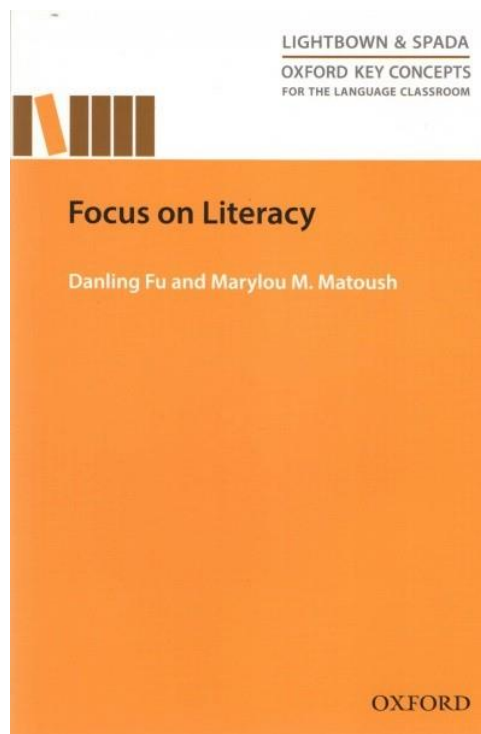


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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Review of *Focus on Literacy*

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Fu, D. & Matoush, M. (2015). *Focus on literacy*. Oxford key concepts for the language classroom. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

ISBN: 978-0-19-400086-4

In *Focus on Literacy*, Fu and Matoush (2015) present a new volume in Lightbown and Spada's *Oxford Key Concepts for the Language Classroom* series. Intended for practitioners, this 2015 book discusses teaching second-language (L2) literacy in the 21st-century. Literacy as a concept is no longer limited to the traditional printed format. Instead, it has moved beyond the text to include the various modes of communication presented through technology, languages, signs, and various settings. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram foster new forms of expression and transnational connection while texting, tweeting, and even blogging also contribute to the term of multiliteracies. Fu and Matoush define multiliteracies as "literacy activity that involves any complex combination of multiple modes, multiple languages, multiple platforms (means of delivery), multiple sign-systems, and/or multiple perspectives in multiple social contexts and landscapes" (p. 125). The authors explain the importance of understanding multiliteracies in our highly globalized world as they affect how language learners develop.

Fu and Matoush strive to address the critical point that many teachers have been trained to teach second language learners through a pedagogical approach no longer relevant in our current age. Too many educators are not versed in instructional strategies that will support the development of 21st-century multiliterate and transnational students (p. 17). Globalization and technology have changed the face of education and the literacy goals of the classroom. Fu and Matoush add,

In the course of reading and writing multimodal texts, L2 learners can connect with people all over the world and build their literate lives and identities as transnational citizens as they learn to make flexible use of 21st-century multiliteracies for their own social and academic purposes. (p. 103)

Students are coming to the language classroom with different needs, capabilities, and goals than their predecessors. Fu and Matoush stress that educators can no longer just teach the target language; they must consider how to do so with the new understanding of a multiliterate communicative competence as a way to connect language learners across communities and modes.

This slim and easy-to-read volume provides second language educators with a plan of not only how to understand 21st-century language learners, but also how to teach, support, and empower them as multilingual and transnational students. While *Focus on Literacy* is addressed directly to teachers of young and adolescent learners of English as a second or foreign language, the volume is also of interest to anyone working in the wider field of language education and is easily adaptable to a variety of instructional settings. As a collegiate foreign language instructor, I found the text insightful and had little issue applying the content to fit my own experiences. Fu and Matoush support this adaptability by supplying various "Classroom Snapshots." These vignettes capture the essence of the content with real world examples and I would argue that anyone who has ever taught can relate either through direct, indirect, or even imagined experiences.

Fu and Matoush have taken care to create a text accessible to practitioners, but based in research. The combination of the two—often divided—camps, is refreshing and pleasant to read. The authors break up the text with interactive activity boxes for participatory application of the content and reflexive practice. New terminology is bolded and presented clearly within the text with an additional definition in the included glossary. "Spotlight Studies" are also interwoven throughout the volume, giving contextual support from recent research in the field.

**Chapter 1: Communicative Competence:
Literacy for the 21st Century**

Fu and Matoush frame Chapter 1 around “*linguaging-as-thinking*,” a perspective they use and connect to Vygotsky’s (1978) research on language as a means for thinking. The authors describe their framework as “*doing language, literacy, and learning while being and becoming*” (p. 14). *Linguaging-as-thinking* provides a foundation for the concepts discussed in the book: L2 learners develop their language by ‘*doing*’ and in the process become multiliterate. Fu and Matoush use Chapter 1 to describe how contemporary language learners are seeking a greater level of communicative competence across borders in our increasingly globalized world. The authors discuss the rise of English as the *lingua franca* and the continual development of digital communication platforms in terms of how that impacts English language learners. With this in mind, it is emphasized that teachers need to shift from *only* teaching the linguistic functions of language to actually using it in as many modes as possible for authentic communication. Chapter 1 successfully captures the reader’s attention, bringing awareness to the importance of reevaluating and supporting the needs of L2 learners.

Chapter 2: Empowering L2-Literacy Learners

In Chapter 2, Fu and Matoush turn the focus more specifically to L2 literacy learners and how teachers can help their development as multilingual and multiliterate communicators while also encouraging their transnational identities. Using vignettes of individual cases to represent the consideration of transnational identities, the authors explain how L2 learners move back and forth between social contexts that tend to straddle national boundaries. They discuss how all learners have numerous cultural, social, and linguistic experiences that inform their L2 identity. It is impossible to separate these experiences and knowledge from their learning and teachers should instead incorporate them into the learning process. One spotlight study, for example, discusses a refugee high school student who has to take care of his younger brother, work a

job to help pay the bills, and repair his own car in order to get to work (p. 33). The teacher that was able to best support the student was the one who developed literacy learning around these topics. Fu and Matoush add, “The goal of supporting students as they attempt to integrate household knowledge with academic knowledge makes sense in terms of supporting meaningful connection making” (p. 33). By doing so, L2 literacy learners make these connections through *doing* and through *linguaging-as-thinking*.

Additionally, the authors note the importance of including the home language with L2 learning. They draw upon Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez’s (1992) concept of ‘*funds of knowledge*,’ which Moll et al. define as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Much like capitalizing on a student’s funds of knowledge, so too should teachers incorporate the learner’s home language/s into the L2 learning experience to increase potential for meaning-making. Fu and Matoush introduce and define numerous terms used in the field such as Garcia’s (2009) ‘*translanguaging*,’ which refers to how multilinguals move back and forth between language to create meaning or Siegal’s (1995) research into ‘*transmediation*,’ which involves the meaning derived from translation of one system or mode to another. Crossover between modes, systems, and languages aids students in their “*cognitive or inter-representational flexibility*” (Fu & Matoush, 2015, p. 127). The authors argue that by understanding and building upon the hybrid relationship between an individual’s various identities, teachers will better support meaning-making in the L2.

Chapter 3: Literacy Development for Young L2 Learners

Chapters 3 and 4 concentrate on instructional techniques. Despite the focus on practice in these chapters, the authors seamlessly continue to

integrate research into the teaching points, nicely bridging the gap between praxis and theory. Chapter 3 introduces emergent bilinguals and how to encourage and support their biliteracy development. Fu and Matoush dedicate an early section of this chapter to patterned reading and writing giving example after example of how teachers have used patterned language and repetition as the basis for L2 emergent literacy.

The authors also express the importance of including reading and writing in the L2 classroom and provide a flexible lesson plan breakdown to show teachers how they can incorporate the two into their classroom schedule. Fu and Matoush stress the inclusion of the students' funds of knowledge into literacy activities and explain that the incorporation of personal experiences through various modes such as journaling, drama, art, and digital media creates authenticity. Furthermore, the authors add that the multimodal approach encourages language 'doing' and allows students to actively use the L2 in line with the concept of 'linguaging-as-thinking' rather than from a passive stance.

Fu and Matoush underline the gravity of providing meaningful engagement within literacy activities for student success and suggest restructuring class time in order to do so. The authors give multiple examples (p. 59) of how to better engage and capture the voice of students in literacy learning by incorporating their experiences and interests into the activity. In one example, young students created their own poetic versions of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin & Carle, 1967) as an activity that draws upon pattern book knowledge, but gives students the opportunity to showcase their own interests and experiences.

Chapter 4: Literacy Development for L2 Adolescent Learners

Although similar to the instructional purpose of Chapter 3, Chapter 4 discusses the importance of understanding the challenges faced by L2 adolescent

learners. Fu and Matoush refer specifically to English language learners (ELLs) who enter the English language school setting as an adolescent. In addition to having to assimilate into L1 schooling and be evaluated at the same level of their L1 peers, each L2 student comes to the system with varying levels of literacy and language skills. Teachers are often not prepared to teach their content-area classes with ELLs in mind. Fu and Matoush reference Garcia's (1999) study on ELLs in New York City as they advocate for the combination of integrated instruction and differentiated literacy instruction (p. 81). They use classroom snapshots and spotlight studies to showcase various ways of approaching this. The authors present teachers with numerous ideas for innovative instructional techniques. They give examples of how to thematically connect content and L2 literacy in schools, how to incorporate writing-process instruction, how to teach crossover literacy strategies, and how to introduce vocabulary embedded in reading and writing rather than in isolation.

Fu and Matoush finish off the instructional-based chapter with a return to the focus on 21st-century multiliteracies, suggesting the use of digital platforms for activities such as online storytelling and building classroom websites. The authors declare that, "An understanding of L2 learners as 21st-century learners will lead teachers to use computer-mediated or other multimodal activities in our linguaging-as-thinking classrooms to engage and empower L2 learners..." (p. 103). Teachers who recognize the importance of enabling L2 learners and who provide linguaging-as-thinking multimodal activities will foster their L2 development.

Chapter 5: Second-language Literacy Instruction: What We Know Now

The final chapter serves as a summary of what has been learned in the process of reading this instructional guide. The necessity for continual

teacher professional development based in research is repeatedly emphasized. Whereas theory and praxis have often been separated, Fu and Matoush explain to readers why the two are indeed interlaced. Throughout the entire volume, the authors base their statements and suggestions in research and they conclude with a straightforward connection between teaching and teacher research.

Conclusion

At only 128 pages, including a reading resource section and glossary, *Focus on Literacy* is a concise, but cogent guide for second language education. As mentioned above, the issues presented are often prevalent in any language classroom and can be adapted to various levels despite the concentration on young and adolescent L2 learners. However, Fu and Matoush oscillate in their use of the term *L2 learners*. At times *L2 learners* seems to encompass all learners of a second language, whereas in others, the term is specific only to ELLs or EFLs (English Language Learners as a Foreign Language). In the introduction, the authors explain the intent of the book: “It is written primarily for teachers and future teachers of children and adolescents who are developing literacy in second or foreign language classrooms” (p. 1). Indeed, most of the content presented is relevant for all L2 learners. Yet, the authors more often than not, refine the term to just those learning English.

Fu and Matoush speak of the “hegemony associated with the dominance of English” (p. 29), and I found it surprising that the book still catered to it. I argue that Fu and Matoush could have better supported their theme of transnationalism and globalism had the book been framed for language learners in general or been more clear on the definition of language learners. Cushman (2016) spoke directly to this concept and the need to insert the more generalized term of language rather than continuing to rely on English as the common language. She stated:

Imagine the historical moment when National Council of Teachers of English is renamed to replace English with Linguaging, or Linguaging Arts, or Meaning. The National Council of Teachers of Linguaging Arts... Imagine all the languages valued equally, multiple scripts and media used routinely, and new genres flourishing in ways that recreate institutional and disciplinary contexts. You may say I am a dreamer. But I’m not the only one. (p. 236)

That is not to say that the particular needs of ELLs and EFLs should be ignored. Perhaps a better solution for this volume would have been to dedicate specific chapters or sections to ELLs and EFLs or to clearly state the intention of the book as one for English language learners from the start.

Despite this critique, any language instructor will benefit from reading this book. Fu and Matoush have created an accessible text, easily adapted to a myriad of classrooms and teachers. *Focus on Literacy* deserves a spot on any language educator’s shelf.

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