

The author has counted the various kinds of "literacies" used by educational scholars as titles on papers indexed in the ERIC database 1980-1994. The resulting 197 different literacies are listed and divided into five categories: literacy on a topic (computer literacy), literacy among certain people (prison literacy), literacy for a certain purpose (functional literacy), the ability to handle materials in a certain format in literate ways (Braille literacy) and levels of literacy (basic literacy).

DIANNE G. KANAWATI HAS BEEN FASCINATED WITH THE ECCENTRIC NATURE OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR SINCE SHE TRIED EXPLAINING IT TO THAI COLLEGE STUDENTS IN HER PEACE CORPS DAYS. IN RECENT DECADES, SHE HAS TAUGHT ENGLISH AT THE SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY LEVELS. THIS ARTICLE BEGAN AS A VAGRANT CURIOSITY WHILE RESEARCHING HER DISSERTATION ON CULTURAL, FUNCTIONAL, AND CRITICAL LITERACIES AS CONSTRUCTS FOR APPROACHES TO GENERAL EDUCATION. DR. KANAWATI RECEIVED HER ED.D. IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA LAST SUMMER.

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## how CAN I BE LITERATE: COUNTING THE WAYS

To borrow a wonderful opening line, literacy stock has been bullish lately.<sup>1</sup> Not only is literacy a hot topic of discussion and publication, suddenly there seem to be just so many more ways of *being* literate — and, presumably, more ways of being illiterate as well. How did this plethora of literacies come about?

Part of the *literacy* phenomenon is due to the nature of the word *literacy*. It has, and always has had, two distinct meanings: one is the familiar "able to read and write" definition; the second is "command of a body of knowledge."<sup>2</sup> The use of literacy in this second sense has expanded exponentially in recent years and accounts for many of the *literacies* in circulation.

Besides the nature of the word *literacy*, the multiplication of *literacies* is also due to the nature of the English language. English has an exceptionally expansive and creative grammar which allows, even encourages, insouciant originality. English delights in new words (fax) and familiar words used in new ways (surf the net) or combined in new ways (liftoff, microchip). And, unlike many languages, English allows a variety of words to function as adjectives.

Adjectives function as adjectives, of course (sweet talk). Then there are the verb forms, including the -ing participle (running water) and the -ed or equivalent past participle (iced tea, forgotten melodies). Then there are the nouns. When placed in front of another noun, nouns can function as adjectives of composition (cotton shirt) or purpose (cake knife). So long as the correct order is maintained — which native speakers do quite intuitively — English allows adjectival constructions to indulge in prolonged concatenation without straining comprehension in the least. Consider, for example, a cheap little green plastic toy sports car.

So much flexibility can create a problem, however; the meaning is not always clear. Using a familiar example, a racing horse may be a horse *for* racing or a horse *that* is racing. When speaking, a shift in inflection pattern signals the distinction, but an author

### ENDNOTES

1 VENEZKY, RICHARD L. 1993. "IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF LITERACY." *EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER* 22:3, 34.

2 KINTGEN, E.R. 1988. "LITERACY LITERACY." *VISIBLE LANGUAGE* 22:2/3, 149.

must consciously compensate in other ways to avoid ambiguity. Nouns functioning adjectivally can also confuse. Would an iron cutter be made *of* iron or *for* cutting iron? Either interpretation is possible.

The nature of the word *literacy* combined with the nature of English, between them, have generated a great number of ways in which a person can be literate. Examining titles in the ERIC database for 1980–94, inclusive, indicates that educators felt moved to discuss almost two hundred different kinds of literacy during those fifteen years; that is, two hundred different kinds of modified literacy as opposed to plain, unmodified literacy. The modified literacies fall into five distinct and usually distinguishable groups.

#### GROUP 1.

The first group is Kintgen's "command of a body of knowledge": i.e., literacy about a specific topic. The adjectival construct may be in the form of a noun (Computer Literacy) or an adjective (Political Literacy). These may be distinguished by the transformation "literacy on the topic of [x]," where x is the modifying noun (e.g., Energy Literacy, literacy on the topic of energy) or the noun form of the modifying adjective (e.g., Religious Literacy, literacy on the topic of religion).

#### GROUP 2.

The second group includes literacy among a population sub-group. Examples include Adolescent Literacy, Adult Literacy and Workplace Literacy. These may be distinguished by the transformation "literacy among [x/s]" where x is a class of people, or "literacy among people in [x/s]," where x is a place or condition. Thus, Immigrant Literacy deals with literacy among immigrants, and Prison Literacy is literacy among people in prisons. ESL (English as a Second Language) literacy belongs in Group 2; ESL serves as shorthand for "non-native speakers of English," the target population.

#### GROUP 3.

A third group includes different purposes of literacy, distinguished by the transformation "literacy for [x] purposes." Functional Literacy is literacy for functional purposes, and Emancipatory Literacy is literacy for emancipatory purposes.

#### GROUP 4.

A fourth group includes the ability to deal in literate ways with ideas communicated in a particular format or through a particular medium, such as Visual Literacy and Braille Literacy. These may be distinguished by the transformation "literacy involving material delivered (in [x] form) or (through the medium of [x])." Thus, Prose Literacy is literacy involving material in prose (form), and Television Literacy is literacy involving material delivered through the medium of television.

#### GROUP 5.

A fifth group is concerned with different stages or levels of literacy itself. Early, emergent, crude and mature are examples of this category, which may be distinguished by the transformation "literacy which is at the [x] stage or level." Life-Long Literacy and Developing Literacy are special cases which subsume several levels.

So long as a newly encountered literacy can be instinctively placed in one of the five categories, it presents no particular problem. The literate reader can field newly encountered modified literacies with aplomb, so long as they intuitively correspond to one of the five groups. Literacy Literacy is a piece of cake — most of the time.

However, when the correct category is ambiguous or unidentifiable, confusion ensues. Whole Literacy, Full Literacy, New Literacy, Holistic and High Literacy are among those which mean something specific to the persons who coined them but need to be explained to everyone else.

Another kind of ambiguity can be found in such examples as Alphabetic Literacy. Should that be placed in group 1, literacy on the topic of alphabets? Or in Group 4, literacy involving material in alphabetic form? Out of context it may be impossible to know. Does Essayist Literacy belong to Group 2, literacy among essayists? Probably

not. Probably it ought to be placed in Group 3, literacy for essayist purposes. Even from the abstract included in the ERIC database the meaning of some literacies was unclear, and the same literacy is sometimes used differently by different scholars.

Identifying the five groups helps to explain why there are so many similar literacies. The distinctions among them are sometimes real and valuable, albeit subtle. For example, Science Literacy belongs in Group 1, literacy on the topic of science; Scientific Literacy belongs in Group 3, literacy for scientific purposes. Spanish Literacy is Group 4, literacy involving materials in Spanish (form), but Hispanic Literacy is Group 2, literacy among Hispanics.

Identifying the five groups also explains the penchant for doubly- or even triply-modified literacies. Sub-subgroups can be created using Group 2 + Group 2; for example, Black urban literacy or Adult ESL literacy. Group 2 + Group 4 yields Southern Sudan Local Languages Literacy. Other combinations are obviously possible.

Some literacies are used only once, by the author who coined them; others become part of the popular lexicon. Educators over the last fifteen years have spoken and/or written about no fewer than 197 different kinds of literacy; no fewer than 197 and quite possibly more. Someone else might have conceptualized the categories somewhat differently. I did not, for example, attempt to include examples of what seemed to be ordinary, unmodified literacy in a place (national literacy) or modified by adjectives denoting quality (accelerated literacy, contextual literacy, alternative literacy). Redundant literacies have been grouped together with the most common usage first. Differences among items in some groups — e.g., *Technological Literacy*, *Technical Literacy* and *Technologic Literacy* — if any, are obscure. Also uncertain is whether or not literacies become altered when compounded, as in *Scientific and Technological Literacy*. Some compounds are hyphenated (Visual-Verbal Literacy) rather than compounded with "and"; these are presumably merged into something approaching transcendental unity, yet not quite homogeneity.

The five groups are almost exhaustive, but a few rogue literacies just do not fit anywhere. Library Literacy, for example, is not what librarians strive to master; instead, it turns out to be Adult Literacy programs which are based in libraries. Lay Literacy is defined as the assumptions about literacy shared by members of a literate society. Sometimes modification has simply gone too far; consider, for example, African Oral Tradition Literacy or Convenience Store Workplace Literacy. The vast majority of literacies, however, sort themselves nicely into the five groups.

An interesting side effect of the many modified literacies is that what I have called "ordinary, unmodified" literacy — the ability to read and write — is now often modi-

fied, as it has been here, to distinguish it from the various upstart literacies. Literacy in its "ordinary, unmodified" sense is variously referred to as Conventional Literacy, Traditional Literacy, Reading and Writing Literacy or Book Literacy. Book Literacy has presumably arisen as a tongue-in-cheek contrast to Computer Literacy.

## LISTING THE LITERACIES — COUNTING THE WAYS

The list of 197 literacies which follows may be useful as a reference list. One-hundred ninety-seven seems already more than enough literacies to worry about and, hopefully, anyone who feels compelled to write about literacy, any literacy, can find a term already on the list that will serve the purpose. For easy reference, the literacies are listed in the five groups described above; ambiguities are noted and a few explanatory notes thrown in.

### GROUP 1: COMMAND OF A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.

- ACADEMIC LITERACY [or Group 3]:
  - Subject-specific literacy
  - Content-area literacy
  - Content literacy
- ALPHABET LITERACY
- ART LITERACY
- ASSESSMENT LITERACY
- AUTHORSHIP LITERACY
- AGRICULTURAL LITERACY
- BIOLOGICAL LITERACY:
  - Life-science literacy
- CASH-CULTURE LITERACY
- CHRISTIAN LITERACY
- CHEMICAL LITERACY
- CITIZENSHIP LITERACY
- CIVIC LITERACY [or Group 3]
- CONSTITUTIONAL LITERACY
- COMPUTER LITERACY [or Group 4]:
  - Microcomputer literacy

- Personal computer literacy
- COMPUTER SCIENCE LITERACY
- DEMOGRAPHIC LITERACY [or Group 4]
- DIASPORA LITERACY
- DISCIPLINE LITERACY
- DRAMATIC LITERACY
  - Theater literacy
- ECONOMIC LITERACY
- ECONOMIC NEWS LITERACY
- EDUCATIONAL LITERACY [or Group 3]
- ENERGY LITERACY
- ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY
  - Ecological literacy
- ETHNIC LITERACY [or Group 2]
- GEOGRAPHIC LITERACY [or Group 4]
  - Geography literacy
- GEOLOGICAL LITERACY
- HISTORICAL LITERACY
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY LITERACY
- LEGAL LITERACY
- LEGISLATIVE LITERACY
- LITERACY LITERACY
- MAP LITERACY
  - Cartographic literacy [or Group 4]
- MATHEMATICAL LITERACY [or Group 4]
- MEASUREMENT LITERACY
- MEDIEVAL LITERACY [or Group 2]
- MORAL LITERACY [or Group 3]
- MULTI-CULTURAL LITERACY [or Group 3]
- MUSIC LITERACY
  - Rhythm literacy
- POLITICAL LITERACY [or Group 3]
- PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERACY
- QUANTITATIVE LITERACY
- RELIGIOUS LITERACY
- RISK LITERACY
- ROBOTICS LITERACY
  - Robotics and automation literacy
- SCIENCE LITERACY
  - New Science literacy
- SOMATIC LITERACY

- STATISTICAL LITERACY [or Group 4]
- SYSTEM LITERACY
- TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY [or Group 3]
  - Technology literacy
  - Technologic literacy
  - Technical literacy
- WATER LITERACY
- WHOLE LANGUAGE LITERACY

GROUP 2. LITERACY AMONG A POPULATION SUB-GROUP.

- AMERICAN LITERACY
- ADOLESCENT LITERACY
  - Youth literacy
  - Young adult literacy
- ADULT LITERACY
- AMISH LITERACY
- BLACK LITERACY
- COMMUNITY LITERACY
- DEAF LITERACY
- EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY
  - Nursery literacy
  - Prekindergarten literacy
  - Preschool literacy
  - Kindergarten literacy
- ELEMENTARY LITERACY [or Group 5]
  - Third-grade literacy
- ESL/ESOL LITERACY
- ETHNIC LITERACY [or Group 1]
- FAMILY LITERACY
  - Home literacy
  - Intergenerational literacy
- HAITIAN CREOLE LITERACY
- HISPANIC LITERACY
- MIDDLE-GRADES LITERACY
- INTERCULTURAL LITERACY
- MALE/FEMALE LITERACY
- MATURE LITERACY [or Group 5]
- MEDIEVAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- MICMAC LITERACY

- NATIVE LITERACY
- POPULAR LITERACY
- PRISON LITERACY
- RURAL LITERACY
- SCHOOL LITERACY [or Group 3]
  - Schooled literacy [or Group 5]
- SENIOR LITERACY
- SOCIETAL LITERACY
- TEACHER LITERACY [computer literacy among teachers]
- URBAN LITERACY
- WOMEN'S LITERACY
- WORKPLACE LITERACY
  - Workforce literacy
  - Worksite literacy
  - Worker literacy
- WORLD LITERACY
  - Global literacy
  - Universal literacy

GROUP 3. LITERACY FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES.

- ACADEMIC LITERACY [or Group 1]
- CIVIC LITERACY [or Group 1]
- COMMERCIAL LITERACY
- COMPETITIVE LITERACY
- COMPUTING LITERACY
- COOPERATIVE LITERACY [using cooperative learning to increase literacy and numeracy skills]
- CRITICAL LITERACY
- CULTURAL LITERACY
- CROSS-CULTURAL LITERACY
- EDUCATIONAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- EMANCIPATORY LITERACY
  - Freirean literacy
  - Liberatory literacy
- ESSAYIST LITERACY
- FUNCTIONAL LITERACY
  - Practical literacy
  - Daily-living literacy
- JOB LITERACY

- Vocational literacy
- Occupational literacy
- MORAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- MULTI-CULTURAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- OFFICE LITERACY [includes traditional, cultural and computer literacies]
- ORGANIZATIONAL LITERACY
- PARTICIPATORY LITERACY
- PERSONAL LITERACY
- POLITICAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- PROGRAMMING LITERACY
- SCHOOL LITERACY [or Group 2]
- SCIENTIFIC LITERACY
  - Scientific and Quantitative literacy
- SURVIVAL LITERACY
- TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY [or Group 1]

GROUP 4. THE ABILITY TO DEAL IN LITERATE WAYS WITH IDEAS COMMUNICATED IN A PARTICULAR FORMAT OR THROUGH A PARTICULAR MEDIUM.

- AESTHETIC LITERACY
- ALPHABETIC LITERACY
- BRAILLE LITERACY
- CARTOGRAPHIC LITERACY [or Group 1]
- CHINESE CHARACTER LITERACY
- COMPUTER LITERACY [or Group 1]
- DOCUMENT LITERACY
- ELECTRONIC LITERACY [computer + CD-ROM interactive]
- ENGLISH LITERACY
- FILM LITERACY
- GEOGRAPHIC LITERACY [or Group 1]
- GRAPHIC LITERACY
- HYPERTEXT LITERACY
- SECOND-LANGUAGE LITERACY
- INDIAN-LANGUAGE LITERACY
- INFORMATION LITERACY
  - Information media literacy
- LANGUAGE LITERACY
- MATHEMATICAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- MEDIA LITERACY

- MOTHER TONGUE LITERACY
  - First-language literacy
  - Native-language literacy
- MULTI-LITERACY [includes reading/writing/mathematics/computer]
- MUSICAL LITERACY
- NEW LITERACY [combines traditional and technological media]
- NEWSPAPER LITERACY
- ORAL LITERACY [includes rhetoric and speech-making]
- PICTORIAL LITERACY
- PRINT LITERACY
  - Text-based literacy
- PROSE LITERACY
- READING LITERACY
- SPANISH LITERACY
- STATISTICAL LITERACY [or Group 1]
- TELEVISION LITERACY
- VERBAL LITERACY
- VERNACULAR LITERACY
- VISUAL LITERACY
- VISUAL-VERBAL LITERACY
- WRITTEN LITERACY
  - Writing literacy

GROUP 5. DIFFERENT STAGES OR LEVELS OF LITERACY.

- BASIC LITERACY
- COMMON LITERACY
- CRUDE LITERACY
- DEVELOPING LITERACY
- EARLY LITERACY
- ELEMENTARY LITERACY [or Group 2]
- EMERGENT/EMERGING LITERACY
- FULL LITERACY
- HIGH LITERACY
  - Higher literacy
  - Low literacy
- HOLISTIC LITERACY
- INITIAL LITERACY
- LIFE-LONG LITERACY
  - Life-span literacy

- Lifetime literacy
- MATURE LITERACY [or Group 2]
- SCHOOLED LITERACY [or Group 2]
- POST-LITERACY
  - Pre-literacy
- POSTMODERN LITERACY
- WHOLE LITERACY

A final note: Many of these 197 literacies were used only once or by only one person, thereafter to fall into eternal obscurity. For those who feel they must coin a new literacy of their own, I offer a bit of advice.

When a new literacy construct appears, several labels may vie for acceptance at first. For example, Workplace Literacy, Workforce Literacy and Worker Literacy all appeared at about the same time, but Workplace Literacy gained popular acceptance and the other two forms became increasingly rare. This is a typical pattern. The form which survives is the one which has a conference, then a newsletter, then state or federal funding — all in its name.

So for those who feel the need to create an original literacy, your literacy may still prevail where others have failed: Present a report, hold a conference, edit a publication, coordinate a project. While we are counting the ways to be literate, we can always count one more.

In the stylistic category  
we have this man at his word-machine,  
this displaced person of juxtapositions  
processing art in an unusual stretch  
of Delta sea-miles.

The property of words strung together.  
defining and redefining a lifetime, sweet seasons  
gone, or rather they may still depict.  
Symbols and transformations, in  
other words,  
the strange beauty  
of being.

*p*UNS, PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND *p*OSTMODERNISM

Over the last few decades, puns have become increasingly common in commercial texts ranging from print advertising ("Campbell's has something that will bowl you over") to T-shirts ("The Puck Stops Here.") The trend is surprising both because the pun is an intricate as well as a literary device and because advertisers usually avoid the risks of using humor as a selling strategy. The appeal of the pun appears to be its stylishness, which provided it with a place in the pop art movement and the culture of the 1960s, and its simultaneity, which has made it the print medium's competitor of the attention-grabbing television commercial. Recent studies argue that the word play of T-shirts and bumper stickers represents a non-establishment, anti-elitist voice. But in this essay the author suggests that puns used by both corporate advertisers and car owners alike reflect a commercial influence on the language of public texts all across the culture, and a mingling of business and art that is characteristic of postmodernism.

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They are everywhere.  
In print ads — for soup,  
"Campbell's has something that will bowl  
you over,"  
— for the Toyota Camry,  
"A styling so classic, in fact, over two million  
people have been moved by it,"  
— for Chinese stir-fry,  
"Create a wok of art in 8 minutes."  
As names of businesses — the restaurant called  
"The Grill from Ipanema."  
On shopping bags — for a department store, in December,  
"We have the gift for giving."  
Even on the cover of the 1995 federal tax form packet:  
"Get the credit you deserve."  
Bumper stickers —  
"Get a Life. Be a Christian."  
Billboards —  
"Children should be seen and not hurt."  
Trucks — on the side of the exterminator's,  
"The Bug Stops Here."  
T-shirts — for a hockey team,  
"The Puck Stops Here."  
Academic offerings —  
"The Cyberpowers That Be,"  
at New York University.  
Book titles — about education and community service,  
*Service Matters*, and its statistical sequel,  
*Service Counts*.  
Magazine headings and headlines — from one issue of  
*Psychology Today*:  
"The FDA opens its mind"  
(about psychedelic drugs),  
"Model existence"  
(fashion models);  
and puns on syntax rather than word meaning, from the same issue,  
"Like mommy, like baby,"