

## Chapter 2

# Enacting a Raciolinguistic Perspective for the “New Mainstream” in Literacy Classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter contributes to the conversation on reconceptualizing literacy teacher education through exploring the fallout of neoliberal sensibilities on U.S. schools. It continues to describe the new mainstream to be primarily racialized bi/multilingual students that defy the mono-mainstream assumption. The chapter then defines the mono-mainstream assumption that surreptitiously pervades educational systems with its deleterious effects on students. To combat this, the author explores how literacy teachers can enact a language architecture framework as an extension of a raciolinguistic perspective with practical classroom examples, including the terms used to describe students, their languages and literacies, how to negotiate hegemonic systems of accountability, specific pedagogical practices, and continued teacher reflexivity.*

### INTRODUCTION

Today's k-12 classrooms are riddled with many interconnected tensions, affecting how teacher educators make instructional decisions in the preparation of literacy teachers. Arguably one of the greatest tensions is that of neoliberal sensibilities applied to school settings, where the market-place logic of who is successful is reduced to individual hard work (De Lissoyoy, 2015). This leads to an emphasis on teacher and student grit and efficiency to overcome literacy challenges (Golden, 2017). It also includes the belief that increased school choice creates a competitive school market that will lead to better outcomes for all (Klein, 2007). Closely related to neoliberal *sensibilities* are the neoliberal *goals* of many school systems

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that focus on reified views of literacy achievement through mass-produced, standardized tests. In other words, the definition and standard of literacy achievement is severely reduced to focus on the teaching and learning of *print-based* reading and writing assessed on wide-scale, norm-referenced texts. This, of course, leads to a narrowing of the curriculum and literacy practices that are deemed important and valuable (Yancey, et al., 2018) in teacher preparation curriculum.

Also related to the tensions surrounding neoliberalism in education are the *sociocultural histories* that inform current inequities. Under a neoliberal view, multilayered structural conditions are rarely acknowledged or deeply considered. For instance, gerrymandering of school zones (Richards, 2014) and segregated schools (Orfield, et al., 2016) remain a reality affecting the teaching and learning of k-12 students. This disproportionately disadvantages Students of Color and advantages white students as to the quantity and quality of resources they receive, including highly-qualified teachers (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016). While decades of activism have sought to mitigate these inequities, they still persist. Another layer to the sociohistorical complexity of literacy education is what and how literacy teachers are prepared to meet students’ needs in such a milieu. Conceptualizations of and pedagogies to counter the endemic nature of white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005) and English hegemony (Macedo, et al., 2015) are also rarely addressed in teacher preparation programs (Aronson & Meyers, 2020). Such an ahistorical view thus constrains teachers from fully understanding and addressing themselves and their work (Palmer, 2019) in U.S. literacy classrooms.

Taken together, these macro-level forces are often at odds with the internal motivations of teachers, schools, and district systems (Babino & Stewart, 2018; Babino, 2018; Palmer et al., 2016) that seek to work toward a democratic view of literacy as a right, including many ways of meaning-making across languages. Both teacher educators and classroom literacy teachers feel caught in the crossfire between what they believe is right and what they must enforce from top-down “reforms”. Thus, as educators try to walk out their democratic principles, they find themselves in an educational ecosystem wrought with mixed messages, often leading to feelings of lack of agency (Palmer, 2019). Teacher educators may wonder: Who gets to define literacy and literacy success? Why is this the touted definition? How can teacher educators enact more expansive views of literacy, and how can teacher educators facilitate the development of a multiplicity of literacy practices beyond those assessed on English standardized tests?

Inspired by these questions, the aim in this chapter is to foreground the “new mainstream” (Enright, 2011) in U.S. literacy classrooms to set the foundation for how school systems have historically viewed and treated their literacy practices. The new mainstream refers to the current and projected majority of literacy students in the U.S., or mainstream, that are racialized, multilinguals instead of white, English-speaking monolinguals with ties to the dominant, white culture. Then I plan to detail how teacher educators can view the new mainstream and partner with pre-service and in-service teachers in developing and leveraging their literacy practices in highly sophisticated, expansive, and emancipatory ways (García & Kleifgen, 2020). In the following sections of the chapter, I plan to 1) share my personal journey in the remainder of the introduction, 2) define the mono-mainstream assumption, 3) detail the trouble with “academic” language and literacies, and 4) propose a practical application on how teacher educators can enact a raciolinguistic perspective across the curriculum.

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