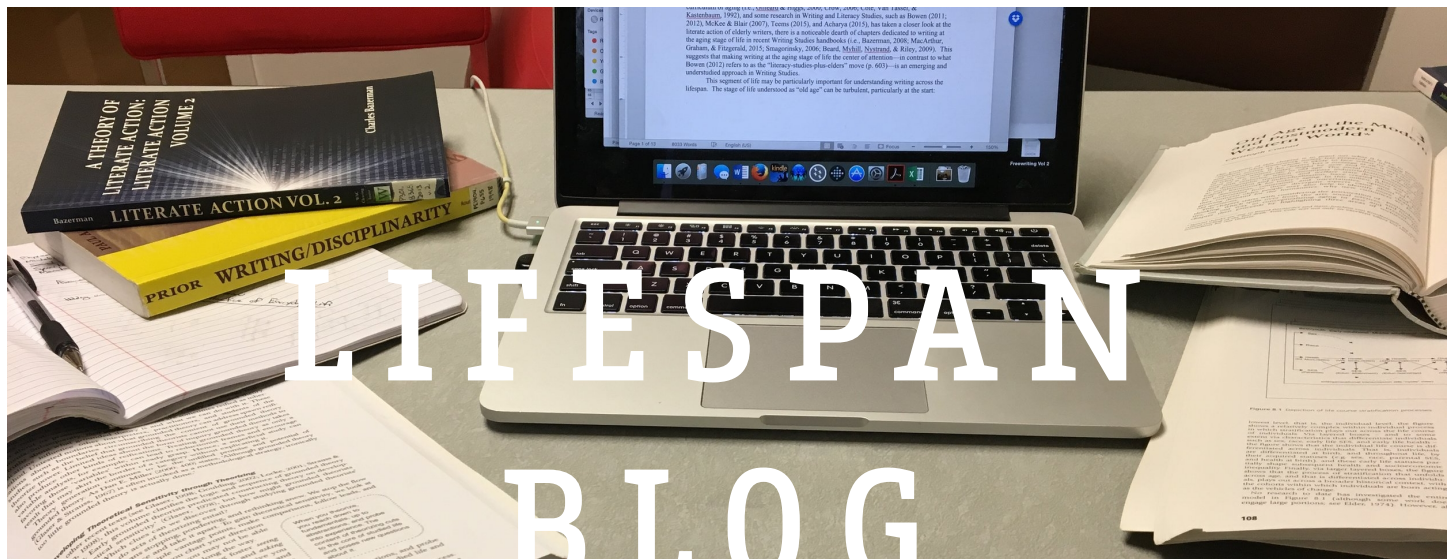


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My Longview Of **READING** As Composing Reality

May 14, 2017

The core of my research interests resides within the question: What kinds of knowledge and actions are important for raising critical consumers of knowledge? Within this question are hints of relevant disciplines, genres, and sociocultural linguistic theories of social practices. I have taken up the practice of **reading** as a form of composing meaning and critical textual analysis.

This entry is an account of my own thinking about the **8 Principles** while pulling in various artifacts collected from social media. Through my Sunday morning journey, I raise questions, possibilities and (undoubtedly) impossibilities for future work.

“Writing can develop across the lifespan as part of changing contexts.”



In 1983, Robert Tierney and P. David Pearson published an important theoretical piece in *Language Arts* titled, “Towards a Composing Model of Reading” (pp. 568-580). In this seminal article, a new theory of reading was introduced; as we make sense of text, we are making interpretations that might approximate yet not fully represent the text as written or intended by the author. In other words, we are re-writing the text as we read it. Reading is not a passive enterprise, as if the

content from the page (or screen) is delivered directly from author to reader. Reading is rather an active, dynamic practice, and as such, we should foster rich interpretations of text through the idea of students composing their own tellings and perspectives. I agree that much of reading, like writing, “occurs in the mind of the writer” (Bazerman et al., p. 354), yet I also see the act of composing as socially anchored. Even sitting in a room by one’s self, reading a novel involves a dialogue, and this dialogue is not merely an exchange between reader and author; as Bakhtin demonstrated via Dostoyevky’s writing, there are many voices pushing and pulling on the reader, who may in turn have multiple voices from other sources vying for attention.

In my work, I have decided to take up and expand on this theory of reading as composing, focusing particularly on multiple, multimodal textual analyses within STEM (mainly science and engineering) learning contexts. Hence, I have focused on the notion of reading as collaborative constructions (or rather compositions) of knowledge.

“ . . . Writing is complex.”

The image shows a hand-drawn educational poster on the left and three blue speech bubbles on the right. The poster is titled "Types of Sentences" and lists three types with examples and definitions:

- SIMPLE SENTENCE:** McKendree is a great school. - Shows one idea.
- COMPOUND SENTENCE:** McKendree is a great school, and I love going there. - combines two ideas using a comma and conjunctive.
- COMPLEX SENTENCE:** While I was at McKendree, I learned many things. - An independent clause joined by a dependent clause.

Below the examples is the acronym "FANBOYS" with the letters F, A, N, B, O, Y, S. At the bottom right of the poster is a logo for "The Teacher Shop".

The three speech bubbles contain the following text:

- Writing sucks.
- What does it mean when the teacher says to use my science words?
- What about the writing in graphic novels? Does complexity always mean more clauses?

In my research of knowledge building across different generational contexts—elementary, secondary and higher

education—I have come to a “head scratching” point in my career . . . beings within every context demonstrate high levels of complexity while demonstrating that we also are developing knowledge, skills and strategies at greater complexity. How is this so? Kids are deep in their thinking, and given the opportunity, they never cease to impress adult beings with what they know. At the same time, children are growing in their understanding of the world and their place in it. We are all in the process of understanding more of what we read, and in turn we are becoming better “composers” of meaning within and across ever-evolving societies.

Bazerman and colleagues relayed the five domains of development from the field of child psychology, and they connect this framework with writing across the lifespan. From birth onward, we develop our abilities and understandings related to our physical, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, and executive functioning. Further, the idiosyncratic nature of writing insists the acknowledgement of individual differences demonstrated within each of these domains. Furthermore, such differences are shaped and reshaped as new technologies and (hence) ways of thinking, saying, reading, writing, doing, making and being continue to evolve over time.

Taking up one of these domains—language—enables a closer view of development. Luckily, renowned linguist M.A.K. Halliday is ready to lead us through the lifespan, at least through the toughest moments of childhood language development . . . we begin at the “protolanguage” phase of early childhood, where we see crawling and wobbly toddlers assert their desires through grunts, cries, pointing, and pounding fists. Then Halliday guides us along a trail that serves as a transitional, “instrumental” phase, where we see our growing toddlers moving with greater precision while composing two-word expressions (*more milk, mommy down*, etc.) in a turn-taking world that suggests new roles of being and doing, some of which are perceived to be lacking in merit (*No beans!*). Then comes the stage during which time the “Speaker” emerges; there are stories created, (re)presented, and foretold. The child is

This principle, in my opinion, will be the toughest challenge for the field of education. If there is no single path, then what do schools tell their teachers? How do we assess progress? We live and work in a society that privileges the test score as an authority on reading and writing levels and abilities. In literacy, the Lexiles rule in determining “appropriate texts” across the grades.

Metametrics (the corporation that created the Lexile) provides the engine for concrete, computer-driven reading programs that offer new compelling reasons for parents to believe that “career and college readiness” is just around the corner because their child just grew two Lexiles. Whatever the hell that means...

Fortunately, I see increased interest in case studies for tracing the different pathways that can be taken as students develop their semiotic skills and voices.

At this point in my **composing** of Bazerman et al.’s 8 principles, I begin to see how the three principles following this notion of “no single path” offer specific explanations for why this is the case. First, composing readers are adapting and responding to an ever-changing world, so how can we possibly anticipate a universal path? Further, we develop our composing skills by using what we have, our cognitive resources, which were not originally developed for such purposes. Finally, as we compose meaning, we are further inspired to research, consider, argue, and (re)compose in various ways, and such experiences set us on different lines of thinking, relating, and doing that further enhance linguistic skills, which in turn are different yet related to composing, and thus serve as important resources for reading (and writing) development.

“Curriculum plays a significant formative role in writing development.”





I see this lifespan project as one that commits to the idea that literacy curricula must be responsive to changing societal structures, student needs and technological advances. My work is driven by my desire to better understand the composing nature of reading various forms and formalities of scientific texts across professional fields of study. I look outside classroom walls in order to better understand the reading differences between school and professional learning contexts, and what difference these differences make in terms of supporting post-secondary success. As such, my “longview” on reading as composing meaning focuses on preadolescent students (grades 4-6) and their development of taking argumentative stances on multiple, multimodal texts related to science and engineering (e.g., data tables and figures, interactive model simulations, historical accounts of discovery and innovation, expositions of conceptual or mechanical processes, etc.). In other words, I am keenly interested in how the scientist within the child grows into being, and I have further focused my investigative lens on the scientist as an interpreter (or composer) of various types of narratives about reality. I aim to contribute to greater understandings about how such notions of argumentation emerge and develop from the elementary years through high school.

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