

**MAKING MEANING WITH
READERS AND TEXTS**

ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON TEACHING

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ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON TEACHING VOLUME 40

**MAKING MEANING WITH
READERS AND TEXTS:
BEGINNING TEACHERS'
MEANING-MAKING FROM
CLASSROOM EVENTS**

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context.
(Rosenblatt, 2019, p. 455)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christi U. Edge is a Professor of Education and Scholar for Extended Learning and Community Engagement at Northern Michigan University, USA. Prior to academe, Christi was an award-winning high school English language arts and reading teacher and Tampa Bay Area Writing Project fellow. Her research addresses meaning making from teaching and learning events, multimodal literacy, narrative inquiry, and self-study of practice.

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PREFACE

The research represented here began in practice as theory came alongside my knowing, doing, and becoming – first as a high school English and reading classroom teacher and then as a teacher educator. Side by side, practice and theory danced together like bodies moving with tension, flexing, leaning, shifting, stepping, finding moments of harmony in and with the music.

THE SPACE BETWEEN

Research and scholarship focused on reading instruction have documented meaning-making involves a complex process through which readers use language and experience to construct internal (in-the-mind) tentative understandings as they negotiate meaning and revise their interpretations of the external (printed, visual, aural, etc.) communicative signs to which they attend. Concomitantly, since the 1990s there has been growing attention to adolescent and adult learners' reading and literacy needs. Research has called for continued reading and literacy instruction as learners attend to more complex texts. Recognizing discipline-specific literacy practices has led to calls for research and instruction to cultivate students' disciplinary literacy and learning (e.g., Hall, 2005; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wilson, 2011) as well as teachers' professional development for teaching reading across content areas and for teaching disciplinary literacy (e.g., International Reading Association, 2012; Pasternack, Caughlan, Hallman, Renzi, & Rush, 2014; Scott, McTigue, Miller, & Washburn, 2018; Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). Other scholars have depicted society itself as a kind of ambiguous cultural text – one its members are continuously reading, interpreting, and creating (Bruner, 1986; Cooper & Simonds, 2007; Gee, 2008; Geertz, 1973; Goodman, 1984), guided by their frame of expectations (Popper, 1962). Nevertheless, we know little about the ways that these two – making meaning through disciplinary texts and making meaning in life – come together in classrooms from the perspective of the teachers who read and make meaning from classroom events.

While teacher education research has long documented beginning teachers' struggles into the profession (e.g., Hammerness et al., 2005; Jackson, 1998; Kennedy, 1999; Lortie, 1975; Smagorinsky, Rhym, & Moore, 2013), this book addresses an unexplored space situated in the nexus of research on teaching, the lifeworlds of teachers, literacy, and making meaning from teaching and learning events. This book documents how beginning teachers read and made meaning from classroom events. Connecting meaning and experience in the fields of

English education, teacher education, literacy, and narrative inquiry, this book materializes new insights for advancing teacher education, research, and practice. Teaching is reimagined as transactional reading and composing – curriculum, identity, relationships, and culture.

EXPLORING THE SPACE BETWEEN

This book was born out of exploring the space between reading and literacy instruction in secondary English language arts and literature on the one hand and teacher education on the other. These are the “worlds” I have been bridging for 25 years of practice, first as a high school English, literature, and reading teacher, then as a Tampa Bay Area Writing Project Fellow transitioning from teaching to teacher education, as an English education and teacher education graduate teaching fellow during my doctoral program, as a teacher educator who works with practicing teachers and prospective teachers from all disciplines in field-based methods courses, and as a scholar for extended learning and community engagement who works alongside and with faculty in higher education.

This book is born from the space between with the intention of demonstrating how what is known in the discipline of English literature, language arts, reading and literacy can help educators (re)see, understand, affirm, shape, construct, and transform the work of teaching and learning. A kind of crosswalk between these worlds is Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory (1978, 2019), reimagined and extended to new contexts, stitching new conceptions of texts, readers, and writers. Through nearly two decades of inquiry through research and teaching in various contexts, I have connected and utilized the central tenets of Rosenblatt’s theory alongside broadened understandings of *text*, *reading*, and *literacy* to teaching and teacher education. Notably, I do think the theory resulting from these years of practice and research is not limited to teaching and learning in teacher education; however, teacher education through literacy practices has been my central focus.

This book foregrounds teachers as meaning-makers. Both teachers and students can be understood as active meaning-makers who read the world around them and make meaning. My focus is attending to teachers’ meaning-making with the understanding that what teachers know and do makes a difference in student learning. While I attend to teachers, it is always with learners and learning in mind. Better understanding how teachers know and do matters – for learning, democracy, and radical love. At a time when education in the United States is threatened by attempts to sterilize teaching and learning with scripted curriculum, when a litany of high-stakes assessments continue to skew attention, when teachers are expected to work in deprofessionalized cultures and untenable conditions further exacerbated by a global pandemic, when teachers are forced to fear for their students’ and their own lives, the need to better understand *how* teachers know and do the work of teaching and learning has never been greater. Fostering teachers and learners touches the quick of the human learning experience – with implications for all aspects of humanity and the human experience.

MINDING THE GAP

Findings from the longitudinal research represented in this book demonstrate the space between as the multidimensional space for making meaning. The metaphors of quilt, story, and poem are heuristics for attending to the distinct, yet relational ways of making and representing meaning.

As a whole, this book is a composite story of research lived and told, knit together, like a quilt, as a result from piecing together many stories, experiences, and events, threading each text together with strands of knowledge from multiple spools of thought. As a whole, the book is a kind of “poem” – that is, meaning(s) made and positioned here as a form of practical art. As story, quilt, and poem, readers of this text can fashion visions of possibility, uncover questions, resee experience, connect, discover, and begin to compose/enact their own poems.

LITERARY READING

I invite my readers to join me in a literary reading (Probst, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1938) of longitudinal research. This research aimed to bridge a gap in the knowledge base between what teachers know and do by inquiring into how teachers read and make meaning from classroom events. What is a literary reading? Literary reading is a reading that respects and makes room for the human experience. Literary reading is a “process by which we participate in another’s vision, learn something significant about the world, [and] acquire the insights that make our lives more comprehensible” (Probst, 1990, pp. 28–29). In this moment, I participate in Probst’s (1990) vision for Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* (1938) in classrooms. Through his synthesis, application, and vision, I make connections to my past experiences and present wonderings that help me lean toward what I am on the verge of understanding and communicating. I borrow some of his words and through them create connections to my thoughts and make meanings between his printed pages and my own. I am reading and composing in my mind, and at this moment, composing on my computer screen. What Probst asks as a question, “What is literary reading?” I consider and compose as invitation in response to the unfolding event. Rosenblatt (2019) described this phenomenon as a second stream of response in which something triggers conscious reflection.

We must recognize during the reading event a concurrent stream of reactions to, and transactions with, the emerging evocation. Even as we are generating the evocation, we are reacting to it; this may in turn affect our choices as we proceed with the reading. Such responses may be momentary, peripheral, or felt simply as a general state, for example, an ambiance of acceptance or perhaps of confirmation of ideas and attitudes brought to the reading. Sometimes something unexpected or contrary to prior knowledge or assumptions may trigger conscious reflection. (p. 461)

To call attention to your own stream of response, dear reader, you might, for example, be considering the ideas I am communicating and, while glancing at the size of this text, wonder if a literary reading might mean a lot of work on your

part, or wonder if the whole text will include granular attention to thinking, or hear yourself talk back to the text, *Get on with it already!* Or, perhaps you are intrigued by a text that seems to be breaking some unspoken “rules” of academic research writing, and you sense your mind and body opening a bit to possibility or closing with dismissal of what does not align with expectation. Perhaps, having some background knowledge about Rosenblatt, you sense the parallel spaces of writing and reading about theory as it is employed. You may even recall Rosenblatt wrote, “The various strands of response, especially in the middle ranges of the efferent-aesthetic continuum, are sometimes simultaneous, interacting, and interwoven. They may seem actually woven into the texture of the evocation itself” (2019, p. 461). From the connection between your background knowledge and the words you read here, you may notice your own stream active of reading-composing. In any case, you are here and are thinking *with* the text. Describing a literary reading, Probst (1990) writes:

The symbolic dance of words on paper awakens memories, arouses feelings, evokes thought, conjures images, but all those memories, feelings, thoughts, and images are the reader’s as much as – even more than – they are the writer’s or the texts. . . . Reading, then, is a process of creating rather than simply receiving. It is active, not passive. And it requires readers to attend not only to what is on the page, but also to what they have brought with them to that page. (p. 29)

While there will be “things” to take away from this text, it is my hope and my goal to include readers in the meaning-making process as creators who actively participate, with attention to what is on the page, what they bring with them to the page, and what – through the reading experience – they begin to envision. Literary reading is a generative process of exploration and discovery that aims for praxis. While I did not initially realize I had been, for some time, employing literary reading to how I read and created learning opportunities first as a teacher and then as a teacher educator, the research I represent in this book helped me to become aware of literary reading and composing as a way of thinking about the stories teachers and students live and tell in classrooms. Learning to see literary reading helped make more visible my own inchoate knowledge, helped me attend to others’ ways of knowing, and helped me to begin seeing when literary reading was present and absent in teachers’ meaning-making from classroom events. Candidly, I feel compelled to aim to communicate what I have come to understand from studying reading and writing in classrooms in a way that also honors that knowledge by reflecting it and creating space for others’ meaning-making. (I too have experienced the paradox of, for example, being told I should be teaching students through active learning in transmissive style sit-and-get lecture about active learning.)

Once again, I lean to the knowledge I sense and connect to in Probst’s (1990) words:

If readers are to learn from their reading, they must begin with the visions it awakens in them and work from there. Teachers, abiding by this principle, have begun to ask students what they see, feel, think, and remember as they read, encouraging them to attend to their own experience of the text. And teachers (those who accept the responsibility transferred to them) find students testing the literature in the light of their own experience, and rethinking their own experience in

the light of the text. The questions initiate talk, not just about the text, but about reader-and-text. They invite consideration not just of what the text presents, but also of its significance in the intellectual and emotional life of the reader. (pp. 31–32)

As a reader and as a teacher to myself and others, I aim to continue learning from my reading classroom events with beginning teachers by beginning with the visions reading awakened in me and work from there.