

## **Representing Reading: An Analysis of Professional Development Book Covers**

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**ABSTRACT:** Multimodal ensembles utilize a variety of modes to communicate meaning potential and mediate understandings. Professional development books covers contain visual representations of literacy practices, particularly the practices of reading comprehension and reading instruction. The multimodal representations of literacy practices have the potential to impact how literacy educators view, approach, and carry out the practice of teaching reading. Using a social semiotic perspective, the authors analyze 150 professional development book covers intended for classroom teachers. This multilevel, qualitative content analysis examines specific types of literacy practices represented on books and leads to the development of the Multimodal Ensemble Analytical Instrument (MEAI) as a way to guide analysis of representative cover images. Findings are examined in two ways: (1) across four specific literacy practices (reading aloud, independent reading, reading instruction, and reading activities), and (2) within each of the individual literacy practices. Authors conclude with a call for the development of analytical frameworks to examine the types of multimodal texts encountered daily.

**Keywords:** multimodal analysis, qualitative content analysis, visual literacy, book covers



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Visual images and multimodal ensembles play an ever-expanding role in the communicative landscape of contemporary societies (Elkins, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Inhabiting a world mediated by visual images and multimodal texts in both print and digital environments, people are constantly involved in a wide range of literacy practices that incorporate socially-embedded discourses (Gee, 1992), multimodal communications (Kress, 2010), and digital technologies (Gee & Hayes, 2011). As literacy researchers, the implications of the communicative and representational resources, discourses, and technologies that support our encounters with visually dominant texts and multimodal ensembles and the potential effects of mixing and remixing various modes of communication in our everyday lives should be considered (Serafini, 2010). In order to do so, we need to consider how visual images and multimodal ensembles mediate our experiences in a variety of social contexts and communicative events.

Teachers, like everyone else, are bombarded with visual images and multimodal ensembles in both their professional and personal lives. The resources teachers select to include in their classroom libraries as part of their literacy lessons and to share during professional development experiences contain semiotic resources for communicating meanings and mediating understandings of the world they inhabit. These resources include representations of various aspects of teaching and learning through the modes of written language and visual images, in particular representations of literacy practices such as reading comprehension and instruction. How literacy practices are represented on the covers of professional development books and the potential for how these representations affect the ways in which teachers conceptualize reading comprehension and instruction is the focus of this article.

The design and publication of professional development book covers are not disinterested processes. The commercially designed and produced

images on the covers of professional development books focusing on reading comprehension and instruction are not innocent, neutral representations of various literacy practices. The visual images produced for these covers have been carefully selected to represent various aspects of reading comprehension and instruction, classroom experiences, and educational settings by the graphic designers employed by their respective publishing companies. The visual images included on these covers have different modal affordances than the written language included in the title and subtitle, and represent aspects of reading and reading comprehension through different modalities. Investigating the meaning potential of these multimodal representations may offer a window into how reading comprehension and instruction are conceptualized, with both intended and unintended consequences (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

We need to consider how visual images and multimodal ensembles mediate our experiences in a variety of social contexts and communicative events

Commercially produced professional development resources are utilized by elementary and middle school teachers throughout their careers. For purposes of this article, we define professional development books as books directed at pre-service and in-service educators intended to

support instructional practices, in particular reading comprehension and instruction. The covers selected for this study were gathered from a set of nine commercial educational publishers, including those associated with professional literacy education organizations such as the National Council Teachers of English.

The covers of professional development books serve a commercial and rhetorical purpose, meaning they are designed to get teachers and educators to consider the value of their contents and persuade teachers to eventually purchase them. Rhetorical analysis has been aligned with theoretical and analytical frameworks including discourse analysis (Oddo, 2013) and advertising (Scott, 1994) in an attempt to provide warranted accounts of how discourse functions across modalities, contexts, audiences, and cultures. As with other forms of

advertising, these covers are to get teachers and other educators to consider their value as teaching resources and to increase the sales of these books.

In this article, the authors report an analysis of 150 selected print-based, professional development book covers using an observational instrument developed for analyzing visually-dominant, multimodal texts in print-based formats. The authors provide the results of our analysis of selected covers published by nine publishing companies that focus on teacher professional development in the areas of reading comprehension and instruction. The following research questions guided the research presented in this paper:

1. How do publishing companies use various visual and textual resources to represent the concepts of reading comprehension and instruction on professional development book covers?
2. What does an analysis of the multimodal features of selected contemporary professional development book covers reveal about the concepts of reading comprehension and instruction?

The analysis reported here reveals insight into how these professional development book covers represent literacy practices, in particular how the concepts of reading comprehension and instruction are represented in these multimodal ensembles.

### Review of Related Research

Visual images have been used to represent events, practices, and peoples in both school and out of school contexts for centuries. Although we were unable to locate any research focusing explicitly on the visual images of professional development covers associated with reading comprehension and instruction, research has been conducted into the representation of same-sex parents on picturebook covers (Sunderland & McGlashan, 2013), how reading is represented in picturebooks (Serafini, 2004), how teachers are represented on covers and visual narratives in children's literature (Barone, Meyerson, & Mallette, 1995), and how illustrations in picturebooks allude to works of fine art (Beckett, 2010). In addition, research in visual and multimodal

literacies has focused on instructional materials (Newfield, 2011), standardized test materials (Unsworth, 2014), and online reading comprehension materials (Dalton & Proctor, 2008; Unsworth, 2011). These studies demonstrated how various visual images and written language are used to portray specific aspects of the human condition and ways of being and becoming literate.

Paratextual elements (Genette, 1997) are features of print-based and digital texts that are associated with a multimodal text but are peripheral to the narrative presentation itself. *Peritextual* elements are those included in the physical text itself, for example, dedications, endpapers, author biographies, and book jackets. Book covers are a peritextual feature that provides a *threshold* (Genette, 1997) that distinguishes the world of the book from the world of the reader. These features serve both centripetal trajectories, meaning they draw readers in towards the text itself, and centrifugal trajectories that extend beyond the boundaries of the text (McCracken, 2013). The covers of professional development books serve both trajectories; centripetal trajectories alluding to what might be included in the book and what theoretical orientation may be addressed in its contents, and centrifugal trajectories that are associated with the author, publisher, and other professional associations. The covers of a book constitute an important peritextual element worthy of analysis (Baetens, 2005; Sheahan, 1996).

### Theoretical Framework

Multimodal ensembles communicate using semiotic resources across a variety of modes including visual images, design features, and written language (Jewitt, 2009). Visual images have modal affordances that support the depiction and communication of concepts and ideas in certain ways that differ from the affordances associated with written language (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). What a particular mode, such as visual images, can communicate and represent has both limitations and semiotic potentials. In other words, written text represents ideas in different ways than visual images, and visual images and graphic design features work in different ways from written language (Kress, 2010).

Expanding the analysis of various forms of discourse, including written, oral, and visual forms, Halliday (1978) focused on texts as a type of social action rather than simply a decontextualized object to be analyzed. In similar fashion, contemporary multimodal researchers and theorists have expanded the analysis of multimodal ensembles to include the social and cultural embeddedness of these texts (Aiello, 2006; Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Duncum, 2004; Serafini, 2014). No matter the semiotic means of representation, the relationship among visual images, design features, and written language and their associated meaning potentials are socially embedded and worthy of investigation.

Representations of various aspects of social life utilizing multimodal ensembles that include visual images and written language are ubiquitous in modern society (Mirzoeff, 1998). Every instantiation of communication and representation implies a reduction and transformation of a considerable number of characteristics of represented reality (Kenney, 2005). Consequently, recognition of the represented elements of a visual image or multimodal text by no means implies that one understands the meaning potentials and underlying ideologies of what is experienced (Pauwels, 2008). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) assert that visual images or *pictorial structures* do not simply reproduce reality, rather they suggest visual representations “... *produce* [italics in original] images of reality that are bound up with the interests of the social institutions within which the pictures are produced, circulated, and read” (p.45). In the same manner, the visual images included on the covers of the professional development books under investigation represent a particular version of reality, in particular a version of reading comprehension and instruction in educational settings.

The use of visual images and multimodal texts as communicative and representative resources operate within a larger sociocultural context that includes a particular set of literate and social practices (Gee, 1996; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Lave & Wenger, 1991). These practices are mediated by cognitive, technological, semiotic, and linguistic tools or resources (Werstch, 1991). Because of the complexity of the mediational means associated with multimodal ensembles, it is necessary to situate these practices within larger

sociocultural and theoretical contexts. This grounding of literate practices within a sociocultural context allows researchers to analyze the various resources used in meaning making in relation to the cultural, social, and historical influences in which they reside (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2009; Shanahan, McVee, & Bailey, 2014).

Like other concepts, reading comprehension and instruction are defined by the expectations, experiences, instructional approaches, assessments, and sociocultural, political, and historical contexts in which they are presented and enacted (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1999; Bloome, 1985). Over the past decades, reading comprehension has been defined as oral comprehension plus decoding abilities (Gough, 1972), a process of building and activating schema (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), a psycholinguistic process (Goodman, 1996; Smith, 1988), and a form of cultural mediation (Smagorinsky, 2001). Each of these definitions has specific implications for how it may be conceptualized, represented, and portrayed.

Contemporary definitions of reading comprehension address the processes of generating viable interpretations in transaction with texts and readers' abilities to construct understandings from multiple perspectives, including the author's intentions, textual references, personal experiences, and socio-cultural contexts in which one reads (Serafini, 2012a). Meanings constructed during the act of reading are socially embedded, temporary, partial, and plural (Corcoran, Hayhoe, & Pradl, 1994). There is not an objective truth about a text, but many truths, each with its own authority and its own warrants for viability aligned with particular literary theories and perspectives (Rorty, 1979). Because of this, readers are empowered to revise traditional meaning potentials and challenge existing, hegemonic interpretations that pervade particular institutions (Luke, 1995). In other words, readers and viewers do not have to readily accept traditional representations of reading comprehension and instruction, rather they can disrupt commonplace interpretations and re-envision how these constructs are interpreted (Lewison, Seely Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

### Researcher Positionality

As literacy researchers, it is important for us to recognize the lenses through which we approach our research processes and data analysis. Since we cannot remove our personal and professional experiences and backgrounds as literacy educators, we need to acknowledge the role these influences and perspectives play in the research we conduct. As classroom teachers, we came to these images with preconceptions of what a teacher looked like and how students engage with classroom activities. We readily identified the adults in these images as teachers and the children as students. This was also made easier by knowing the intended audience of the books under study.

Having performed similar literacy practices in our classrooms, we were positioned to recognize the events portrayed on the covers as particular literacy events, whereas other viewers with less experiences may have interpreted them differently. Our experiences positioned us to recognize the settings in which the literacy practices were contextualized, for example, classrooms and libraries, and the participants operating in these contexts. As former classroom teachers, we have also browsed through and purchased many professional development texts and considered ourselves as part of the intended audience of these resources. Our analysis was conducted with these potential biases in mind and we understand the influence these perspectives and experiences may have had on our analyses.

In this study, we determined it was important to analyze the covers across, as well as within our constructed categories to generate understandings about what was represented and communicated in visual images and written language across literacy practices. This type of qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) is useful for analyzing large samples of visual images or multimodal texts and determining tendencies or frequencies across large numbers of examples. In addition to frequency counts and generalizations generated across the entire data corpus, what was equally important to

the researchers in this study were utilizing methods of multimodal analysis (Jewitt, 2009) for a more nuanced understanding of the representations used on individual covers to reveal the ways reading comprehension and instruction was represented across the identified literacy practices. The challenge was developing an analytical method to ensure assertions could be generated both across and within individual covers and categories of literacy practices.

One of the primary goals of multimodal research designs is to expand existing analytical frameworks for analyzing texts and images

### Multimodal Research Designs

As part of the data analysis procedures, the researchers selected several representational covers from each of the four categories of literacy practices identified during the initial data analysis and conducted an in-depth,

multimodal analysis of the selected covers addressing the categories included in the *Multimodal Ensemble Analysis Instrument* (See Appendix A) developed by the researchers and described in the following sections.

One of the primary goals of multimodal research designs is to expand existing analytical frameworks available for analyzing texts and images, for example, discourse analysis (Coulthard, 1977; Gee, 1999), iconographical analysis (Panofsky, 1955), critical content analysis (Beach *et al.*, 2009), and visual analysis (Dondis, 1973; Elkins, 2008), to consider multimodal ensembles in sociocultural contexts across various settings or sites of analysis (Rose, 2001). Drawing on a variety of theoretical frameworks, namely systemic functional linguistics, art criticism, and visual literacies, these analytical frameworks must address the multimodal aspects of the ensemble itself, its production, and its reception.

### Instrument

Over the course of this study, an instrument was developed to guide the observations and analysis of the individual covers under investigation. The *Multimodal Ensemble Analytical Instrument* (MEAI) was designed to help the researchers analyze the various visual and verbal grammars used across the

modes of visual images, graphic design features, and written language, and the relationship among the various modal entities.

The instrument developed was based on the systemic functional linguistic framework first presented by Halliday (1975, 1978) and later elaborated and extended to visual modalities by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and architecture (O'Toole, 1994). Halliday asserted that all forms of communication

required three metafunctions, namely: 1) ideational, 2) interpersonal, and 3) textual. These metafunctions have been renamed and adapted by numerous scholars of visual and verbal modalities, for example, O'Toole (1994) used the terms representational, modal, and compositional, while Lemke (1998) preferred the terms presentational, orientational, and organizational. The terms representational, interpersonal, and compositional were selected for this analytical instrument because the researchers felt these terms best captured the processes they represented.

However, the three metafunctions developed by Halliday and elaborated by others did not directly address the intermodal relationships in multimodal ensembles and how meaning potentials are constructed across modalities and the sites of production and reception (O'Halloran, 2004). To address these additional features of the professional book covers, the analytical instrument developed for this study was organized into three sections: 1) intramodal considerations – focusing on the structures within particular visual images, 2) intermodal considerations – focusing on the associations and connections across various modes, and 3) ideological considerations – focusing on the interactions among modes and the larger sociocultural context. The intermodal considerations take into account the associations and meanings developed across individual modes, while the ideological considerations attempt to address the features and contexts associated with the books covers as social, cultural, and historical entities.

### Data Corpus

The purpose of the study presented here was to analyze the covers of selected professional development books included in the catalogs of nine

publishers that contained the words reading and/or comprehension to better understand how these concepts were represented visually and textually and to consider the implications of these representations. The data corpus of this study included a total of 150 professional development book covers that include the words *reading* and/or *comprehension* in the title or subtitle from the following publishers in their fall 2010 catalogues: Christopher-Gordon; Corwin; Guilford; Heinemann; IRA; Jossey-Bass; NCTE; Scholastic; Stenhouse. The books selected for this analysis were published prior to 2010 and spanned over a decade in their publication dates. Although new covers appear in publishers' catalogs every year, the covers of the books offered by these nine prominent literacy education publishers represents a sample of convenience (Merriam, 1998) that may be used as a representation of the phenomenon under study.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis began with 150 book covers that were identified and collected to form the original data corpus. The book covers were digitally scanned and reviewed as digital files rather than as print-based books. The covers were initially divided into two categories: those that contained visual images and those that were simply a single-colored cover or had an abstract design element but not an identifiable visual image. There were 21 covers that displayed no discernible visual images. These book covers simply included a title and a single or multi-colored background. Although color may be a semiotic system in and of itself (van Leeuwen, 2011), and the typographical design of the title may offer potential meanings (van Leeuwen, 2006), the covers that did not include an identifiable visual image were not analyzed further.

Of the 129 covers remaining, 24 included only objects associated with reading or literacy instruction, not people. The most prominent objects displayed on these covers were images of print-based books, for example, novels, textbooks, and picturebooks. Of the 17 covers that contained books, some were abstracted illustrations and some were photographic images of actual books placed in a variety of settings: on shelves, outdoors, on tables, and on classroom desks. In addition, seven covers featured notebooks,



pencils, worksheets, or other potential artifacts of classroom-based literacy practices.

The objects prominently displayed on 24 of the covers were print-based reading materials, including pencils, notebooks, and worksheets. Viewing these visual objects as possible metaphors of reading comprehension and instruction, it is easy to suggest the potential meanings associated with these objects would allude to a print-based variation of reading comprehension and instruction, although this may be an overgeneralization. The dominance of worksheets, pencils, and print-based books as objects on these covers, though a ubiquitous aspect of contemporary reading education, fails to capture the multimodal and digital environments and resources that are an important part of reading education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Serafini, 2012b).

The remaining 105 covers were identified as *narrative images* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) because they included people or represented *participants* doing something and not just colored backgrounds or isolated objects. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest particular visual images are considered narrative images when they include participants, and may be of one of two types: interactive or represented. Interactive participants are involved in the image doing something to someone or something, while represented participants are simply displayed, often in portrait-like poses. Narrative representations include participants that carry a certain weight and position, and processes or vectors that create tension or force (van Leeuwen, 2008). Each of these aspects of narrative representations helps viewers consider who is doing what to whom or to what object. Our analysis focused on the 105 covers we identified as containing narrative images to understand what patterns might be constructed from these representations associated with reading comprehension and instruction.

These 105 covers were more extensively analyzed by focusing on who was represented, what they were represented as doing or being, and the setting in which the participants were depicted or displayed. As with the previous iterations of our data analysis, a variety of literacy practices were represented across various settings and represented participants. These results required the researchers to consider further

analysis focusing on the types of literacy practices represented in the visual images in addition to analyzing who was depicted and where they were positioned (see Table 1 in Appendix B).

Further analysis of the 105 covers generated four categories of literacy practices that were then used as a starting point for cross-case and individual cover analyses. The categories of literacy practices generated were: 1) reading aloud, 2) independent reading, 3) reading instruction, and 4) reading activities. Each of the three researchers involved in the study categorized the 105 covers individually according to the four identified categories. Subsequently, the researchers met and discussed the inclusion or exclusion of individual texts for each category. These discussions resulted in the final four categories for further analysis and are subsequently defined and delineated here (see Table 2 in Appendix B).

Covers identified as *reading aloud* were those in which a teacher was depicted as reading a single text to a group of students. In our data analysis, adults who were depicted in classroom settings (due to the objects displayed, for example, desks, books, and other objects typical of contemporary classrooms) were identified as teachers. Teachers were generally depicted holding up a single text in front of the children, while the children were seated in a circle or small group on the floor to allow them to see what was being read. Covers identified as *independent reading* featured individual students reading a text by themselves, where each student had their own book or reading material. Covers identified as *reading instruction* contained images in which students were depicted interacting with texts, other students, and a teacher. It was the inclusion of an adult that distinguished the covers assigned to reading instruction from those identified as independent reading. The covers initially identified as reading instruction were further organized into two separate categories: images containing groups of children reading together without an adult and images featuring adults and children together. We eventually determined that images where children were reading together without an adult would be more appropriately categorized under the heading of independent reading because children were not being instructed by adults. The images containing



both children and adults interacting with texts not classified as reading aloud were re-categorized as reading instruction. The remaining images were designated as *reading activities* because they featured

a range of alternative literacy practices associated with reading and reading instruction, for example, writing, drawing, or carrying books.

### Findings

The data analysis subsequently generated findings in two areas: 1) analysis across the four literacy practices and 2) analysis of each of the individual literacy practices. By analyzing visual structures and representations within *and* across the four categories, the assertions constructed focusing on how reading comprehension and instruction were represented are more viable than individual case analysis would reveal. First, data will be presented using elements of visual grammar focusing on the depiction of represented participants in the cover images. Second, the analysis of the language of the titles and subtitles will be presented and discussed focusing on how language represents reading comprehension and instruction. Finally, a detailed analysis of covers representing the identified four literacy practices will be shared.

### Analyses Across Four Literacy Practices

**Depiction of participants.** Van Leeuwen (2008) describes how participants are represented in images and how these representations construct potential relationships between represented participants and viewers. Based on their analysis of how participants are depicted, van Leeuwen (2008) offered three dimensions for consideration and analysis: 1) social distance, 2) social relations, and 3) social interactions. All of these dimensions are, “colored by the specific context” in which the visual images are produced and received (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139). Sunderland and McGlashan (2013) further suggest these dimensions be considered as possibilities rather than definitive categories, allowing for, “wider, contextually-informed understandings and alternative readings” (p. 483).

In addition, van Leeuwen (2008) posited that the representation of social participants must also consider who is depicted, who is not depicted, and

what are the participants doing or not doing. Our analysis of the 105 covers containing narrative images revealed that two covers contained only adults, 62 contained only children, while 41 had a mixture of adults and children. In addition, 64 covers depicted participants in an identifiable school setting, 12 were depicted in a variety of out of school settings, and 29 images were categorized as abstracted settings, meaning the use of white space or an abstracted background did not specify an identifiable or realistic setting (See Tables 3 & 4 in Appendix B).

The adults depicted were overwhelmingly Caucasian females. Of the 43 covers that depicted adults alone or with children, 29 were identifiable as Caucasian females depicted in the role of teacher, while only three African-American females were depicted as teachers. Ten white males were depicted while only one adult African-American male was represented in the role of teacher. The children depicted were generally more diverse as far as identifiable visible attributes as compared to the teachers depicted. African American and Latino students were the depicted in smaller numbers, while Caucasian students represented a small majority of students.

**Social distance.** Social distance refers to the perceived level of intimacy created between viewers of the image and the participants portrayed in visual images. When participants are represented as closer, the viewer is invited into a more intimate relationship, while participants being depicted as farther away create a less intimate relationship. Many of the visual images on the covers contained students in what would be considered *intimate social distances* revealing only faces or upper bodies. The relatively intimate positioning of the participants on the covers invites the viewer to closely participate in the world of the classrooms and other settings depicted. It would be difficult to offer long-distance representations given the fact that most of the images were illustrated or photographed in classroom settings and the relative size of most classrooms.

**Social relations.** Social relations have two aspects, namely involvement and power. Involvement is represented along the horizontal axis, generally whether the participants are depicted frontally or from the side. Most of the images in our

study depicted participants from a side view. This type of depiction signals to the viewer the participant's involvement with the given activity in the image, rather than being directly involved with the viewer. A small number of images positioned the participants frontally, inviting the viewer to participate directly in the represented activity. The visual images were used to invite the viewer into the reading comprehension and instruction activity depicted and to feel a part of the events portrayed.

Power is depicted along the vertical axis, generally whether the viewer is positioned above, below, or at eye-level with the represented participants. Several of the images position the viewer at eye-level suggesting a shared power relationship with the viewer. However, a majority of the images positioned the viewer in a position of power above the participants, looking down on the events taking place, similar to how a teacher may view younger students in an elementary classroom setting. The depictions of events in the images across all four literacy practices were predominantly from above much like an adult would be positioned when visiting a classroom. These representations, although subtle, suggest the power in the classroom lies with the adult and students are subservient to the teacher in reading comprehension and instructional events.

**Social interactions.** Social interactions may involve a direct or indirect address between participants in an image and the viewer. In a direct address or *demand*, participants look directly out at the viewer, whereas in an indirect address or *offer* participants look away from the

viewer suggesting the viewer consider what they are attending to (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The 105 covers analyzed revealed that a majority of images (87 covers) featured indirectly addresses rather than directly addresses (18 covers). In other words, the majority of images featured teachers and students not looking directly out at the viewer. Instead, the teachers and students looked at each other or at texts and other objects in classrooms or other settings.

The indirect address positions the viewer outside of the classroom or other spaces represented in an image, looking in on the events depicted. These

indirect addresses turn the participants into what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) call the “object of the viewer’s dispassionate scrutiny” (p. 119). It may be suggested that the viewer is being asked to evaluate whether the depictions of the literacy events and processes being represented on these covers are how they want similar literacy events and processes to appear in their own classrooms. The indirect address positions the viewer of the image as *voyeur* who watching as the events in the image unfolds.

Eighteen covers depicted participants, both students and teachers, looking directly at the camera or illustrated facing the audience. These *demand images* created a more direct connection between the participants and the viewers. This form of representation invited the viewer to not only participate in the depicted activities, but to directly transact with the participants represented. The facial expressions of the students and teachers portrayed in these images also impact the connection created by the direct address. In some instances, students looked directly at the viewer with expressions of confusion or concern as they struggled with reading activities, suggesting the viewer is expected to empathize with the student. In other images, students smiled at the viewer thus conveying a positive, inviting, friendly relationship between participants and viewers.

### Analysis of Four Literacy Practices

The analysis of the covers containing narrative images revealed a wide range of depicted participants, activities, objects, settings, and social interrelationships. At this point, the researchers believed a more nuanced analysis of the identified four literacy practices was necessary. After analyzing the data corpus across the four literacy practices using the visual grammar features and language representations described previously, our analysis proceeded by looking at each of the four literacy practices individually.

Three book covers were selected as representative samples from each of the four identified literacy practices. The dimensions included as part of the MEAI (listed in the appendix) were used to organize and deepen the analyses of these selected book covers. These dimensions include: 1) intramodal

considerations (compositional, design, ideational, and interpersonal inventories within a particular mode, in this instance the visual image), 2) intermodal considerations (how visual image and written text interact), and 3) ideological considerations (critical, socio-cultural associations). Results of this analysis are presented according to each identified literacy practice.

**Representing reading aloud.** The category constructed as *reading aloud* was defined as one adult person, identified as a teacher, male or female, holding a single book and appearing to read or present it to a group of children, identified as students. In these visual images, the students were positioned either in a semi-circle or small group facing the book and the teacher. The single text being held up was the focus of the children's engagement. In general, the teacher was positioned above the students and held the text so students could see it and appeared to be reading from it. The books depicted on the covers were primarily picturebooks or books with text and images. In these cover images the text became an object used to mediate the interactions between the teacher and children. It was the text as visual object that was the focus of the students' attention.

On these covers, children are positioned below the level of the teacher and face the teacher and the book. A teacher always held the book and children were represented facing the text engaged in the act of listening to the story being read. Students were never depicted in chairs or at their desks on these covers. In the reading aloud images, the majority of teachers were identifiable as Caucasian, including six females and three males. In general, the children depicted on the covers were multiculturally diverse. African American, Latino, Asian American, and Caucasian students were depicted in equal numbers of both boys and girls.

The visual images on the covers depicted reading aloud as a communal activity that takes place in school with both teachers and students engaged in the activity enacting different roles. The setting of all the reading aloud covers was a classroom, suggesting that reading aloud occurs in school settings regularly. Whether in an abstracted image or photograph, students were depicted as facing the

teacher, happily listening to a story being read aloud suggesting that students enjoyed this literacy event.

### **Representing independent reading.**

Covers categorized as *independent reading* were defined as any time a child had his or her own text and was depicted reading or looking at the text. Of the 105 covers containing narrative images, 53 covers fit in the category of independent reading. Within the category of independent reading, two sub-categories were constructed: 1) multiple children in an image, each with his or her own book, or 2) a single child with his or her own book. Images in the independent reading category depicted a variety of settings: school buildings, classrooms, outdoors, or abstracted representations containing unidentifiable settings, most commonly depicted on white spaces or single colored backgrounds.

A majority of images portray a child with an open book, looking directly into or at the book. Fewer images depict either a child looking at his or her book with the book closed or some combination of these actions. The majority of texts represented in the images are chapter books, with a lesser amount of picturebooks, textbooks, and combinations of newspapers, comic books, or unidentified texts. The prominence of chapter books identifies these specific texts as the preferred reading material for independent reading. The less frequent inclusion of picturebooks, textbooks, and other texts signals approval to the inclusion of other texts but as an alternative to chapter books.

Of the children depicted in the visual images, 21 featured only males, 22 had a combination of males and females, and ten covers featured only girls. The differences in gender representations may suggest that boys need more guidance with their independent reading practices than girls. The few images featuring girls on their own or in a group of girls suggests they may not require the same level of assistance as young male readers. Twenty images featured Caucasian children, while 23 featured a mix of races. Just ten covers depict only minority children on the covers. Further analysis of the representations of the gender and racial aspects of the independent reading covers revealed two predominate groups: Caucasian boys and mixed-gender, mixed-race groups.

Covers categorized as depicting independent reading feature children looking away from the viewer, at a close personal distance, at an eye level angle of interaction, and are realistic in terms of the image's modality. Images in the independent reading category did not depict multiple students reading in groups, interacting with one another as they read. The covers represent independent reading as a solitary activity and may suggest reading is something best done alone.

**Representing Reading Instruction.** The category of *reading instruction* was defined as any time teachers and children came together around a single text in a literacy practice identified as something other than *reading aloud*. The inclusion of adults in the image distinguished these covers from the category of independent reading. Twenty-nine covers out of 105 were categorized as reading instruction.

Within the category of reading instruction, the mostly commonly represented literacy practices were one-on-one reading instruction, which appeared on 14 covers, and small group instruction, which appeared on 12. Classrooms and libraries were the most common settings for reading instruction in this category. Sixteen of the 29 reading instruction images were set in classrooms, and seven were set in libraries. The frequency with which classrooms and libraries were represented in the covers suggests that reading instruction tends to occur in an academic environment or classroom setting. Reading instruction was depicted as not occurring outside or in less formal, socially oriented spaces. Students were depicted in circular group arrangements commonly associated with small group instruction and the close proximity of the students and teachers implies an interactive quality to reading instruction.

In all the images, students and teachers are positioned within close proximity to texts. In one-on-one instruction, students are represented holding their own texts, while in small group instruction students either hold texts or direct their attention to a text the teacher presents to them. The type of text represented varied greatly with seven cover images containing picturebooks, seven containing chapter books, six containing paper handouts, three

containing presentations and/or presentation materials, two containing textbooks, one containing a computer, and one containing an abstracted text. Such a variety of texts suggested that reading instruction, while print-based and text-centric, is not specific to a particular type of text. Instead, all texts can be utilized to teach students how to read.

**Representing Reading Activities.** The category of *reading activities* initially served as a miscellaneous category for images that did not easily fit into the other three categories. However, it became clear after further analysis that certain activities associated with reading and reading instruction were depicted more frequently and were worthy of further investigation. For example, writing was depicted in a majority of these visual images.

Seven of the fourteen images included identifiable educational settings (ie. classrooms), three were set outdoors, and four were abstracted images with no identifiable settings. There were adults depicted in only two of the 14 images suggesting these activities were done independently and could be completed both in and out of school. One cover depicted a student lying in the grass with a magnifying glass, and one looking through the lens of a digital video recorder. Students participating in some form of theater or acting, having a discussion, carrying notebooks, and holding a small flower were also included on individual covers.

In addition, drawing and other art projects were also depicted. Students were engaged in some form of writing and drawing activity or conducting some form of artistic project. This relates to many contemporary classrooms where teachers have been using writing and drawing as ways of responding to texts and assessing students reading comprehension abilities.

## Discussion

The literacy practice of reading aloud is used primarily to share stories, build community, present examples of fluent reading, introduce readers to new titles, and teaches children about narrative stories (Fox, 2001; Trelease, 1989). In all of the images in the reading aloud category, viewers (of the book cover images) are positioned to look down on the students.

Across these images, the students sat passively, many of them cross-legged on the floor listening to the story being read. No participants directly address the viewer, meaning they did not look at the camera or were not illustrated from a frontal position, positioning the viewer as *voyeur* of the literacy events in the classroom. In these images, we are given a window into the types of literacy events that are recommended in elementary reading programs. However, these images suggest reading is something that is done *to* students, not something they do for themselves. Our analysis of these images further suggests that teachers direct the reading aloud activity and that students have less control over these classroom events.

Considering the dimension of social interaction discussed earlier, the teachers depicted in the cover images in the reading aloud category were depicted in positions of power, represented above and separated from the students. There was a sense of intimacy represented by the close proximity of the teacher and the students. These depictions positioned teachers above the children portraying a sense of power and control, with the teachers serving as the conduit between the students and the narrative being read.

Most of the images in the independent reading category position children at a close personal distance to the viewer and at an eye level angle of interaction. This social distance and angle of interaction portrays independent reading as an intimate activity for the participant while placing the viewer in a voyeuristic position as observer, not as participant. During independent reading, teachers and students are often not in close proximity to each other, and ideally, children are looking at their books during the entire independent reading practice, not interacting with other students or the teacher.

The variety of settings included in the cover images suggests that independent reading as a practice can occur anywhere and is not limited to school settings. One cover categorized as independent reading, *Reading to Live, How to Teach Reading for Today's World* (Wilson, 2002), features a single Caucasian boy, sitting alone on a pier, reading a book. The title suggests reading in "today's world" is different from reading in the past; however, the depiction of the act

the boy engages in does not suggest anything modern or new about reading. The viewer positioning at eye-level and at a far personal distance combined with a side-view of the boy looking directly into the book, together suggests the boy is "lost" in his book. The viewer is simply observing the child reading and not invited to interact with him. The viewer positioning and outdoor setting depicted on this cover present independent reading as a solitary act not reliant on a school or a classroom setting.

The images identified as reading instruction would suggest effective reading instruction is not something accomplished in a whole class setting. Instead, reading instruction is best accomplished through small group or individualized instruction where the students and teacher can get close to the text. Students and teachers were represented throughout these images within close social distances from one another. In one-on-one instruction, teachers are primarily positioned above students, leaning over students as they engage with a single, print-based text.

The images featuring small group instruction are arranged similarly to the covers identified as reading aloud with the teacher in the center of a circle commanding students' attention. In these images, students' gazes are either directed at the teacher or at the place where the teacher is pointing, in most cases a print-based text. Such positioning implies that effective reading instruction is not something students can accomplish individually; teacher guidance, in one form or another, is considered essential to reading instruction.

Many of the images included in the reading activities category focused on the act of writing. The inclusion of these activities in the cover images focusing on reading comprehension and instruction suggests that reading and writing are closely associated activities. Students were depicted with pencils and other traditional writing implements. No students were depicted with computers or digital reading devices. These representations of print-based reading and writing aligns with traditional schooling practices and may be used to connect with an older teaching force that may not be as well-versed in digital technologies.

Students were depicted as actively engaged with objects like pencils, notebooks, magnifying glasses and other texts. Although these activities may be considered tangential to reading comprehension and instruction, it is interesting that these activities are included on the covers of books that focus on reading instruction. It suggests reading is associated with other forms of literate behaviors, in particular writing, acting, and drawing. This may relate to the underlying connection among the different forms of literacies, or it may suggest teachers require lots of activities to support or assess reading behaviors.

One of the covers, *Catching Readers Before They Fall: Supporting Readers Who Struggle, K-4* (Johnson & Keier, 2010) features two young girls with their arms around one another holding small yellow flowers. The girls are staring directly into the camera in this photograph and are smiling. The concept of “catching readers before they fall,” included in the title, suggests that some children will have trouble learning to read and will fall behind in school. The premise of this book title is that there are struggling readers in our schools and teachers have to support them before they fail.

The two girls depicted on this particular cover seem oblivious to their plight as struggling readers. They are depicted as happy and smiling, unaware that they are struggling and continue to fall further and further behind as readers. The two girls are minorities, one possibly Latin@, the other possibly African-American. Whether any meanings were intended by the selection of these particular participants is potentially circumspect; however, the cover suggests minority students may struggle with learning to read and will need help before they fail.

An analysis of the language used in the titles and subtitles of the selected professional development book covers reveals interesting patterns across visual representations, depicted participants, and the ways in which reading and reading instruction is described. Some titles and subtitles contained terms that suggest reading as a positive, enjoyable activity that all children should be interested in doing. Words like *awakening*, *wonder*, *deepening*, *strategic*, *growing*, *joyful*, *enhancing*, and *passion* were used to describe the reading process or reading instruction on these covers. The titles and subtitles of some

books contained words like *struggle*, *struggling*, *improving*, *closing the achievement gap*, *misguided*, *tutoring* and *reaching*. These words seem to suggest that reading is a struggle and difficult to do for some children. Further analysis, possibly using systemic functional linguistic approaches, to investigate how the concepts of reading comprehension and instruction are represented in language is warranted but was not part of our study at this time.

### Concluding Remarks

This article focuses on how reading comprehension and instruction are represented on the covers of professional development books, and the meaning potentials of these multimodal ensembles. As teachers look to purchase professional development resources, it is important to understand how they may be positioned as teachers of reading in the visual images and written language of the covers of the resources they are considering.

The quest for the identification of stable, universal, objective meanings associated with particular visual images and text has been investigated throughout the past few decades (Jewitt, 2009). To complicate this endeavor concepts of multimodality have muddled the theoretical waters suggesting the relationships among various modes in a multimodal text produce more elaborate and different meanings than those suggested by either mode alone (Hull & Nelson, 2005). Because of these theoretical assertions, suggesting these covers have an identifiable, objective meaning that is universally interpreted by all educators would be negligent. We have attempted in this study to suggest potential meanings and interpretation of the selected professional development book cover images and supported our interpretations with theoretical and analytical foundations.

As literacy researchers, we need to develop analytical frameworks for expanding our understandings of the multimodal texts we encounter and select for literacy instructional approaches for our students and ourselves (Serafini, 2010). This study demonstrates the need to reconsider the visual images that portray various aspects of literacy instruction and classroom teaching. These images, as part of multimodal book covers, have underlying assumptions and messages

that often go unchallenged. Although their effects may be hard to measure, these images play a role in developing teacher identities and how teachers come to define reading comprehension and instruction

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## **Appendix A**

### **Multimodal Ensemble Analysis Instrument (MEAI)**

#### **I. INTRAMODAL CONSIDERATIONS**

##### **Compositional Inventory: Textual Elements**

- Title: How is the title / subtitle presented? (color, size, position)
- Linguistics: What Verbs / Nouns are used in the title? What do these suggest?
- Fonts: What are the characteristics of the fonts used? (weight, coherence, color, serif / sans serif, expanded or condensed)
- Author: How are the names of authors / editors presented? (color, size, position)

##### **Compositional Inventory: Visual Elements**

- Media: What visual media are utilized? (photographs, line art, collage, other)
- Informational Value: What is centered? Top / Bottom? Peripheral?
- Visual Composition: What design elements dominate the cover? (lines, shapes, color, borders)
- Framing: How are design elements used to frame the cover?
- Logo: How is the publisher identified? (color, size, position)

##### **Representational Inventory**

- Participants / Roles: Who is in the image (race, gender, age)? Provide numbers.
- Pose: How are the participants posed?
- Vectors: What vectors are observed?
- Setting: What setting is included? Abstract or realistic?
- Objects: What objects other than people are included in image?
- Actions: What literacy event (social / literacy practice) is being suggested?

##### **Interpersonal Inventory**

- Gaze: Do the characters look at viewer (demand) or away (offer)? What does this suggest?
- Interpersonal Distance: (close personal, far personal, public):
- Angle of Interaction: Is the viewer positioned from above, below or eye level?
- Modality: Is the image realistic or abstract? How is this created? Is the image posed or naturalistic? (detail, background, focus)

#### **II. INTERMODAL CONSIDERATIONS**

##### **Image-Text-Design Inventory**

- Ideational Concurrence – image and text present similar information, some degree of redundancy:
  - instantiation – image displays ONE instance of the text
  - exemplification – one serves as an example of the other
- Ideational Complementarity – joint contributions to meaning potential (synergistic)
- Ideational Counterpoint – meanings potential in image and text and in opposition, offering contradictory information

#### **III. IDEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- Keyword Associations: Consider keywords other than reading or comprehension in the title: What connotations are suggested?
- Absence: Does anything seem missing from the image / cover?
- Symbols of Literacy: Are any suggested symbols of teaching or reading included?
- Literacy Practices: What does the setting / event / participants suggest about literacy education?
- Appeal to Consumer: What is being used as the hook? What might compel you to buy or not buy this book?

## Appendix B

Table 1: *Data Corpus Categories*

<u>Types of Covers</u>	<u>Number of Books Identified in Category</u>
Data Corpus	150
Covers with Colored Covers Only	21
Covers with Objects Only	24
Covers with Narrative Images	105

Table 2: *Identified Literacy Practices*

<u>Literacy Practices</u>	<u>Number of Covers</u>
Reading Aloud	9
Independent Reading	53
Reading Instruction	29
Reading Activities	14

Table 3: *Participants Depicted*

<u>Cover Image Participants</u>	<u>Number of Book Covers</u>
Children Only	62
Children and Adults	41
Adults Only	2

Table 4: *Settings Identified*

<u>Settings Identified in Book Covers</u>	<u>Number of Covers</u>
School / Classroom Settings	64
Out of School Settings	12
Abstracted (No Identifiable) Setting	29