Course Description

Historically, literacy has been a contested term during times of rapid social change. It is no surprise, then, that in contemporary times of technological change, economic globalization, and increased awareness of diversity, the meanings and uses of literacy are undergoing significant shifts. In this seminar we will study the changing understandings of literacy and the ways that literacy practices and events are conceptualized and researched.

We will focus specifically on understanding the ways that people use literacy practices to construct identity and social relationships. As an outcome of the seminar, each participant in the seminar will begin to construct an analytical framework to guide further studies, projects, and/or pedagogical practice.

The course readings are strongly influenced by the New Literacy Studies which emphasizes the multiple social functions of literacies, the culturally and historically situated nature of literacy practices, and uses of literacy to negotiate power relationships.

Our weekly class meeting will function as a reading discussion group. Graduate seminars can too easily become competitive arenas that do not allow for honest exchange and sincere questioning. Please help me create a tone of respect and acceptance of difference and please extend this respect to the authors of the readings. While you may not agree with the authors or your colleagues, please demonstrate your understanding of their arguments and the context for their arguments before expressing your objections.

Key Questions

1. How do researchers study literacy practices? What all needs to be included?
2. How do differing theoretical frameworks affect the study of literacy?
3. How is literacy practiced in particular contexts—junior high, individual households, neighborhoods, adult literacy programs, churches, schools, workplaces, etc.
4. To what extent do literacy practices shape (or regulate) identity or to what extent does identity shape (or regulate) literacy practices?
5. What is the relationship between literacy and power?
6. What are the slippage points between the ways literacy is taught and studied and the ways literacy is understood and practiced in non institutional sites?
7. How are ideologies “carried” in literacy practices?
8. How can opportunities for social and economic power and participation be expanded by increased attention to the ways literacy is taught and studied?

Assignments
Weekly Reading Reviews
For each reading assignment, please prepare a typed review that accomplishes the following:
   a. identifies and summarizes important arguments of the text, including important quotes
   b. reflects on the ways that arguments might be used in your work as a teacher, scholar, or program administrator
   c. identifies two questions or issues or points for group discussion.

Keep the preceding eight questions in mind as you read and write. Be prepared to share these reviews during class discussion.

Reviews should be written in such a way that you will find them useful in your future work. They can take the form of careful notes with occasional breaks for summary thoughts and reflections. In general, reviews of essays can be about 2 pages long and reviews of books can be about 4 pages long.

I would like you to find ways for the course to move you toward your next goal—masters thesis or project, comprehensives, conference paper, dissertation, course design, etc. Please don’t hesitate to keep those goals in mind as you do the readings and write the reviews.

I will collect and skim these reviews after each class. If there is something in particular you want me to comment on, please call my attention to it.

Photographs of Literacy Events
During the first two weeks, carry a disposable camera around and take about 10-12 photos of people interacting with text. Take only candid shots; not posed. Develop these pictures and bring them to class on Sept. 9. Have them in some sort of display unit—either poster board or plastic.

Rotating Discussion Leader
Responsibility for class discussion will rotate. When you are discussion leader, your job is to set the focus for discussion, encourage participation, and keep the discussion connected to the readings. Be sure to allow time for individuals to talk about what they wrote about, about how they interpreted the arguments and connected with the text.
Oral Book Review
The aim of this assignment is to make connections between literacy studies and identity studies. Each person should choose a book (or group of readings) related to identity. (The choice should be one that moves you along in your research interests.) Then prepare an oral review (20-30 minutes) that accomplishes the following:

1. summarize the overall arguments of the reading
2. place the work in the context of the readings of the course
3. focus in depth on how the book extends/complicates/enhances your particular interests
4. provide a one-page handout which summarizes important points particularly in terms of how they might interest to your colleagues.

After each presentation, seminar participants are responsible for raising questions or issues and suggesting additional reading. Take note of these contributions and encourage additional discussion rather than take a defensive stance.

Final Paper
On the last day of the term, an informal summary paper of about 10-15 pages will be due. In this paper, you should synthesize the ideas you are taking from the course, clearly indicating their implications for your research interests. More detail will be provided later in the course.

Texts:
Books

Articles
Daniell, Beth. "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture" College Composition and Communication 50 (1999): 393-410,
Weekly Reading Schedule:

August 26: Pratt, in class
September 2: Labor Day Holiday
September 9: Finders, Just Girls

Street, "New Literacy Studies," Critical Sourcebook, 430-442
Daniell, Beth. "Narratives of Literacy"
Bring Photos

September 16: Critical Sourcebook, Scribner and Cole, 123; Akinnaso, 138; Moll and Gonzalez, 156; Graff, 211

September 23: Critical Sourcebook, Purcell-Gates, 402; Heath, 443; McCarty and Watahomigie, 488; Brandt 555

September 30: Street, Social Literacies

October 7: Identity Theorists: Young (2), Ogbu, Flax, Lu
October 14: Cope and Kalantzis, Multiliteracies Intro, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6
October 21: Cope and Kalantzis, Multiliteracies, Chapters 10, 12, 13, 14, 16

October 28: Gee Social Linguistics and Literacies, pp vii-89
November 4: Gee, Social Linguistics and Literacies, pp. 90-191
Delpit, Critical Sourcebook, 545-555

November 11: Street, Literacy and Development, chapters to be announced
November 18: Street, Literacy and Development,

Thanksgiving Break

December 2: Individual reviews of Race and Identity Theorists
December 9: Presentation of Final Papers

Note: MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (7-3310).