

Lecture No. 5

New Literacies, Functional Literacy, and Multiliteracies *The Socially Literate Teacher in the 21st Century*



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If we look for the definition of "literacy" in the dictionary and thesaurus, it means the ability to read and write. In some references, it also means the ability to communicate effectively. Reading and writing have long been considered the cornerstones of literacy. While they are necessary building blocks, the modern definition of literacy includes so much more.

Notwithstanding the challenges, literacy is the universal standard by which we evaluate society. Various social factors have been linked to high

literacy rates. In reality, UNESCO's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals rest on a foundation of increased global literacy since goals like quality education, gender equality, sustainable infrastructure, and eliminating poverty and hunger cannot be achieved without educated populations. According to UNESCO's expansive definition, literacy is a method of navigating a more rapidly evolving and information-rich (cited in National Council of Teachers of English).

Let's continue from the Conclusions in Lecture 4

The concept of "21st-century skills" refers to an extensive set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and personality traits that are critically important in today's world, particularly in this post-pandemic era where careers and workplaces have shifted to the so-called "new normal." 21st-century skills refer to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and personality traits that are critically important today.

The school develops students' 21st-century abilities to ensure that teaching and learning can continue effectively until they leave for college and lead the economy. Skill categories serve as the standards for the holistic development of students, namely, (1) information, media, and technology skills, (2) communication skills, (3) learning and innovation skills, and (4) life and career skills.

It is sensible to prioritize literacy as a means to participate actively in modern society. While we must equip people worldwide with the resources, they need to recognize, interpret, create, and communicate in a digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and rapidly evolving world, persistent inequitable power structures mean that development will be uneven and slow.

As explained in previous discussions, our course deems literacy as social literacy. For this lecture, we will enrich our understanding of literacy in various forms and perspectives considered new and emerging and perceived as instrumental in equipping our learners with 21st-century thinking skills.

At the end of this lecture, we are expected to attain the following objectives.

1. Discuss the new literacies in the 21st Century and their implication for the educational curriculum;
2. Define functional literacy in the context of teaching and learning in the K-12 classes; and,
3. Characterize teaching multiliteracies in the context of cross-disciplinary approaches.



Let's go ahead.

1. The New Literacies in the 21st Century

As discussed in the introduction, our traditional definition of literacy has transcended from reading, writing, and defining to the ability of a person to understand social issues and fit in the community harmoniously and creatively. Twenty-first-Century literacies have been labeled as multi and interdisciplinary across local and global contexts. Today, the literate person is seen as someone who can innovate society and contribute to economic development and sustainability.

With these contentions, people worldwide have indulged in various endeavors that have evolved fast, drastically creating new standards, demands, and solutions. In this case, schools should keep up with these changes so that the education of students will be responsive and practical, and their assumption of adult responsibilities will be seamless and progressive.

New local socio-economic standards, global sustainable development goals, and the K-12 educational competencies become our main yardsticks in delivering the curriculum. In this case, the 21st-century teacher has to be multiliterate to facilitate the smooth implementation of the curriculum.



As discussed in our earlier lectures, the following new literacies relate to attaining the Global Sustainable Development Goals and AmBisyon Natin 2040. However, we will discuss further details and their practical integration into the curriculum in our succeeding lectures.

| <i>Literacy Area</i> | <i>General Description</i> | <i>Curricular Implication</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Information & Media</i> | It is the capacity to discover, examine, review, and create content to make people feel good about themselves and their communities (De Leon, 2020). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aside from the prescribed textbooks, curricular content can include massive access to information and media. ➤ Use of digital tools and online media applications as instructional support and learning assessment ➤ Online, electronic, and digital technology drive 21st-century learners to communicate, collaborate, and create as practiced in their curricular tasks. |
| <i>Health & Safety</i> | It is the extent to which individuals can access, comprehend, and apply health information (Wood et al., 2023). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Proper hygiene and sanitation to be included not only in health education but also as a value focus in selected lessons across subject areas ➤ Mental health has become an essential topic for intervention in rapidly evolving communities. ➤ Community work integrates health and safety issues and problems into the lessons. |
| <i>Finance & Economy</i> | It refers to the skills, information, mindset, and actions people need to improve their financial and economic situations (OECD, 2011). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financial management standards and devices have grown with the ever-changing demands of economic development that must be introduced as early as the primary grades. ➤ Practical financial management applications must be a significant component of instruction and learning, transcending the usual theoretical education. |

| <i>Literacy Area</i> | <i>General Description</i> | <i>Curricular Implication</i> |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Ecology & Nature | It means being aware of and caring about nature and the problems that come with it. It also means having the knowledge, skills, and motivation to work on solving problems and stopping new ones from happening (McBride et al., 2013). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In co- and extra-curricular programs, laboratory learning should be included concerning issues and thrusts in sustaining flora and fauna. ➤ Community-based ecological tasks be used as practical learning in related courses. |
| Arts & Creativity | It entails generating valuable unique ideas and observing the world from new and exciting perspectives (Darras, 2018). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This new literacy is highly applicable in any subject area. The creative outputs of the students can manifest innovative learning. Planning lessons shall include learning objectives that allow students to visualize a solution to a problem posed in class. ➤ Capitalize on the learners' innate creative capacities by encouraging them to collaborate with classmates to create prototypes representing their psychomotor development. |

2. Functional Literacy in Modern Education

We explored in our previous lessons that literacy in the 21st Century is the main business of schools to help the economy succeed. It is, therefore, presumed that teachers play an essential role in perpetuating this imperative in the teaching-learning process. Their knowledge, understanding, values, and skills must be geared toward developing the learning environment and experience toward creating and performing relevant pedagogy. This is **Functional Literacy** among the teachers.



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<https://www.regenesys.net/reginsights/the-importance-of-functional-literacy/>

For the Nth time, modern literacy, as conceived in the realm of education, is the ability to understand life experiences and circumstances through learning, unlearning, and relearning (Lecture 1, Alvin Toffler). From language literacy to being functional, one must be aware of and responsive to issues and problems that directly and indirectly affect social behaviors (Ng & Wong, 2020).

Traditional definitions and measures have limited education authorities' research and interventions on literacy levels. Studies in the past focused on simple steps of total illiteracy, while more recent ones have attempted to define "functional literacy" as the minimum reading level required for meaningful participation in society. Worldwide research has not improved our estimations' accuracy or illiteracy rate comparisons. Literacy, like socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and physical ability, functions as a social divide but is often overlooked as a distinct social inequality (Payne, 2022).

According to Regenesys Business School (2020), adapted from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, functional literacy progress in four stages: (1) below basic, (2) basic, (3) intermediate, and (4) proficient. Below basic literacy is indicated by mere decoding of symbols, letters, and numerals, while the proficient functional literacy level suggests the person's broad understanding of ideas and practical application of such.

Based on the Department of Education's Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), within DepEd Order No. 42, series of 2017, the distinguished teacher (the highest teaching career level) "embodies the highest standard for teaching grounded in global best practices"; hence, functionally literate. The teacher can effectively design and use instructional activities involving literacy and numeracy toward lifelong learning and development for the learners.

In conclusion, functional literacy promoted in 21st-century education depends on using information and communication technology to reinforce and enhance the teaching and learning experiences.

3. Teaching Multiliteracies Cross-Disciplinarily

The idea of 21st-century skills stems from the conviction that today's schools should place a premium on equipping their pupils with the most valuable talents in the workplace and life.

Consequently, students need to be taught various skills that match the unique requirements of an economy and culture that are complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-aged, and technology-driven.

Teaching skills relevant to the twenty-first century in various educational contexts is possible. Educators may push for teaching skills that cut across disciplinary boundaries, while schools may mandate that students demonstrate proficiency in 21st-century abilities to pass classes and be evaluated.

Cross-disciplinary learning approaches often encourage authentic, outcome-based, project-based, and performance-based ways of acquiring knowledge in the classroom. Students must research, develop numerous technologies, evaluate and process information, think creatively, plan the process, and work cooperatively with other students in groups.

De Leon (2020) cites Newman and Biswas to suggest four components of multiliteracies be integrated into the curriculum and instruction as follows:

1. Situated Practice - Students are guided toward meaningful learning by integrating foundational information into their education.
2. Overt Instruction - Students are led through the steps of a methodical practice of the learning process using various tools and strategies.
3. Critical Framing - Students are taught how to challenge other points of view to provide them with more meaningful educational experiences.
4. Transformed Action - The goal is for students to be able to use the knowledge they gain to address issues in the real world.

Conclusion:

Opportunities for future literacy teaching and learning can be found in the incorporation of new literacies and the teaching of multiliteracies. With multiliteracies, educators can ensure that all learners have the same opportunities to study. Students acquire the ability to work together by discussing and debating ideas in virtual or on-campus classrooms that facilitate several learning styles. As a result, the new literacy integration in the teacher education curriculum should help students gain confidence and expertise as they study together in cooperative settings.

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