

The Anthropology of Literacy  
LRC 795a  
Spring 2012  
Wednesday 4:15 – 6:45 pm  
Room 502  
(Tentative)

Instructor: Perry Gilmore  
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Course Description:

In recent years the nature and role of literacy has been studied and debated in a wide variety of disciplines. While early studies of reading and writing tended to focus on cognitive processes, in the past two decades the view of literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon has received much credence and attention. With this sociocultural conceptualization of literacy, it became necessary to use research theories and methods more suited to the study of cultural processes. The anthropological perspectives and ethnographic methods thus became the primary approaches for this area of study. The course will explore the “anthropology of literacy” research and literature and examine and critique the state of the art and the implications for the future.

Course Requirements:

The course will be conducted as a seminar with readings assigned for each session. In addition to weekly reading and writing assignments for the class, individuals and groups will be assigned readings, which they will summarize, and present to the class.

One major paper will be required. The professor will approve the topic for the final paper. Students will have opportunities to share their work- in- progress regularly during the semester.

Readings:

Ways with Words. Shirley Brice Heath Cambridge 1983

The Ethnography of Reading. John Boyarin (Ed.) University of California Press 1993

Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts. Greg Sarris University of California Press 1993

Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses. James Paul Gee Routledge 1996

Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity. James Collins and Richard K. Blot Cambridge University Press 2003

(Additional readings will be provided on D2L)

Tentative Outline:

January 12 Introduction and Overview

January 18 Guest Speaker, Dr. Janet Theophano  
“Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the  
Cookbooks They Wrote”  
Read Ch. 5 - “Cookbooks, Literacy and Domesticity”

January 26 Literacy in Everyday Life: What is Literacy? What is Ethnography?  
What is an Anthropology of Literacy?

“Putting Literacy in Its Place” Ray McDermott *Journal of Education* 184:1, 11-30, 2004

“The Anthropology of Literacy Acquisition” David M. Smith *In The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives*. B. Schieffelin and P. Gilmore (Eds.) (pp. 261- 275) Ablex 1986

“What is ethnography?” Dell Hymes, *In Children In and Out of School: Ethnography and Education*. P. Gilmore and A. Glatthorn (Eds.) (pp. 21- 32) Ablex 1982

“What is literacy?” James Paul Gee, *Teaching and Learning*, 2 (3-11) 1987

“The ethnography of literacy” John Szwed, In *Perspectives on Literacy*. E. R. Kintgen, B. Kroll and M. Rose (Eds.) (pp. 303-311) Southern Illinois University Press 1988

**DUE: A two page autobiographical essay on the social and cultural contexts of literacy in your life.**

- February 2 Ways With Words. Shirley Brice Heath
- de Castelle and Walker, “Identity, Metamorphosis and Ethnographic Research: What Kind of Story is Ways With Words”
- B. Assink, “Open Letter to Suzanne de Castelle and Tom Walker”
- S. B. Heath, “The Madness of Doing Ethnography”
- Orality and Literacy: From Savage Mind to Ways With Words, J. P. Gee  
*TESOL Quarterly* 20, 719 – 746, 1986
- February 9 Ways With Words. Heath (cont.)  
“Gimme Room” Perry Gilmore. *Journal of Education* 1983  
“Sub-rosa Literacy” Perry Gilmore. In Schieffelin and Gilmore  
1986  
The Ethnography of Reading. Boyarin (Ed.)  
Chapters TBA
- February 16 **Attend TLS Colloquy**
- February 23 The Ethnography of Reading. Boyarin (Ed.)  
Chapters TBA
- Arabic Literacy and Secrecy among the Mende of Sierra Leone.  
Bledsoe and Robey. In *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, B.  
Street (Ed.) 1993
- Continua of Biliteracy. Nancy Hornberger. *Educational Researcher*  
(59) 3, 271 – 296. 1989
- The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse. Lisa Delpit in Other  
People’s Children 1995
- March 1 Collins and Blot, Literacy and Literacies.  
T. McCarty, “Introduction: The Continuing Power of the Great Divide”

March 8 Collins and Blot, Literacy and Literacies.

March 15 Spring Break – no class

March 22 Sarris, Keeping Slug Woman Alive.

March 29 Sarris, Keeping Slug Woman Alive.

April 5 Gee, Social Linguistics and Literacies.

April 12 Gee, Social Linguistics and Literacies.

April 19 Student presentations

April 26 Student presentations  
**Final papers due in class**

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Brief Bio (Background, degree program, full or part time, research interests, etc.)

Reasons for taking this class:

Other related classes you have taken:

What are your specific interests in this area of study:

What is Literacy?

What is an Anthropology of Literacy?