

**To Contextualize Agency:
Children and Youth's Appropriation and Resistance of Literacy Practices:**

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Post-structuralist scholarship emphasizes issues of power and control in education as it simultaneously rejects totalizing, essentializing narratives (Ninnes & Burnett, 2003). Post-structuralism offers a theoretical framework for researchers who view literacy as social practice by recognizing that language is both constitutive and expressive of relations of power, and individuals are subject to multiple discourses within those relationships (Bourdieu, 1991; Canagarajah, 1999). In recognizing the multiple ways that issues of power relate to language and literacy practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Street, 2001a, 2001b), literacy scholars have increasingly rejected universalizing narratives and adopted frameworks that challenge cultural, social, and structural determinism. Instead, they are turning to conceptualizations of power and hegemony that allow room for individual and collective agency and resistance (Canagarajah, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). This frame does not preclude a critical theoretical lens that allows us to understand how power and language transact. In fact, post-structuralism assumes the role of power in all human endeavors; it does not, however, take the position that power is universally experienced or that it universally structures activity. Without the acknowledgement of power, we could not study agency since power and agency are co-constitutive.

Within post-structural thought, thanks a great deal to feminist post-structural theory, children are also viewed as capable of agency within contexts of power. Feminist post-structural theorists have particularly focused on gender construction on the part of children within gendered discourses and questions of agency, or resistance to dominant discourses of gender, is for the most part viewed as possible but problematic and rare. However, the acknowledgement of the agentic nature of children (and other members of dualistic pairs such as *male/female*,

able/*disabled*, teacher/*student*, and adult/*child*) comes with the post-structuralist lens as described above. Within feminist post-structuralist thought, according to Alcoff (1988), we recognize multiplicities in identities and the multiple discourses within which identities are formed. Within this, the concept of *children* is made multiple and with this lens it is now possible to think of different children within different discourse contexts at different times in their histories. Agency, then, "stems not from the essence of the person in question but from the positions available to them from within the discourses through which they take up their being" (Davies, 2000, p. 68).

Increasingly we are seeing ethnographic accounts of children and youth, within and without classrooms, exercising control and agency in their learning and 'taking up' the different dominant discourses from the curriculum and the teacher (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Davies, 1993; Dyson, 2003). In this paper, we use a multiple case study approach that allows us to examine issues of agency among children and youth within different contexts of power and hegemony, allowing us to more fully explore the multiplicities of response to power and the construction of identities within contexts of power. Eschewing fixed definitions of the constructs of power, hegemony, agency, and resistance, we provide general discussions of how we are using these constructs in this paper.

Power itself is an ambiguous construct, yet critical scholars agree that it is neither monolithic nor universal (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Power is a network of multiple but unequal points or nodes, and it does not exist without simultaneous resistance; that is, power and resistance are co-constitutive (Foucault, 1980; Ninnes & Burnett, 2003). The construct of *hegemony* describes the systems of power relationships where dominating groups wield power over others. These hegemonic power structures can involve political, economic, cultural, religious, and educational (Giroux, 1992; Gramsci, Forgas, & Hobsbawm, 200; Martin, 1998).

Like the power relationships that constitute these systems, hegemony is never total and complete, but rather is porous, leaving room for agency and resistance (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). In this paper, we argue from data that different types of hegemonic systems co-constitute different types of agency and resistance for children and youth.

Agency is a key aspect of post-structural conceptualizations of subjectivity. That is, children and youth, as do all individuals, have a range of available subject positions, and this subjectivity is fluid, dynamic, and negotiable (Canagarajah, 1999). McLaren (1989) also argues that subjects are active agents, capable of exercising deliberate actions in and on the world. While Gramscian notions of hegemony suggest that agency is partially involved in ensuring the conditions for class domination—that is, agents blindly accept hegemonic ideologies and therefore reproduce them (Martin, 1998)—others challenge the notion that the subjugated are somehow mystified and unaware of the power structures that lead to their condition (Canagarajah, 1999; Clayton, 1998). These scholars argue that dominated actors are often aware of power relationships and are able to consciously make decisions about their actions within those relationships. These conscious actions may take a variety of shapes, including appropriation (of dominant discourses and practices) and resistance (against those practices or discourses).

As a phenomenon, *resistance* is complex, multilayered, and socially constructed, and it is deeply connected to power relationships (Foucault, 1980). Post-structural resistance theories take seriously the various contexts of power, and in doing so, they become more open-ended than reproduction theories, which scholars critique as overly deterministic (Canagarajah, 1999; Giroux, 1989; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). With this paper, we offer cross-case empirical data to explore the nature of agency and power within individuals and groups of children and youth.

Our analysis of agentive literacy practices illustrates the ways that different types of hegemonic relationships for children and youth shape contexts of power relations and how these contexts seem to co-constitute multiple agentive responses to discourses of power.

The Cultural Practices of Literacy Study

The data for our analysis come from a collection of case studies that fall under the aegis of the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS). The project is co-directed by Victoria Purcell-Gates and Kristen Perry, in Canada and the United States, respectively. Researchers working within the CPLS project conduct ethnographic case studies of literacy practice in diverse communities (Purcell-Gates, 2007).

Methodology

Data Collection and Analysis Methods for the Overall CPLS Project

Although each of the studies within the CPLS represents a different sociocultural context and community, all use a framework suggested by Luke (2003) to illustrate the complexity of literacy practice within each group. One unique aspect of the CPLS project is that the structure of the project allows for rigorous cross-case analyses of ethnographic data from very different contexts while simultaneously guaranteeing researchers the ability to pursue their own individual research interests during the course of both data collection and analysis. For the common project, each CPLS researcher investigates how participants have access to different discourses, and use languages, texts, discourses, and literacies in homes, communities and schools. In cases that involve multilingual contexts, researchers also examine the ways in which participants have access to different languages and use languages within literacy events, as well as the ways in which language shapes or constrains literacy practices. Despite differences in context and researchers' own individual research interests, all CPLS case studies are built upon a common

methodology regarding literacy practice: (a) field and participant observation of the ways that people within the specified context engage with literacy, defined primarily as print literacy events and the social, cultural, and political contexts within which they occur; (b) semi-structured interviews of participants; (c) photo documentation of public texts such as store signs, and textual artifacts like newspapers. (For full details of the methodology employed for these case studies, see Purcell-Gates (2007) as well as the Cultural Practices of Literacy website available at <http://www.cpls.educ.ubc.ca>)

One goal of the CPLS study is to aggregate data on literacy practices across context-sensitive case studies, in an attempt to both reach for greater generalizability than a single case may afford and to deepen understanding and explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Responding to the need in cross-case analysis to maintain the layered complexity for each case as well as the requirement that each case be understood on its own terms, we have developed a database that will permit this as well as allow principled cross-case analyses. Thus, included in our *database* is the qualitative data that informed each case study as well as the researcher interpretations of that data. As a multi-dimensional database, this is used by researchers in conjunction with a “flat database” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 127) of theoretically coded literacy events.

In addition to demographic data for each participant, the flat database contains information related to each literacy event identified in the data. Following Heath (1984), we define *literacy events* as any instance of the reading or writing of text. Our definition of literacy events includes both those events that have been directly observed by researchers as well as those that participants report themselves. Once events have been identified in the data, we apply a string of nine codes to each event. Some codes are descriptive and include (a) study/participant

ID; (b) mode of literacy engagement (e.g., reading, writing, etc); (c) language(s) of the text read or written; (d) whether the event occurred in participant's childhood or adulthood; and (e) whether the event involved observed or reported literacy engagement or was observed in the environment without the presence of a person reading or writing it. Other codes in this string are theoretically based and include: (a) social activity domain in which the literacy event takes place; (b) text type; (c) communicative function of literacy event; and (d) social purpose of literacy event. Although the data coded for the flat database are literacy event data – observable instances of reading and writing – the code types that we employ allow us to move from these data to the level of literacy practice. That is, our analysis allows us to draw connections between observable events and the larger practices that contextualize them, including such things as beliefs, values, attitudes, purposes, and social activities. Figure 1 contains our model of a literacy practice that has emerged from our work.

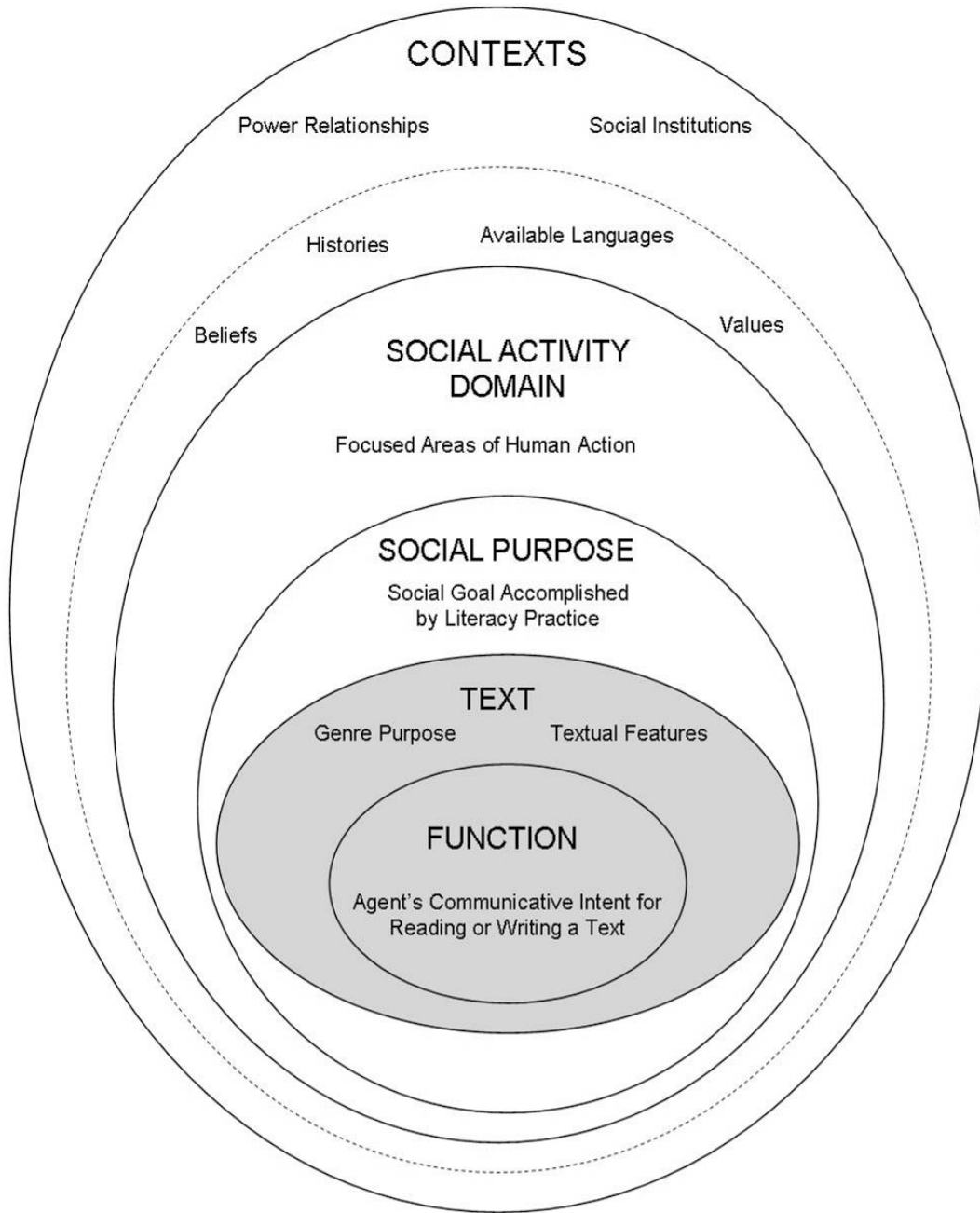


Figure 1. Model of a literacy practice. The areas shaded in gray represent an observable *literacy event*, while the unshaded areas represent inferred aspects of the larger *literacy practice* that contextualize and shape the event.

Data Analysis Methods for this Analysis

This particular analysis emerged as a result of our observation that most of the cases in the CPLS project involved disproportionate power relationships in some form, due in part to the fact that CPLS case studies focus on marginalized communities. Many of the cases involve children who are immigrants, refugees, or other ethnic minorities in a given context, such as Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica or Sudanese refugees in the U.S. Other contexts represent colonial or post-colonial contexts, such as Puerto Rico. Still other cases involved (often) minority children who were non-voluntarily participating in the institution of formal schooling, such as at-risk urban youth in an alternative middle school, a low-income African-American teenager, and Chinese-American immigrant children attending both U.S. schools and an after-school Chinese enrichment program. Some of the relationships in these cases, such as the cases involving students in Puerto Rico and refugees from the Sudan represented power on a global scale. Relationships involving children from various communities in American schools represented power on a smaller classroom scale, although these classroom-level power relationships reflected the larger power relationships in society.

We became interested in the agentic ways in which the children and youth in these cases might respond to these contextual power relationships. Thus, for this particular analysis, we explored the following research questions: (a) in what ways do children appropriate or resist dominant literacy practices?; and (b) how does context shape children's agentic acts with respect to literacy practices?

We first from the data all practices which seemed "agentic" to us, within their individual contexts. This was an interactive process during which we clarified our intuitive sense of what it means for a language practice to be "agentic," or to reflect agency. Based upon this analysis, we

identified two types of responses to hegemony that we defined as agency for purposes of this analysis: (1) resistance, and (2) appropriation. Next, we listed the types of agentive acts in the data along with their sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, looking for patterns. This process resulted in a patterning of agency with hegemonic context that, we believe, complicates the notion of hegemony and, at the same time, begins to clarify it. As the CPLS database grew through the addition of subsequent case studies, we revisited our data in order to investigate whether our analysis would hold up when applied to new data from different contexts. This return to the data also allowed us to search for disconfirming evidence. Our analysis is based on data gleaned from seven case studies, all of which include young children or youth as focal participants.

The CPLS Cases

Urban middle school students in an alternative school for “problem kids.” Gallagher (2007) studied literacy practices of four ninth-graders in the U.S. in an alternative middle school classroom, designed for students who had been identified as potential school failures or dropouts. As one student explained “You have to be bad or dumb to get in here.” Of the four students who participated in this study, two were African-American, one was Mexican-American, and one was European-American. Gallagher visited the classroom at least twice a week for one semester, spending two periods per day in the classroom. Gallagher focused on the unofficial and unsanctioned literacy practices within in the classroom.

Chinese-American immigrants. During a seven-month study, Zhang (2007) examined the literacy practices of two Chinese-American bilingual immigrant families who chose to send their children to a weekend Chinese enrichment school, at which Zhang was a teacher. These families, affiliated with the state university, spoke Chinese dialects at home and also spoke English. The

children either were born in the U.S. or came to this country at a young age, and spoke fluent English. Zhang visited both families at home on a regular basis to document their literacy practices in both English and Chinese. Her study examined the ways in which Chinese children appropriated literacy practices from both the home/community and school environments.

The “Lost Boys of Sudan” in the U.S. Perry (2007, 2008) examined the ways in which Sudanese refugee youth used literacy. The youth had been orphaned by the 20-year civil war in the Sudan—a war which was the result of the northern, Arab-dominated government imposing the Islamic religion, Islamic law, and the Arabic language on black African, Christian southerners. The refugees lived for a decade or more in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, where they received an education in English, before being resettled in the U.S. This seven-month study focused on three youth who had resettled in Michigan and were pursuing higher education in that state. Perry’s study highlighted the community nature of literacy for the Lost Boys, as well as the ways in which language and power played out through literacy acts.

A young African-American girl in an urban context. Collins (2007) described the literacy landscape of Penny, a young African-American middle school girl. Penny lived in a government-subsidized housing project in the urban center of a university town. Penny, the youngest of nine children, repeated the fourth grade, and she attended an after-school literacy tutoring program that was run by the local university. Collins worked with Penny as a tutor on both a formal and an informal basis for nearly three years before beginning to document Penny’s literacy practices. Collins’ study focused on the ways in which Penny imported and exported various literacy practices between her home, community, and school contexts.

Nicaraguan immigrant children in Costa Rican Public Schools. Purcell-Gates (in press; 2008, April; 2007, May). This six-month ethnography focused on the literacy practices of the

highly-marginalized Nicaraguan immigrant communities in Costa Rica. As part of this Purcell-Gates spent 150 hours observing literacy instruction and the activities of the children in kindergarten, first-, and second-grade in a public school in the capitol city area of the country. She observed the regimented nature of the reading and writing instruction as well as the resulting copying and reciting of the children in first and second grade. In the kindergarten class, as part of the pre-school program, intentional and strategic literacy instruction was forbidden. However, in all three contexts, Purcell-Gates documented the covert use of texts that came into the school from the life communities of the children. It is this data that is used in the cross-case analysis.

Sudanese refugee children in kindergarten and first grade. Perry (2009) studied the literacy practices of three Sudanese refugee families in Michigan, focusing on four children in kindergarten and first grade. These children spoke a dialect of Arabic at home and were either proficient or fluent in English. They were emerging into literacy in English. The children's parents all were literate in Arabic, having completed differing levels of formal education in the Sudan, and exhibiting various levels of proficiency in English. Perry collected data over a period of 18 months, observing in the homes, community contexts, and in the children's classrooms. Perry's study documented the ways in which family members, including the young children, made sense of the new language and new textual genres they encountered in literacy practices in the U.S.

Youth in a Puerto Rican K-9 school. This study took place in a rural school library-turned community center in a mountainous central municipality in Puerto Rico (Mazak 2008). For approximately seven hours per day over a period of four months, Mazak observed the uses of English text within the context of this Spanish-speaking community. She audio recorded interactions around text and interviewed focal participants. Focusing on literacy practices that

occurred outside the classroom, Mazak observed how young participants, particularly a group of eighth graders who were members of the “Library Club,” interacted with and created text in English, which for most of them was a developing second language.

Results

Resistance

Our concept of resistance implies some form of rejection of the hegemonic discourse or ideology. Other scholars have included the notion of revolution in their concept of resistance, particularly as applied to resistance through literacy practices (Freire & Macedo, 2001). The data from our case studies did not provide instances of this particular construction of resistance. Rather, we identified two types of resistance in our data: (a) overt resistance, and (b) covert resistance. Overt resistance occurs when actors clearly and openly reject a hegemonic structure or discourse (Clayton, 1998). These are overt acts of refusals of some type—refusals to speak or to read/write within the linguistic hegemony. Covert resistance, on the other hand, is a much more subtle form of resistance, much like the “everyday” forms of resistance described by Clayton and others (1998). Covert resistance largely passes “under the radar” of those in power. It involves language and literacy practices that are hidden from those in power.

Appropriation

Appropriation describes those acts by dominated groups where actors adopt a hegemonic practice for the agent’s own purposes. We define appropriation as agentive for two reasons: (a) dominated groups use the hegemonic practice for their *own* purposes, rather than for the purposes intended by the powerful, and (b) the dominated group transforms the hegemonic practice itself, so that it is no longer identical to the original practice. All of this results in a breaching of the hegemony and occurs as an active act against the hegemony. We will provide

examples of each of these three types of agency as we present the ways in which hegemonic contexts appear to shape agentive acts, below.

The Patterned Nature of Agency in Response to Hegemony

We looked both within and across the seven CPLS cases to examine the ways in which children and youth used language and literacy practices as forms of agency. Our analysis revealed interesting patterns about the use of literacy practices in response to hegemonic power, particularly in terms of patterns of overt and covert resistance.

Overt Resistance and Appropriations within Diffuse Hegemonies

Overt acts of resistance occurred in contexts of what we have termed 'diffuse hegemony.' Three of our cases revealed acts of overt resistance: Chinese-American immigrants, youth in Puerto Rico, and orphaned Sudanese refugees. Three other cases, alternative middle school students, the case of a young African-American girl, and the primary-grade school children in Costa Rica did not exhibit any instances of overt resistance at all. We argue that the more direct nature of the hegemony in these cases could not co-constitute overt acts of resistance as could the diffuse hegemonic contexts. Appropriations showed similar patterns across cases. Diffuse hegemonies allowed for acts of appropriation more than direct hegemonies. By far, the highest percentage of agentive acts from our data were appropriations.

Diffuse hegemonies. In *diffuse hegemonies*, the power of the dominant group is not as great or as apparent over the dominated as it is in more direct hegemonies. Dominated groups appear to have more “wobble room” in diffuse hegemonic relationships. Diffuse hegemonies make overt resistance more possible, and participants appropriate more often from the discourses of power. This suggests that dominated groups may feel more comfortable accepting dominant ideologies and practices in diffuse hegemonies than in more direct ones. In this study, the context

of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. contexts of Chinese-American immigrants and Sudanese refugees represented diffuse hegemonies.

Chinese-American immigrants. The parents of the Chinese-American immigrant children exhibited overt resistance by choosing to shop at Chinese-owned stores, as opposed to mainstream American shops, and by sending their children to Chinese enrichment programs. Although most of the participants in the study could read English, they sought out Chinese-language newspapers and read the Bible in Chinese. In addition, parents in this community enrolled their children in a Chinese enrichment program, which not only taught Chinese language and Chinese arts, but also provided math classes in English. Each of these practices implies an overt rejection of certain American practices in favor of an attempt to maintain a Chinese identity. The diffuse nature of the English-language context allowed these overt agentic acts – Chinese was okay if engaged in outside of U.S. schooling. The hegemony shows, however, in the reality that the children and the adults must use English in their schooling and many other activities such as shopping in mainstream stores and watching mainstream TV channels.

The Sudanese youth overtly resisted hegemony through rejection of language. They directed their resistance toward the government of the Sudan. The refugees rejected the Arabic language and the Islamic religion of those in power in the Sudan. “It’s [Arabic] a bad thing. It steals our language away in our minds,” said one participant, Chol (Perry, 2007). Unlike participants in other contexts who view English as a colonial hegemony (e.g., Mazak, 2007), and despite the fact that Great Britain had been a colonial power in the Sudan, these Sudanese refugees saw English as a language of liberation and empowerment. Chol indicated that “English is important to communicate with many people around the world ... so that you can

communicate with other African people.” Arabic and English therefore stood in stark contrast for these orphaned youth; Arabic stole away their native languages, but English provided them with a voice through which to speak to the world. In the refugee camps, participants worked to translate texts in their native language, Dinka.

This case saw a number of acts of appropriation. Participants used English literacy skills to research and write articles or letters to the editor (or, less often, speeches) about their refugee experiences as refugees as well as the oppressive regime in the Sudan. Participants eagerly read news media and participated in various Internet discussion boards about the situation in the Sudan. They took the English language they were required to use and used it for their own liberatory purposes.

The youth in Puerto Rico engaged in primarily acts of appropriation. Most appropriation occurred with pop culture texts in English. Students navigated the web to find sites related to their favorite artists (Jennifer Lopez, Madonna), cars and motorbikes (Ford), and TV shows (The Simpsons). However, their talk around these English texts was always in Spanish. In this way, youth were playing into the dominant discourse of U.S.-based pop culture while simultaneously acting agentively as they interacted with these texts on their own terms and in their own language. Similarly, students played videogames which relied on understanding English texts, but talked about their play in Spanish with their peers. One student even appropriated the discourse of videogames by creating her own videogame concept in English, complete with character sketches and plot lines.

The linguistic and political hegemonies present in the above studies represented contexts within which participants could resist overtly and appropriate dominant practices for their own purposes. The difficulty of acting in such agentic ways within more direct hegemonies (such as

the political situation in the Sunday) is obvious and certainly the Sudanese refugees were not able to appropriate dominant practices until they had found their way to refugee camps wherein the power relations were more diffuse.

Covert Resistance and Appropriation within Direct Hegemonies

Cases that showed high proportions of covert resistance in contrast to other types of agency typically were cases where the hegemonic relationship was direct and apparent. For example, the case involving middle school students in the U.S., the case of an African-American girl, and the case of Sudanese refugee children all exhibited many instances of covert resistance. In these cases, the hegemonic context typically did not allow room for overt resistance. Few cases of appropriation were observed across these three studies.

Alternative middle school students. The students in this case clearly did not enjoy school, and a large majority of the agentic literacy practices in this classroom involved covert resistance, practices that school authorities did not sanction (Gallagher, 2007). The covertly resistant practices included writing and passing personal notes during lessons, reading non-school and other unsanctioned literature during class time, and failing to turn in academic assignments. In addition, one participant wrote poetry, in which she incorporated codes so that others would not be able to understand her meaning.

An African-American pre-teen. Penny's agentic literacy practices exhibited the same patterns as those of the middle-schoolers described by Gallagher. Like the other middle-schoolers discussed above, none of her practices involved overt resistance. And, similar to the other middle-schoolers, Penny's practices of covert resistance involved passing personal notes in class. She also pretended to take notes and follow along in her textbook during lessons.

Primary grade children in Costa Rican schools. In this study, there were two different types of direct domination. In response to the stated philosophy of the pre-school department of the Ministry of Education for Costa Rica, teachers were forbidden to teach children to read or write. No alphabet letters graced the walls, the children did not write or read their names, and they were discouraged from trying to read from the books in the room. Covert acts of agency, though, became apparent in non-classroom spaces like the playground, where children shared the prayer cards they each carried in their uniform pockets, or in the garden, where some children sidled up to Purcell-Gates (who, as always, was sitting around with a clipboard, paper, and a pencil) to ask to use some paper and a pencil to copy words they could find in the environment like “lunch room” or “office”, and so on. They also took advantage of this situation to try to write their names and to read back words they had copied.

The pattern of domination in the first and second grade classes was realized through a cultural and historical scheme for teaching children to read and write. This involved repetitive copying from the board a “date sentence” (e.g., *Today is Monday, February 2, 2006.*) Other sentences were added as the year progressed such as the “school sentence” and the “teacher sentence”: My school is *Escuela Primavera*. My teacher is *Ms. Sanchez*. By the middle of the school year, the students in first grade were copying six such sentences each day – the same sentences day after day. This pattern of copying (and not composing/writing) continued into second grade and beyond, reflecting also the economic context within which books were not possible, and teachers had to make and reproduce all materials for children to use. It was both culturally/historically congruent to require children to learn to read and write by copying text from the board (or from dictation) and necessary, given the economic condition of the schools and the country at that time in their history. Agentic acts by the children, though, prevent us from

viewing them as passive victims or receptacles of this limited access to texts. As for the kindergarten children, the first and second graders were observed pulling out unsanctioned texts to share with their classmates – texts such as sports calendars, trading cards, fast food flyers, movie tickets, and agendas. Again, these acts of textual agency were performed in unofficial spaces such as during recess, after finishing the assignment, over lunch, or waiting for a bus.

Young Sudanese refugee children in U.S. schools. The diffuse and direct hegemony pattern related to types of resistance played out in this case, as well. The two kindergarten children were in classrooms in which the teachers utilized hands-on learning opportunities, group-oriented center work, and other more child-centered teaching techniques. In these classrooms, Perry did not observe any instances of covert resistance. In contrast, the two first-grade children attended classrooms in which the teachers more frequently employed teacher-directed pedagogical techniques, in which all students were expected to engage in the same learning activities at the same time. Testing was heavily emphasized in both classrooms as well. Both first-grade teachers also were explicit in their monitoring of children's behavior: one often exhorted children to "mind their manners" or to demonstrate that they were good children who knew how to behave properly, while the other often yelled at children and regularly used punishment techniques to control her classroom. In both of these classrooms, Perry observed many instances of covert resistance.

Children in one classroom had a daily literacy quiz, and children, particularly those who were slower at developing literacy skills, covertly resisted this practice by developing techniques for cheating. Perry observed at least two children in this classroom furtively jotting down the words for the weekly spelling test in a place where they could be accessed during the test. Similarly, the focal child in this classroom once whispered to Perry that "I'm going to copy

from” another child when he wasn’t sure of the answer. Most of these cheating episodes went unobserved by the teacher. The only observed instance of overt resistance to a literacy practice in this classroom occurred during the state-mandated high-stakes testing period at the end of the year, when one child, also an immigrant who spoke a different language at home, absolutely refused to take the exam. In the other first grade classroom, the researcher observed children engaging in activities like surreptitiously reading books or writing in a notebook while they were supposed to be paying attention to a whole-class, teacher-directed activity.

Resistance. Reflection on these settings led us to speculate that classroom contexts allow little room for acts of overt resistance, because overt resistance can carry great consequences. Therefore, participants resort to covert acts of resistance in order to subtly challenge the authority of their teachers and of the hegemonic system of formal schooling. Those in power do not permit students to openly defy them, and pretending to take notes in class, reading a text of the student’s choosing rather than the required textbook, secretly practicing writing when it is forbidden, or refusing to turn in assignments provide alternate ways for these students to reject the hegemonic discourse of schooling.

Interestingly, researchers involved in these cases noted that student participants often had negotiable relationships with those in power—their teachers and other authoritative adults. While it was clear that the adults in each case held the power in the classroom, students in these cases could negotiate some aspects of the student-adult power relationship. Indeed, the teacher in the alternative classroom sometimes appeared to deliberately “overlook” resistant behavior, such as passing personal notes, just as the first-grade teachers sometimes seemed to ignore when children were socializing during an expected literacy activity instead of working alone. Despite the fact that students negotiated some aspects of the relationship with authority figures, it was also

obvious that the students were nevertheless subjugated in the sense that they had little choice in whether or not they attended school, and they only had as much power in that context as the teachers granted them. These students were non-voluntary subjects (Ogbu, 1987, 1992)—required to attend school, regardless of whether or not they wanted to be there. The alternative middle school particularly emphasized this non-voluntary status—the students described themselves as “bad or dumb” and attended this school as a “last chance” after being rejected by mainstream schools.

The single instance of covert resistance in the Chinese-American case study involved a student in her school context rather than in the larger community, supporting our conclusion regarding the hegemonic nature of classrooms. In this case, the student incorporated Chinese characters into an art assignment for her American school, characters that her American teacher likely could not read (Zhang, 2007), but which may have held important meaning for the student in terms of her cultural and linguistic identity. In all of these cases, students were a clearly dominated, non-voluntary population who were subjected to the hegemonic structure of schooling, thus rendering their resistance covert. In some instances, students had a negotiable relationship with those in power, complicating the hegemonic power structure relationship. However, such a negotiable relationship also may reflect the fact that no permanent structure existed against which to overtly resist, thus rendering all acts of resistance as covert.

Appropriation. Although covert resistance dominated acts of agency in these cases, the participants also engaged some acts of appropriation. Many of the students in both of the middle school cases used the Internet and school-style research skills to participate in youth culture. Participants in Gallagher’s (2007) study indicated that they read popular magazines and performed Internet searches to find song lyrics and to keep up-to-date on the latest information

about popular musicians. One participant, Marshon, avidly played video games. He used a variety of resources, including the Internet, to help him achieve higher levels of play in the games. Collins (2007) wrote that Penny used the library to research hip-hop music lyrics via the Internet and to download and print the lyrics for herself. Although they might be surprised to recognize it, these middle school students actually appropriated practices that they learned in school—the very setting that they so covertly resisted. However, they transformed these skills by appropriating them in order to participate in youth culture, a purpose that remains largely unacknowledged or unsanctioned by formal schooling.

Similarly, the young Sudanese children engaged in many acts of appropriation in their kindergarten and first grade classrooms; in fact, they appeared more likely to appropriate from this context than were their older U.S. counterparts. Many of these acts involved taking up the dominant literacy practices – that is, those valued and sanctioned by the schools they attended – and modifying those practices for their own purposes. For example, although their teachers often expected them to read silently or work independently, the children transformed these expected individual practices into opportunities to socialize. One first grader frequently turned her supposedly independent reading time into a chance for “buddy reading”. Other times, the children took often-boring routines or activities and transformed them into a game. For example, the same first grader turned the required journal-writing activity into an opportunity for a friend to guess the words she was writing. Examples such as these suggest that the social aspect of these appropriated practices may have been more meaningful to the children than the solitary nature of the practices their teachers expected them to engage in.

Other appropriations by the children reflected their attempts to bring real-world, out-of-school literacy practices into the classroom, as did the youth in other cases. This occurred

especially frequently in one kindergarten classroom. One girl had bought a little notepad in her classroom's store, and she had recorded the phone numbers of some of her friends in it during the children's free time. This prompted a discussion among some children about the proper way to record contact information. Another common practice in this classroom involved literacy play in which the children would pretend to work at a restaurant and would write down the food orders of their "customers". During one pretend play event, the focal girl sounded out words like *mango*, *taco*, and *cheese*, and she consulted the class's word wall to spell *two*. The children were permitted to engage in this sort of play when they had completed their required literacy class work. In such instances, the children appropriated common early-literacy learning techniques such as using invented spelling or relying on environmental print, but they did so for their own purposes – playing a make-believe game about a restaurant, for example. Examples of appropriation in which young children import real-world practices into the context of formal schooling suggest the desire to engage in meaningful practices as they emerge into the world of print literacy.

In the case of the young children from Sudan, their appropriations in the classroom may be seen as an alternative method of resistance. In this case, the children appeared to be rejecting certain expectations held by their teachers and their schools, such as the expectation that children work individually. In other instances, their appropriations suggested a rejection of practices they saw as boring or meaningless. Through their re-purposing of certain practices, the children still met the larger goals or expectations held by schools – to become literate – but their appropriations allowed to do so on their own terms, to a certain extent.

Direct hegemonies. In *direct hegemonies*, the powerful exert a great deal of power over the dominated. These hegemonies have a highly apparent power structure, making the powerful

and the subjugated easily identifiable. Direct hegemonies may or may not be oppressive or repressive, but they typically do not allow for overt resistance. The dominated must resort to acts of covert resistance, and they appropriate relatively few hegemonic ideologies and practices, at least in our analysis. All of the school cases represented direct hegemonies, as did the home context of the Sudanese orphaned youth. The young Sudanese children's classroom contexts brought direct hegemonies, but they could, at times, resemble more diffuse hegemonies, *if* learning opportunities were structured into opportunities for group collaboration such as centers or when children were allowed to make choices about educational activities. These activities seemed to encourage the transformation of individual activities into social ones, allowing the children to appropriate practices for their own purposes outside of the direct monitoring of the teacher. These same classrooms also represented much more direct, and oppressive, power relationships at other times. When power was less diffuse, the children's agentic responses differed; instead of appropriating, they covertly resisted the dominant practices.

The Relationship between Hegemon(ies) and Agency

Based upon our analysis and the different patterns of actions we saw in response to hegemonic power systems, we suggest a more complex notion of hegemony in line with post-structuralist concepts of power relationships. Our data challenge Gramscian notions of hegemony as monolithic and deterministic (Clayton, 1998; Martin, 1998), and they illustrate that different types of hegemonies exist which are based upon the contexts of the systems involved.

Hegemonies appear to be defined by the natures of the relationships between those in power and those who are dominated, rather than being defined solely by the political or economic structure of the context. Within this, we conclude that power and hegemonies can be thought of as playing out within different contexts along a continuum of direct to diffuse. Histories, players,

social locations, short and long-term goals, and other critical aspects of social context will impact on location of the power/hegemony continuum.

Our data support and specify to a greater degree than before post-structural theories suggesting that power and resistance are co-constructive (Foucault, 1980; McLaren, 1989). Resistance occurs in all hegemonic relationships, at any place along the direct/diffuse continuum. However, resistance and other forms of agency appear to take different forms, depending on the degree to which the hegemony is diffuse or direct. Resistance, in particular, changes its nature, given the context. Agents must consider both the possibility of overt resistance, as well as what the potential cost might be for such resistance.

More diffuse hegemonies for children and youth seem to provide contexts where overt resistance is possible because the potential repercussions of such actions are relatively minor and this is understood by the children/youth. For example, many of the U.S. hegemonic contexts in this study showed participants overtly resisting language practices; in this context, English is clearly hegemonic, but the U.S. system also guarantees freedom of speech. Diffuse hegemonies likewise appear to provide contexts where agents feel more comfortable appropriating dominant practices. Again, this may be due to the fact that the consequences of such appropriations are relatively minor. In contrast, direct hegemonies appear to provide little (if any) room for overt resistance. Because the consequences for overt resistance are so great, agents must resist covertly. For example, in the alternative middle school, overt resistance might result in getting kicked out of the system entirely. In the native contexts of the Sudanese refugees, overt resistance could mean imprisonment or death. See Figure 2 for a graphic display of these relationships of power and agency.

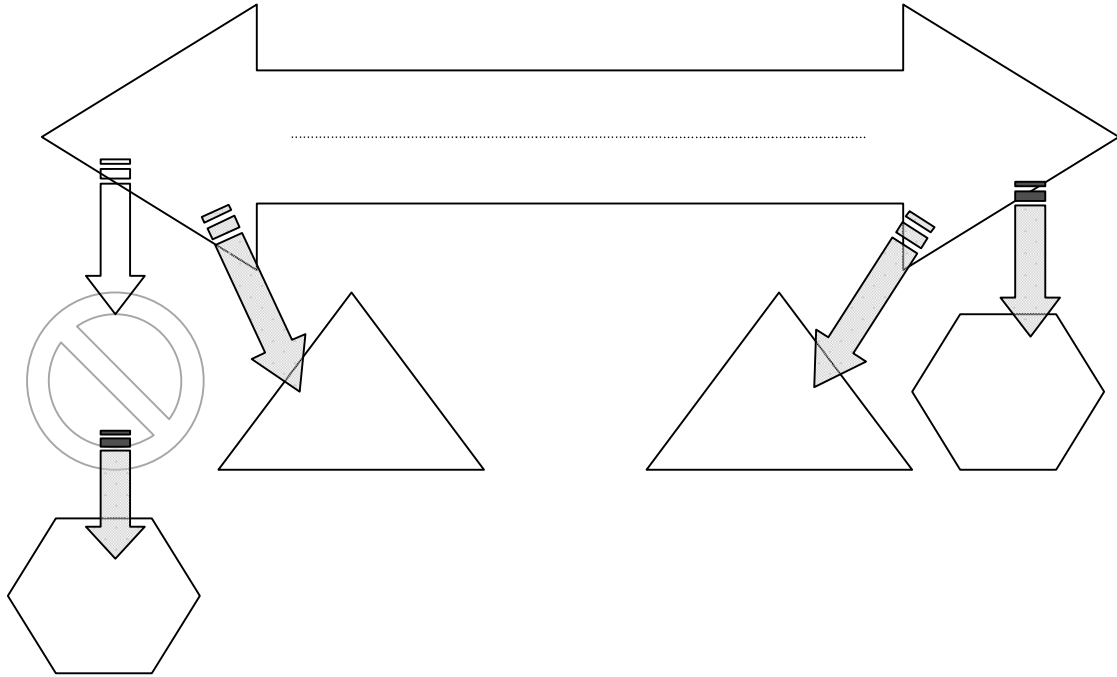


Figure 2. Co-construction of agency and hegemony according to power location on the direct/diffuse continuum of hegemonies.

Our analysis also suggests that individuals may need to leave contexts where there are direct hegemonic relationships in order to be able to openly resist those hegemonic powers. The case of refugees from the Sudan strongly showed this pattern. In this case, participants left a direct hegemonic relationship for the U.S., which has a comparatively diffuse hegemonic structure. The new, diffuse hegemonic relationships appeared to allow more room for movement, choice, and resistance. This case showed high proportions of overt resistance in the U.S., resistance which likely would not have been allowed in their native contexts. The Sudanese emigration appeared to allow refugees to overtly critique the Sudanese government. In this case,

the diffuse hegemony of the U.S. also appeared to provide tools, practices, and discourses which participants could appropriate in order to resist the direct hegemony of their home country. This may also explain the higher degree of appropriations observed in these cases; that is, individuals may find great value in appropriating aspects of the diffuse hegemony because these appropriations allow them to better resist the direct hegemonic relationship of their home context.

Our re-examination and complication of the constructs of hegemony and agency may provide important insights for scholars and practitioners alike who recognize the role of power in language and literacy development and schooling. By recognizing that hegemony is not absolute, by recognizing that there are different types of hegemonic relationships, and that these different relationships enable and constrain agency in different ways, we may be able to move beyond the deterministic fatalism of many discussions of power and hegemony. We hope others will join us in continuing to theorize issues of hegemony and agency in ways that will allow more refined empirical investigations within these constructs that, in turn, may suggest pedagogical practices that will further the agency of students who find themselves stymied within hegemonic relationships.

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