We are pleased and honored to join the editorial team as department editors of the Reading Corner for Educators. As literacy teacher educators at the University of Florida, we have worked closely together on many projects. Over the next three years, we would like to build upon the excellent work of our predecessor, Sonia Nieto. For each column, we plan to review 3–4 books that not only match the journal theme but reflect critical issues of current concern for classroom teachers and teacher educators. Occasionally, we will do integrated reviews of several related books. We welcome your suggestions, comments, and contributions.

In the current educational environment where high-stakes testing and federal/state mandates control the school curriculum, the question of “what matters in literacy and literacy instruction” becomes especially pertinent. What do we as a society value in literacy? What knowledge, experience, skills, and dispositions are needed in order to develop truly literate beings? How can we better prepare our students to meet the challenges of an increasingly pluralistic and multimodal society? The three books reviewed in this issue address these and other related questions. They offer theoretical frameworks and practical guidelines/examples to help teachers and teacher educators conceptualize, design, and implement culturally relevant pedagogies that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners and changing contexts.

School’s Out!: Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice
Edited by Glynda Hull and Katherine Schultz

Shirley Brice Heath points out in the forward that “learning has no temporal or physical boundaries.” Hull and Schultz push readers to extend their conceptions of literacy instruction by examining out-of-school programs that are successful at engaging urban and minority students with literacy, and more specifically, with writing. The format of this book, containing reviews of research, research reports, and commentary by K–12 teachers, creates an informative and entertaining read.

Two ethnographic studies of bilingual children and three studies of urban after-school programs provide evidence of passionate involvement in extracurricular writing. In out-of-school frameworks, children have autonomy over their writing methods and topics, the groups are heterogeneous, and power is shared among participants. Learning is infused with play and imagination. The authors maintain that students must see a real audience for their writing and a real purpose for their writing beyond tests. Writing in school needs to express the inner voice of the writer just as these after school programs do. An exciting motivational learning environment is essential on both sides of the schoolhouse door.

School’s Out! is the kind of book that pushes us to think more deeply about how we educate children. The escalation of charter schools, home schooling, gifted programs, increased dropout rates, and dual enrollment plans point to the failure of traditional public schooling. Reading the idealism of the researchers and administrators of programs outside of schools counterbalanced by the practical comments of the teachers articulating the limits of possible transfer pushes us to think outside the box. (LL)

"Change My Life Forever": Giving Voice to English-Language Learners
Maureen Barbieri

Maureen Barbieri depicts her teaching, reading, and writing experiences with new Chinese immigrant children in a New York Chinatown middle school. As a staff developer, Barbieri found ways to understand the displaced new immigrant children. She touched their hearts and ignited their memories through reading stories and poems. Through writing, she inspired them to join her in discovering the world, examining their experiences, and expressing their feelings. Barbieri uses three case studies to let us see these children individually grow into readers,
writers, and speakers while developing their English language through daily meaningful reading and writing activities. By showing the children her own life as an avid reader, passionate writer, and lover of poetry, Barbieri encourages them to take their learning of literacy and language beyond the boundary of the classroom. This learning bridges their birth land with their adopted home, their old homes with their new explorations, their lives with their world(s), and their present with their futures. Barbieri uses the children’s writing of different genres at different stages as English language learners to show that all children have stories to tell. English-language learners are able to read and write before they develop their language proficiency. As teachers, we need to know how to guide them to read and write, inspire them to express what is deep in their hearts, and provide them with the tools they need in learning in and outside of classrooms.

This book is for teachers at all levels who have students with diverse language and cultural backgrounds and who want to know how to reach the students who may appear detached from the school and learning. The growth of these new immigrant children detailed through their own work and words reminds us, in Barbieri’s own words, that all students need “beautiful literature; time, space, and support to write about passions; challenging invitations to create their own texts; and the absolute assurance that their voice matters in the world” (p. 114). (DF)

Teaching Multiliteracies Across the Curriculum
Len Unsworth

In a televisual, technological, and information-saturated society, students are expected to read and write texts that are increasingly multimodal and specialized. In order to do this, they must develop a wide range of literacies, including basic verbal literacies, visual literacies, subject/genre-specific literacies, cyberliteracies, and critical literacies. Teaching Multiliteracies provides theoretical frameworks and detailed practical examples for meeting such a challenge.

The first chapter describes the changing dimensions of school literacies and introduces sociocultural, semiotic, and pedagogical perspectives on key issues of literacy learning and teaching. Chapters 2–3 provide cursory and somewhat technical accounts of a wide range of grammatical and discursive resources in verbal and visual communications. Chapters 4–5 illustrate how these grammatical and discursive resources are used to construe disciplinary knowledge in curriculum subject areas (e.g., science, history) and to construct meaning in children’s literature. The last three chapters show how explicit knowledge of the meaning-making verbal and visual grammars informs the practical work of developing and implementing teaching/learning activities in different curriculum subject areas (e.g., English, science) and in classrooms ranging from early childhood to upper elementary and middle grades.

The central thesis of this book is that the teaching and learning of multiliteracies entails a functional grammar (or metalanguage) that explicates the relationship between text and context. Drawing upon systemic functional linguistics and associated genre-based literacy pedagogy, Unsworth argues that in order to develop multiliteracies, students must understand and appreciate the distinctively different meaning-making verbal and visual resources available for constructing multimodal texts that are appropriate to particular contexts of culture and situation. Underpinning this argument is the belief that language and other semiotic systems are intimately involved in the manner in which humans negotiate, construct, and organize their experiences. There has been considerable debate in recent years among literacy scholars over explicit versus implicit learning and visible versus invisible pedagogies. This book is a timely and valuable contribution to this debate. In arguing for the need to develop a metalanguage about multiliteracies, Unsworth not only describes the kind of verbal and visual grammatical knowledge needed but provides powerful instructional frameworks and concrete examples to illustrate how such knowledge can be useful in everyday teaching and learning practices. Practitioners will find this book informative, refreshing, and relevant, although they may at times be frustrated with the somewhat technical nature of such a grammar. For those interested in researching multiliteracies, this book provides a valuable introduction to a viable conceptual and analytical framework not widely known in the United States. (ZF)

Author Biographies

Zhihui Fang, Danling Fu, and Linda Leonard Lamme are professors of literacy and language education at the University of Florida where they teach and conduct research in the areas of reading, writing, and children's literature.