“WHAT I FEEL IN MY HEART”: LITERACY PRACTICES OF AND FOR THE SELF AMONG ADULTS WITH LIMITED OR NO SCHOOLING

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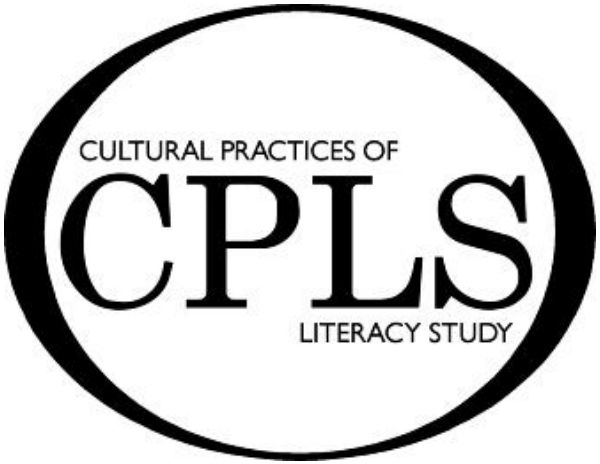

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Theoretical Framework

Literacy as a Social Practice

- Literacy is always situated within…
  - Social & cultural contexts
  - Relationships of power & ideology

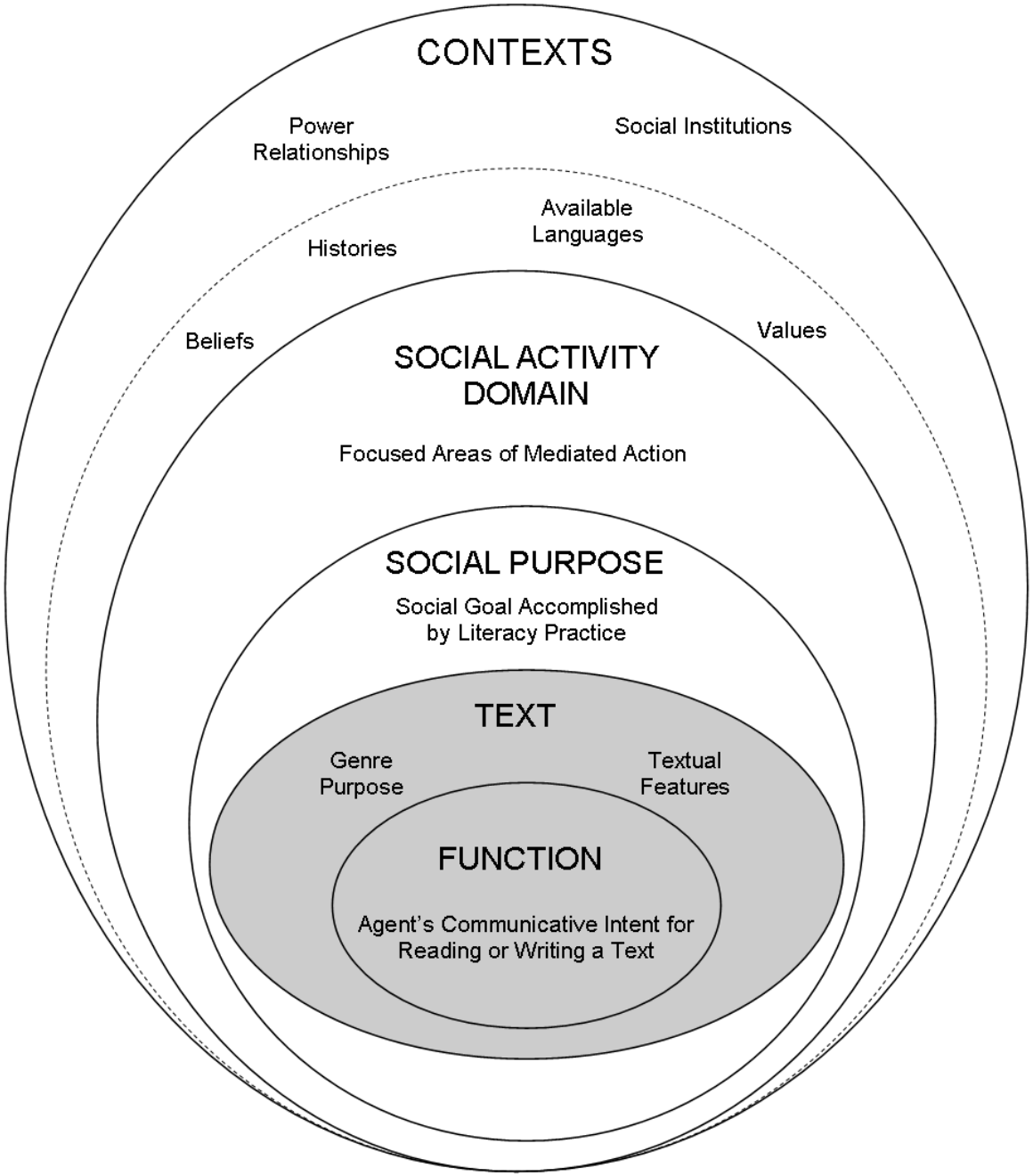
Literacy Events & Practices

- Literacy events (Heath, 1983)
  - Visible, involving written text
  - Reading, writing, speaking, listening, etc
- Literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1999)
  - Not visible, but inferrable
  - Includes beliefs, values, attitudes
  - Situated within context

Model of a Literacy Practice

Areas in grey represent observable *literacy events*

Unshaded areas represent inferred aspects of larger *literacy practice* that contextualize & shape the event



Purcell-Gates, V., Perry, K.H., & Briseño, A. (2011). Analyzing Literacy Practice: Grounded Theory to Model. *Research in the Teaching of English, 45*(4), 439-458.

CULTURAL PRACTICES OF CPLS LITERACY STUDY

The problem

- Early research explored literacy within communities that were traditionally thought to be uneducated, low-literate, or even illiterate
  - Adults practiced literacy in meaningful ways to accomplish important social goals (e.g. Street, 1984)
- National and international discourses still characterize entire groups as low-literate or illiterate
  - Often call upon the concept of *functional literacy* to describe the perceived abilities of certain groups

Functional Literacy

U.S. Definition

- "Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential"
  - Baer, Kutner & Sabatini, 2009

UNESCO Definition

- A person is literate if she can engage in "all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (or her) group and community and also for enabling him (or her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (or her) own and the community's development"
  - UNESCO, 2005

Initial Research Question

- *In what social activity domains, and for which purposes, do adults with limited or no schooling read or write?*

Methodology

CPLS Project

- Ethnographic data on literacy practices
- 26 case studies
- CPLS database
  - Literacy practices data
    - Observations
    - Semi-structured interviews
    - Photographs & artifacts
  - Contextual data
  - Demographic data

Cross-Case Analysis

- Limited to participants with limited or no formal schooling
  - 98 participants
  - 12 case studies
- Analysis
  - Queried database by domain and purpose
  - Identified “unexpected” practices
  - Returned to original data
  - Developed participant portraits
  - Coded portraits for themes

Revised Research Questions

- *In what literacy practices do adults with limited or no schooling engage for personal fulfillment?*
- *What do these practices reveal about the nature of literacy for individuals who are often characterized as illiterate or low-literate?*

Literacy for Personal Fulfillment

Literacy Practices

- Religion/spirituality/faith
- Coping with life
  - Literacy as escape
  - Facing one's problems
- Enjoyment
  - Humor
  - Relaxation

Contextual Themes

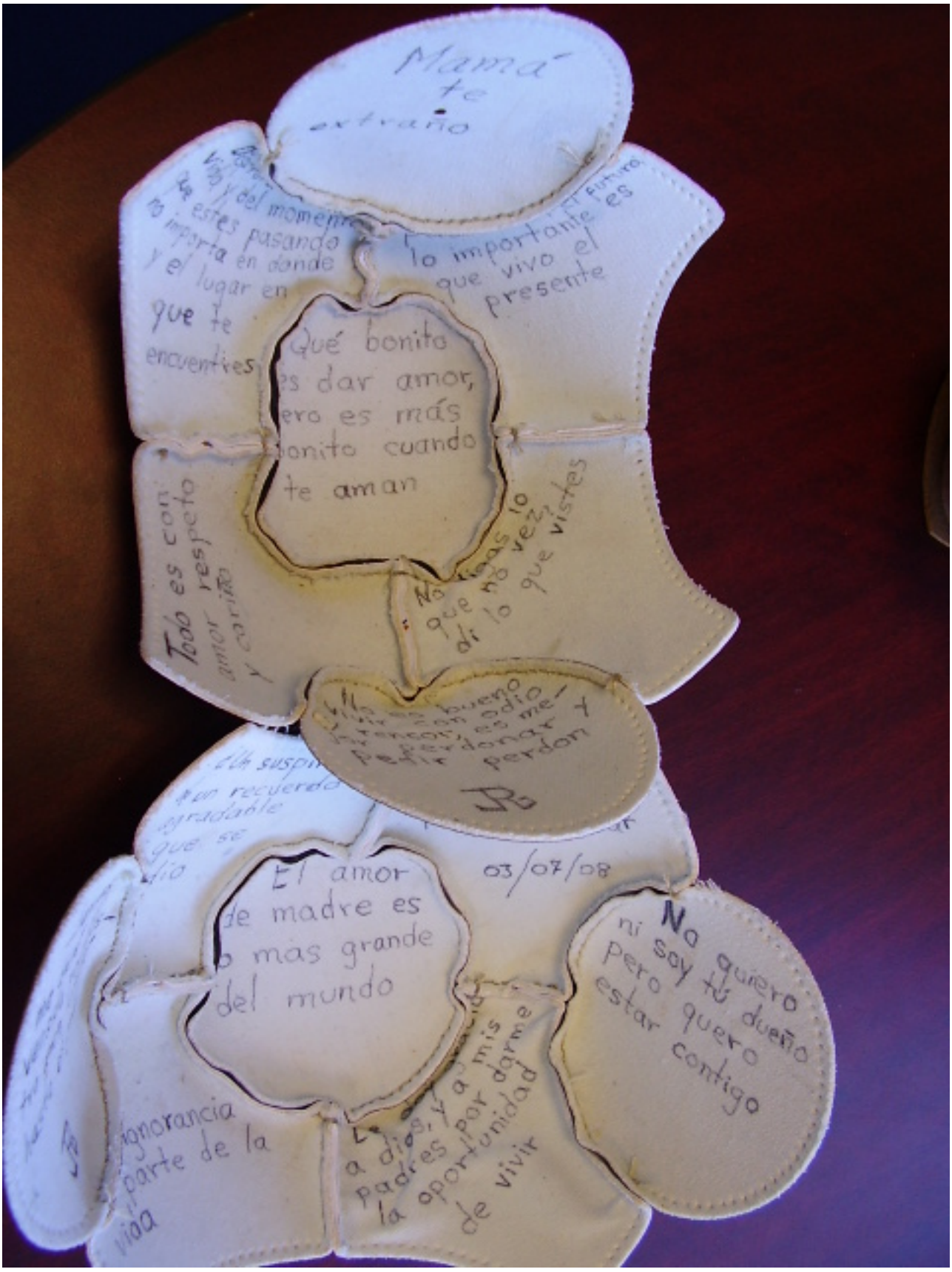
- Oral traditions
- Self-teaching
- Literacy perceptions
- Practical considerations

Nina: *Wisdom to Discover God's Writing*

"EL FRANCES"

Tropical Burger

Raúl: “My Mind Goes Far Away”


Mamá
te
extraño
Qué bonito
es dar amor,
pero es más
bonito cuando
te aman
Todo es con
respeto
amor
y cariño
El amor
de madre es
lo mas grande
del mundo
No quiero
ni soy tu dueño
Pero quiero
estar contigo
03/07/08

Raúl: "My Mind Goes Far Away"

- "When I write, I do not feel I am in prison anymore. I think about nicer things regardless of who is next to me, who is looking or who criticizes me, who teases me or who mocks me or talks about me. I don't care about that because my mind is not there anymore."

Claire: “Trying to Get a Book Together”

Claire: “Trying to Get a Book Together”

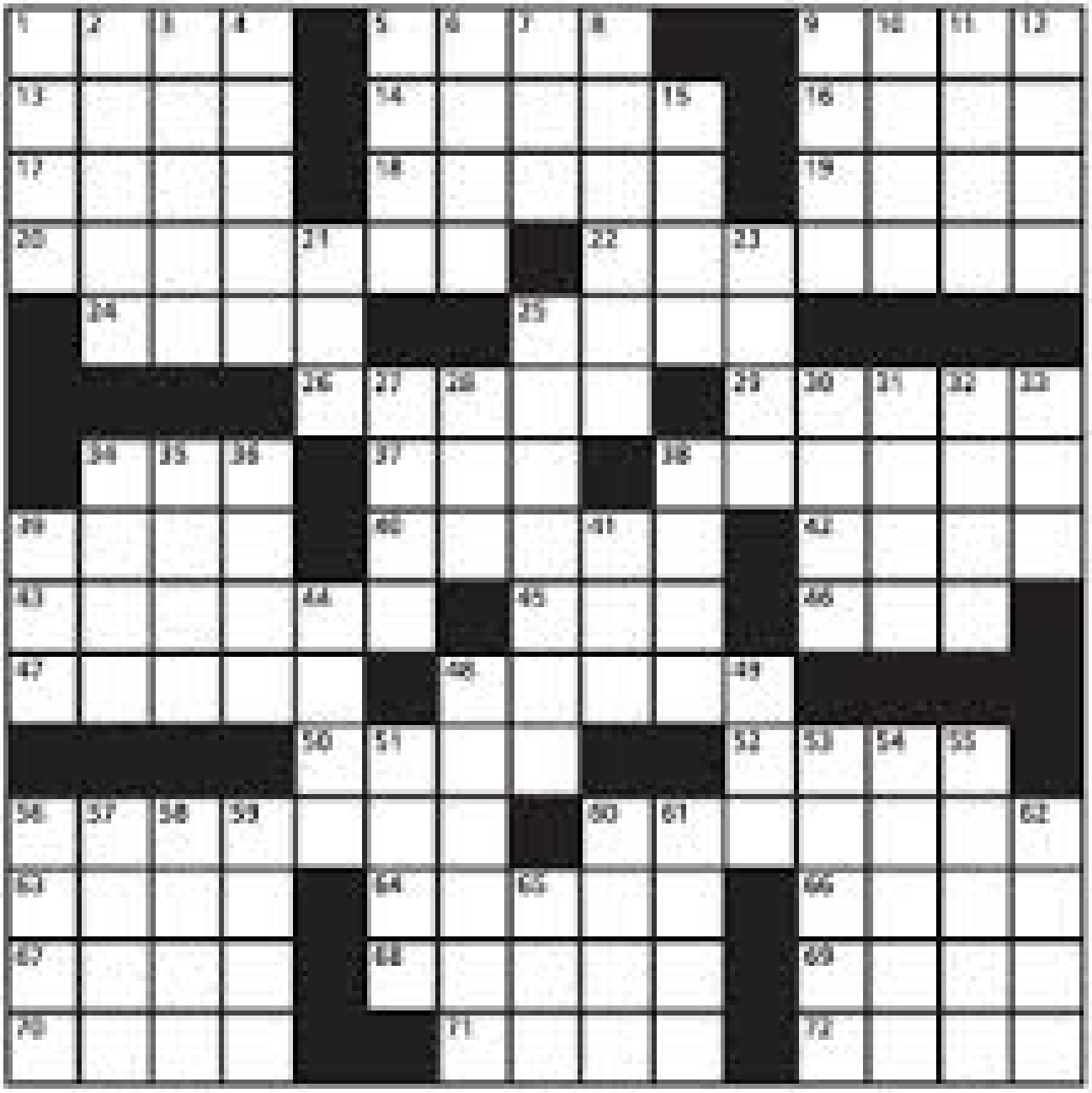
- “In our tradition, like things are not supposed to be written down…so if some other person like you, if you need to know about our spirituality, you’ll have to go there and experience it for yourself.”

Claire: “Trying to Get a Book Together”

- “I’m trying to get a book together…of all my poems…I’m going to try and get this published.”

Catalina: “Because They are Funny”

CONDORICOSAS
SILENCIO



Implications

- Literacy practices of and for the self
  - Go beyond day-to-day “functional” survival
  - Are often hidden
  - Are about the survival, functioning & development of the self
- Theories & concepts
  - Need to rethink/redefine “functional literacy”
    - Which literacy practice(s)?
    - In which context
    - For whom?
    - For what purpose?
- Literacy instruction
  - Individual goals
  - Development of individual selves
  - Increasing literacy repertoires beyond “basic needs”

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