

Encyclopedia of **CURRICULUM STUDIES**

Craig Kridel, EDITOR

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2

Craig Kridel, EDITOR
University of South Carolina



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LACANIAN THOUGHT

Lacanian thought refers to the work of French psychoanalyst and poststructuralist Jacques Lacan (1901–1981). In curriculum studies, his ideas are used to explore desire in the classroom, challenge the belief that identity is a fixed concept, and examine the subject's relationship with language. His writings and lectures are collected in *Écrits*, published in 1966, and in several volumes that contain his seminars delivered between 1953 and 1981. The three orders of the Lacanian self—the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real—were influenced in part by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure, and surrealist Salvador Dali.

The imaginary refers to a phase before the acquisition of language and therefore of an identity separate from a caretaker. Subjects are defined through an imagined sense of self based upon what they see constructed through the gaze of another. Lacan's interpretation of the mirror stage (first presented at a conference in 1936) refers to the time when infants between the ages of 6 and 18 months observe themselves in the reflection of another or an Other (i.e., mirror, mother, or sibling). Recognizing for the first time an external, cohesive identity, subjects seek to regain that ideal sense of wholeness. However, because that identity or image changes with each new reflective surface, the subject can never regain a stable, fixed identity, but continues to seek the comfort of one.

Therefore, subjects must adopt the rules and language of the symbolic order. Lacan and many of those who use his theories call their participants subjects because they must succumb to language to express themselves. As they seek their unconscious needs and desires, subjects must succumb to the symbolic register that is governed by the laws of language, which is controlled by the paternal. Furthermore, because they possess a phallus, male subjects are able to employ the symbolic order, whereas females are forever situated outside that order.

The real is the opposite of the imaginary and exists outside the symbolic. This order represents that which always remains, but is forever unattainable. Once a subject uses the symbolic (i.e., language) to try to define that which is impossible to define, it is no longer real, but is constructed by a subject. In other words, the real is always in its place, and (and to refer to one of Lacan's tenets) because the unconscious is structured like a language, it is impossible to access that which cannot be expressed through the symbolic.

Feminist and queer theories build upon and challenge many of Lacan's concepts. Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva each question the notion that the female cannot express herself through language because it is inherently male. Irigaray posits that the female, therefore, is a male construct, while Cixous advocates that the female does indeed possess a language of her own. Kristeva rejects the idea that the subject must suppress the feminine during the mirror stage and argues that the feminine expresses itself through

the pulsations and rhythms found in language. In her work on performativity, Judith Butler addresses Lacan's ideas that subjects experience lack because they desire the phallus. Agreeing with Lacan's explanation of the phallus as a signifier, not always synonymous with penis, Butler argues that women can both possess and lack the phallus through performance, for example, by dressing in drag or by displacing the penis as signifier by substituting another body part.

In curriculum studies, Lacanian thought is used to explore the complex relationships between teachers and students, to explore how language fails to convey the real and how the desire for the real may be transferred to the Other, and to explore the ethical questions that might result from these interactions. For example, a student who desires the affections of a teacher might in actuality covet the power a teacher represents. The student might transfer that desire onto the teacher in an effort to possess the unimaginable. In other words, employing Lacan's theories to read this situation would reveal that this student or subject might lack or desire power. Once this identification is made, however, the subject cannot signify that lack through language and will still experience lack. Lacanian thought brings to curriculum studies ideas grounded in psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and surrealist art.

Jacqueline Bach

See also Butlerian Thought; Freudian Thought; Poststructuralist Research; Psychoanalytic Theory; Structuralism

Further Readings

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LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Language arts education curricula are the sets of materials and practices generally used in the

preparation of pre- and inservice PreK–8 educators for engaging children and youth with the subject matter, pedagogical practices, and current debates related to the commonly accepted strands of language arts, which include reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visual representation. This topic is relevant to the field of curriculum studies because the language arts remain the most foundational—and potentially most controversial—of curricular emphases addressed within any PreK–8 school setting. This encyclopedia entry provides a definition of English language arts education curricula, including an overview of their most commonly recognized elements; brief discussions of the primary assumptions, theories, and curricular standards associated with this element of curriculum; cursory examinations of historical and recent debates and controversies related to this field of curriculum studies; and descriptions of examples of four of the key strands included in language arts education curricula.

Definition

Although language arts education might be taught with a focus on any language (e.g., Spanish language arts education or Chinese language arts education), in the United States it is assumed that one is considering the English language when speaking of a language arts education curriculum. Of course, in the United States—with an increasingly diverse population, including higher percentages of non-native English speakers—traditional language arts education curricula frequently include considerations of the needs, abilities, and skills related to other languages.

Language arts education curricula are generally differentiated from English education curricula by both the grade levels toward which these subject matters are oriented and the range of subtopics that are included in each. The language arts are generally organized as discrete courses of study taught in elementary through middle or junior high school (PreK–8) grades; these courses are distinct from English courses (generally taught in high school settings) in that language arts curricula include a holistic integration of all of the elements listed above (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visual representation), of which two are written, two are visual, and two are oral.

In addition, in the grades in which the language arts are taught, it is commonly recognized that these topics and skills are integrated within and across subjects (e.g., science or social studies), even if these are also taught as discrete courses. As students progress to high school, these integrated language arts are isolated into distinct courses and curricula, each of which might focus remotely on literature, composition, speech, debate, drama, video, multimedia, or related courses.

Assumptions, Theories, and Standards

Several assumptions and theories lie at the heart of the nature of language arts education curricula. These include the belief that the upper elementary and middle school (Grades 4–8) youth who are the primary audiences for language arts curricula are developmentally unique and benefit from an integrative approach to curricula and teaching practices. As with many fields of curriculum, the features of language arts education curricula are the outgrowth of a set of psychological characteristics believed to be most prevalent among upper elementary and middle school children.

Psychological, constructivist, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural perspectives on how children learn illustrate how students' knowledge is organized in the brain. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky both describe cognitive structures that suggest that the organization of children's brains becomes more integrated as their knowledge grows. Accommodation and assimilation are the primary cognitive processes at work: Accommodation takes place when learners' existing mental frames—or schemes—are modified by new information that they encounter, and assimilation occurs when new information is incorporated into children's existing schemes. All people attempt to achieve and maintain equilibrium—to make sense of new information that they encounter; naturally, children in school encounter new information on a regular basis, but teachers must be conscious of the quantity and quality of this information, seeking to share what Piaget calls moderately novel facts, data, and concepts. Language arts education curricula attempt to appeal to early adolescents' developmental needs for integrated, but increasingly discrete, curricular topics.

Language arts education curricula are also rooted in now commonly accepted prescriptive

principles or content standards. The standards movement has greatly altered the curriculum landscape in the past decade, with states generally developing their own standards and designing their own or adopting commercially available forms of curricula for language arts instruction. The majority of these standards are closely related to those developed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA), which combined are the two primary professional organizations serving language arts educators. While the standards are not in and of themselves language arts education curricula, they are considered near absolute guides for the selection and development of such curricula.

Debates and Controversies

Two controversies are particularly important to consider in any discussion of language arts education curricula. The first relates to what has become an almost accepted fissure between the curricula language arts teachers actually use in their PreK–8 classrooms and the curricula that are presented in language arts education courses. A seemingly insurmountable tension remains between language arts curricula—what classroom teachers actually teach—and the curriculum of language arts education programs, which are typically university-based and include a wider array of theoretical perspectives and broader consideration of a variety of media.

The second controversy is the result of the increasing diversity (particularly in terms of language) of the U.S. school population and the persistent achievement gap between children from higher socioeconomic families and those students from more economically, racially, and ethnically diverse settings. It is arguable that as the United States has become more diverse linguistically and culturally that teachers are facing additional challenges in teaching the English language arts. Increasing percentages of students who are non-native English speakers arrive in schools virtually every day, and nondominant and nonstandard language and communication forms are increasingly common among families, communities, and youth who were either not born into or are not successful participants in the primary economy. As a result, effective language arts teachers must be increasingly culturally sensitive and competent,

with abilities to appreciate, study, and honor their students' given relationships to and skills with these school-based reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visual representation tasks. Given these daily challenges to effective language arts instruction, teachers must be conscious of how their beliefs about how, why, and what children learn impact their daily practices.

The gap between language arts education curricula (those materials and practices used in the training of PreK–8 language arts teachers) and language arts curricula (those materials and practices actually used by PreK–8 teachers in their school settings) is perhaps most evident when the curricula used to serve the needs of the increasingly diverse U.S. school population are considered. Ostensibly in an effort to most efficiently address the curricular guidelines and achievement objectives to which districts and schools are being held accountable (most often through high-stakes, standardized assessments), many districts have turned to scripted curricula that focus on basic skills that are presented in a virtually teacher-proof fashion. Although these curricula are the centerpiece of an increasing number of districts' language arts programs, such materials rarely have a place in the language arts education curricula to which preservice teachers are introduced.

Examples of Language Arts Curricula

The richest and most complete examples of language arts education curricula address all six of the commonly accepted strands of the language arts. Experts agree that the most effective language arts teachers integrate instruction in and incorporate opportunities for students to use all six every day in their classroom curricula. Seminal examples of these curricula generally focus in substantial detail on just one or two of these strands; scripted curricula that attempt to address all six strands generally do so in a streamlined, commercially appealing, and cursory fashion. This encyclopedia entry focuses on historically significant examples of curricula that address the strands of reading, writing, viewing, and visual representation; these reading and writing curricula are among the most respected and widely used across the United States, and the viewing and visual representation examples are among the latest trends in curricular reforms.

Nancy Atwell has been among the most important of curriculum theorists and developers who have attempted to consider the integration of the six language arts strands while paying particular attention to the psychological and sociocultural characteristics of middle school-aged youth—for whom such an integration is understood as most necessary. Atwell's *In the Middle: New Understanding About Writing, Reading, and Learning* is widely considered a foundational text for the teaching of reading in language arts classrooms. Among the most commonly accepted curricular forms described by Atwell is the literature circle, a pedagogical approach that allows for the use of a wide array of literature in a language arts classroom, but that provides youth with structures for playing authentic roles and making scaffolded, but self-directed choices in the selection of this literature and the ways in which they engage with it. More recently, Jeff Wilhelm has provided detailed examples of what Gloria Ladson-Billings has described as culturally relevant reading curricula and strategies while explicitly addressing the guiding standards outlined by NCTE and IRA.

Paralleling Atwell's work on reading curricula and instruction is Lucy Calkins's *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Her volume describes elaborate student-centered mechanisms for engaging children and youth with writing activities, focusing on the now commonly accepted structure of the writing workshop. As with Atwell's and Wilhelm's work, Calkins's curriculum theory and development provide not so much explicit examples of required writing activities as much as a general writing instruction orientation that appeals to the psychological traits and stages of development of elementary and middle school-aged youth. More recently, the *6+1 Traits* writing curriculum has been widely adopted by districts and schools across the United States; these materials rely on extensive research into the characteristics of quality writing across genres.

In the past 20 years, the role of technology, visual literacy, viewing, and visual representation as language arts has become much more prominent. These often fall under the more general term of critical literacy, which calls on teachers to honor youths' proficiency with the consumption of visual texts while also providing students with opportunities to manipulate and construct their own versions

of these texts—often with a perspective that critiques the passive consumption of existing visual tools. When the book and other published paper forms were the dominant texts inside and outside of school, it was arguable that PreK–8 language arts curricula and language arts education curricula were reasonably current with these forms. But as video, multimedia productions, and electronic media (including Web-, music-, e-mail-, and mobile phone-based tools and text forms) have proliferated—and as youth culture and its visual orientation have influenced popular culture in an increasing, more fluid, and swift manner—school language arts curricula and language arts education curricula have struggled to remain current.

James Gee, Brian Street, Elizabeth Moje, and Ernest Morrell are among the most recognized of curriculum theorists associated with this movement toward viewing and visual representation as foundational language arts. The Center on Media Literacy, among other organizations and individuals, has developed seminal curricula that allow children and youth not only to interpret visual media, but also to develop their own. Rooted in Paulo Freire's notion of conscientization, Moje, Morrell, Linda Christenson, and Jessica Singer have articulated critiques of language arts education curricula that do not engage students in these viewing and visual representation activities and have developed substantial examples of curricula that provide youth with opportunities for using these and other strands of the language arts in the pursuit of larger, more real-world and social justice-oriented ends.

Kristien Zenkov

See also Conscientization; Curriculum Studies in Relation to the Field of Teacher Education; English Education Curriculum; Middle School Curriculum; Standards, Curricular; Teacher-Proof Curriculum

Further Readings

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LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION CURRICULUM, HISTORY OF

History of language arts education curricula refers to historical antecedents and underpinnings that have contributed to the general conception of language arts education curricula. This topic contributes to the larger study of curriculum by illustrating seminal work that formed the foundations for current practices and methodologies in the field of language arts education. This encyclopedia entry includes a brief review of early 20th-century trends in English education, an examination of how social and historical events have encouraged shifts in the perception and implementation of language arts curricula over time, and a subsequent review of how modern perceptions have once again evolved to reflect earlier conceptual notions.

Early 20th Century Trends

As early as 1917, policy statements and reports issued by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) documented a need to move beyond a departmentalized framework for the teaching of English that prepared students for the eventual meeting of college entrance requirements. Postindustrial advances in science and psychology influenced work in education by encouraging the reenvisioning of the learning process and the learner from a fragmented, behaviorist perspective to a more holistic, whole child appreciation.