

EDF4123

LITERACY ACROSS THE YEARS

ASSESSMENT TASK 1

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As argued by many theorists, literacy is a socially situated practice. Thus, we can confirm that every human interaction with a text in presence or absence of a person is a literacy event and its analysis through a different lens is necessary for understanding their significance contextually in school as well as personal lives. This essay tries to make that connection.

In the first section, this essay illustrates the context of the social situation and then discusses the relevance of the event for observation as literacy practice in our daily lives. This is followed by an investigation of the situation from the operational, cultural and critical perspective of Green's 3D Model. In the last section, based on the ideas discussed, implications for practice are formulated.

The social event is a conversation between me and a personal trainer (PT) at a gym. This gym offers individual as well as group training lessons and has a common area for people to work out on their own. I have recently decided to opt for personal training after years of exercising in groups or by myself to focus on specific aspects of my body that I need to work on. I am seeking advice from Lara about the best ways of staying fit through efficient and effective workouts that will help improve my overall health and fitness levels. Lara has been a PT for almost five years with about two years of experience as a physiotherapist.

Transcription of the social event:

Lara is the gym trainer, Ron is my workout partner and I am mentioned as 'Me'.

Before the personal training session-

Lara: Welcome to our gym. I am glad that you were able to come over to discuss your training goals before your personal training (PT) session. Yesterday my colleague made you do some basic cardio to test your stamina, so that before we actually begin, I am able to plan our sessions according to your strengths and needs. According to what he has noted here, you seem to be in a pretty good shape, which means that this is not your first time working out? Am I right? Tell me what you have been up to.

Me: I actually used to be a gym rat couple of years ago when I badly wanted to lose weight and I actually did. But being a 'workout – aholic' requires you to have lots of

time in life. I cannot manage to commit to spend two hours a day at the gym anymore, which is why I would like to see how HIIT (High intensity interval training) works out for me.

Ron: I was the one who actually suggested this to her because I have done it in the past.

Lara: Well, I was going to suggest something that involves HIIT. As far as I know, the overall goal you have mentioned in this form here is to lose weight and build strength right. Crossfit is able to do just that. I understand that HIIT has become a popular trend right now but such strenuous workouts include some not-so-safe exercises for those who are not physically fit. Positional changes can lead to dizziness or blood pooling in the lower extremities. Plus, doing too much too soon can cause excessive muscle soreness and, in extreme cases, rhabdomyolysis, which is basically the breakdown of muscle fibres that enter the bloodstream and poison the kidneys. I am not trying to scare you here but I want you to look at this whole weight loss thing from a holistic perspective. We are looking at a lifestyle change here.

Me: I actually do understand what you are saying there. The reason why I had to work out so often in the past is because I hadn't exactly focused on important things like my diet, improving body posture or strength. I used to eat like crazy and then go to the gym because I felt guilty of eating so much. If I did not, I would put on weight in a matter of just two days.

Me to Ron: I am so jealous of people like you who can eat how much ever they want and never put on weight.

Ron: Sorry that I have a high metabolism rate (in a sarcastic tone). I really do feel blessed sometimes though to have such awesome genes.

Lara: See, that is another misconception. Yes, it is genetic but it can also be built. Research and I myself have seen that people who work on building muscles over a period of time, their metabolism rate has increased. In my crossfit workouts here, you do some strength training exercises in the beginning that lead to the WOD (workout of the day). It includes some lifting, drop sets, resistance training, isolation exercises, forced reps where I will spot you. Isolation exercises are where..

Me: Yes, yes. So, this guy here (gesturing at Ron) is a gym junkie and he has tried to explain all these terminologies to me.

Lara: That's great! You will also experience them first hand during our sessions. Next, when it comes to the WOD, my personal favourite is AMRAPs, which is when you do as many reps as possible within a set time frame. Other than that, HIIT and circuit training is also part of this. The philosophy behind this kind of a routine is for your body to reach that state of extreme exhaustion while weight training and then do these challenging reps to increase overall stamina. This is also the time when your body burns fat the most because it tries to look for other sources of energy apart from the little snack you had before you came in, which is probably already used up. The stronger you get, the better you will perform.

Me: All of this is exactly what I am looking for! I cannot wait for us to start. Are we going to begin right away? I would like to warm up a little before we do.

Lara: Do not worry. It is part of your one hour PT session. I am a firm believer in warming up before training. Especially when we are working on our muscles.

Me: It's just that once I did some weight training without warming up and I immediately got muscle cramps. It was very painful! I am glad our thinking matches.

Lara: I am glad too. We will talk more during and after the workout. Let's start for now.

During the personal training session-

Lara: So, the warm-up for today is going to last for around 10 minutes.

Lara (while showing me how it is done): You have thirty seconds of work and twenty seconds of rest in between. We are going to use the kettle bell for all these movements. First is single arm kettle bell (KB) swing on both sides. You can start with the lightest one here. Then comes KB windmill. Be very careful with this one! We have had people dropping them on their heads. After this is carioca. Go across using one side and then come back using the other one. Next is a goblet squat. Make sure you go deep down. Then comes a KB swing. You need to strongly thrust those hips forward using your glutes. Your arms do not do any work. Lastly, figure eight in both directions. Stay very low for this one as well.

Me (while doing the warm-up): Cannot believe that this is just the warm-up. I already feel tired.

Lara: You need to eat properly before coming in. Otherwise it is going to affect your workout. You will have no energy to do these exercises and reach your potential.

Me: Okay. I prefer to not go on restricted calorie diets generally as they make me feel weak. Happy that I get to eat under your watch.

Lara: Eat in proportion. That is my only mantra. Never overeat.

Me: Makes sense. So, I need to look for something that will give me instant energy. Will boiled eggs work?

Lara: Definitely! Just make sure that you eat them at least 45 minutes before you get here or else you are going to feel pukish.

After warm-up-

Lara: Now, we move to the strength prep section of the workout. We are trying to specifically work on your glutes, hamstrings and quads here.

Me: Okay. Let me grab some water first.

Lara: Sure! I am going to just show them to you while you hydrate yourself. Start with crab walks. 15 each way. Then you do banded good mornings, again 15 each side and then terminal knee extensions.

Me: Oh! I hate these banded things. It is not at all a good morning with these.

Lara: Haha! I am sorry but you will thank me one day. Just don't hate me.

Me: Naah! I know. I know it is strange but complaining helps me cope.

After the strength prep-

Lara: I am going to introduce you to a Prisoner squat. Let me just grab this barbell for you. This is a lighter one we use when we are working on technique. You need to really activate those traps and lats okay. After we get that right, we move on to heavier

ones and then add plates to it.

Me: Oh! thank god you have lighter ones. I anyway do not want to lift extremely heavy weights. I am worried I might become too muscular and then look manly.

Lara: Well, the way you look is a matter of perspective but women's bodies do not produce as much testosterone as men do. Unless you take testosterone supplements, you are not going to develop huge guns.

Me: I try not to think about it that way but...

Lara: So, you lift the barbell up, place it carefully on your shoulder bones and squat. Keep your knees wide open, sit on the box and use your glutes to get up. Do not put pressure on your knees. Be very careful. Yes, that's it (while I am doing it). Over time, the height of the box will go down. For now, take 6-8 sets and build to 1RM.

Me: It is deceiving. Seems so easy when I look at you do it.

Lara: I have been doing this for years now but in the beginning, it was quite hard for me as well.

Me: I will get there one day I guess.

Lara: Yes! Just be persistent and you will get there. After a while, it is not even about the types of exercises. It is all about you pushing yourself in those moments when you just want to give up. Of course, I am not saying that you need to train like crazy every single day. Your body needs the rest. Just be consistent.

Me: I have commitment issues. Hope I am able to overcome that.

Lara: I will try to motivate you as much as possible. Anyway, lastly, we have our WOD. It is an EMOM of 20 minutes, wherein, you do one exercise for one minute for 20 minutes. There are five exercises here – 2 rope climbs, 5 handstand push-ups, 12 hollow rocks, 15 goblet squats and farmers carry or burpees. Earlier you finish the exercise in that one minute, more time you will have for rest. Do you have any questions?

Me: Nothing for now. I will just ask along the way.

Affordances of its suitability as a literacy event:

The scenario involves a range of semiotics instead of just reading and writing such as talking, listening, thinking, doing/ playing, observing, creating. In addition, conveying meaning was imperative, which mainly involved use of oral language skills using technical vocabulary to specifically explain concepts. The conversations between me and the personal trainer required me to actively construct knowledge shared in the form of words and actions.

According to Moffet (1981, cited in Green, 2012, p.3), literacy is tied hierarchically and developmentally to what he asserts are the more significant and problematic levels of verbalisation and conceptualisation, wherein, thinking and speaking are regarded to be more important in comparison to spelling, punctuation and grammar. A child is expected to recognise and understand speech patterns even before he or she is introduced to written texts. Therefore, it is more realistic to view literacy in relation to verbal communication having an impact on thinking and comprehension.

Next, this social situation revolves around my personal weight loss journey over the past few years. I am trying to move from a very narrow view of physical fitness to a place where I am mentally at peace with the way my body is. Hence, it can be associated with Barton & Hamilton's contention of a person's practices located in their own history of literacy (p.13). Through the texts I was exposed to, my knowledge base with respect to being healthy was only centred at losing weight but that did not equal to better health. In this life history approach, individuals' views are positively or negatively affected by using literacy as it transforms them along with the changing circumstances and the ever-changing texts they are exposed to (Barton & Hamilton, 1999). In many ways, my social practices were as well as are mediated by popular cultural texts from the internet, magazines, books, etc. As a result, texts are a crucial part of literacy events and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used (Barton & Hamilton, 1999, p.9).

Connection to Green's 3D Model:

Operational dimension-

Firstly, Lara had to maintain a professional rapport in a work context along with making

me feel comfortable and trust her with achieving my fitness goals. Hence, the words used and the tone of language had to be a mixture of formal and interpersonal dialogue. Furthermore, she needed to be bodily-operationally trained or literate to show exercise movements in the exact manner they are supposed to be done in order to avoid injuries. Words were cautiously selected to explain complex functions of the body to me, someone who does not share the same level of expertise as her.

Secondly, usage of the varieties of language is highly evident in the PT's explanations of the issues associated with HIIT (one instance), specifically in terms of specialist language. Specialist varieties of language, whether academic or not, often have both spoken forms and written ones (Gee, 2004). Hence, even though it was verbal, use of certain words ascertain the fact that she was using specialist language. They differ from basic vernacular varieties at the vocabulary and discourse level (Gee, 2004). As part of this, the internal structure of sentences shifted as soon as the conversation moved to a discussion of particular topics. For example, while explaining the severe consequences of strenuous workouts, words like 'can lead to' are used instead of 'can happen' and 'breakdown' is a safer word than collapsing for chemical or physical decomposition of muscles. Inversely, noun forms of words are transformed to verb forms for 'activate' and 'extend' motions instead of 'activation' and 'extension' while giving direct instructions.

Cultural dimension-

In the fitness community, gluteal muscles, which is a set of three muscles that make up the buttocks are termed as glutes. Also, individual muscles of the back and shoulder – the trapezius and latissimus dorsi (scientific names) – are your traps and lats respectively. Having being immersed in health and fitness for years now, I was able to understand the meaning of these common terminologies (content) used in this context. Hence, in Green's (2012, p.5) words, in order to become an active participant in the community, I had to learn the language and become competent with using it as a source for meaning and follow instructions when asked to use my glutes, which meant activating my gluteal muscles to squat. However, it took a while for me to not only get used to the intensity of CrossFit exercises, but also the acronyms, origin of certain names and how these were embedded in their positional aspects.

From its early days, CrossFit is sought to create workouts that simulate the feelings athletes and fighters feel during real competition (AIM Fitness network, 2012). Actual athletes and fighters have confirmed this notion by mentioning that the WODs are similar to the feeling of being in a fight (AIM Fitness network, 2012). At the same time, CrossFit also utilises physical motions from our contemporary daily lives as well as from historic times and creates challenging routines (CrossFit, Inc., 2017). Farmers carry is an exercise wherein the person holds extremely heavy weights in his or her hand and they walk. The origination of this name is related to an actual farmer's daily routine of carrying heavy material on his farm while performing his daily tasks. Prisoner squats are also appropriately named for its visual similarities to a prisoner being arrested.

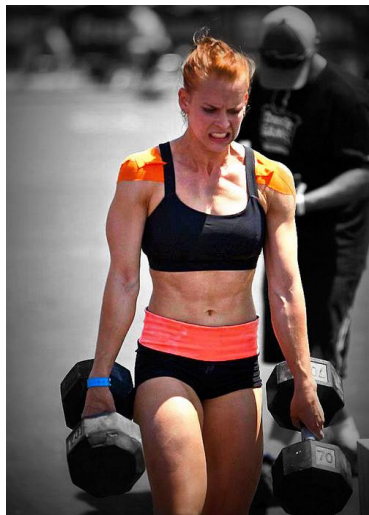


Fig. 1.1. Farmers carry

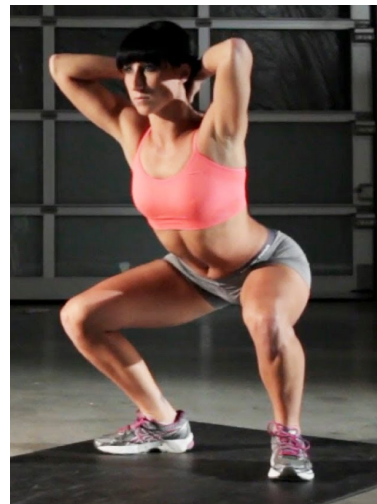


Fig. 1.2. Prisoner squats (unknown)

(Artist name unknown (2016))

In the aforementioned cases, through the experiences of training similar to an athlete and understanding the origin of the postural mechanisms of the physical activity, there is a representation of intermediary meaning systems significant in themselves. These are interrelated to the socialisation and learning processes (Green, 2012, p.6).

An overlap of cultural and operational dimensions is observed when terms like 'banded goodmornings' were created to make an exercise that is hated because of its difficulty, less cruel. Also, when instructions were directed, particularly when I was asked to ensure my knees were not engaged while doing the lift.

Critical-

The social situation includes instances such as discussion of the common misconception about metabolism, following specific eating habits, creating a balance and not overexerting. Discourse or people's popular opinion posits that you can have a good metabolism rate only if it is in your genes, you need to starve in order to lose weight and pushing your capabilities can only lead to achieving fitness goals. Here, Green's critical literacy dimension asks us to use knowledge to critically deconstruct these common beliefs. Thus, the PTs views challenged my personal notions and helped me look at them from another perspective. Her reasoning was supported by scientific research as well.

Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) stress the impact of multi-modal forms of literacy going unnoticed. One such mode is physically embodied texts. According to popular culture, my mind is wired to look a certain way or meet specific beauty standards of the society, that is, not look too muscular because then I might not look feminine enough. However, the PTs statement of assurance related to the quality of physical appearance varying based on different perceptions made me reflect on the impact of existing bodily texts in the media that create my personal identity.

The three dimensions operate together to provide an integrated view of literacies as social practices (Green, 2012, p.4). Without the correct usage of language, none of the cultural terms would be understood. Names given to exercises would be meaningless without its cultural significance and the critical aspect would not exist without language and cultural learning.

Implications for teaching practice:

School writing is highly circumscribed as a consequence of being produced in the school setting (Applebee, 1984; Bennett, 1983). In the exact same sense, gym jargon is produced in a gym setting, scientific terms are created in science laboratories, hence, circumscribed in these settings. In relation to the pedagogical application of the three dimensions, because every text originates from its cultural roots and later transforms into a text with linguistic value and opinion, according to Green (2012, p.28), working effectively and building competency within a subject area first is crucial before entering the operational or critical dimensions. Hence, literacy education should

be first viewed as a cultural instead of an instructional process with words directing meaning-making and identity creation. I would not have deeply learnt the physicality and then the effects of the movements on my body without performing the prisoner squat, carioca or windmill first. As an implication for literacy education, teachers need to engage students in experiential learning and make it a cultural process for deep learning instead of an instructional process (Gee, 2004).

Lankshear (1994) refers to two approaches that have been referred to in his paper – an activity meant to analyse a text by giving two different types of supporting material to the readers. One approach informs the reader in position of the factual reality of the incident by means of information covering a wide range. Conversely, the other approach (method for critical literacy) uses similar information but only after critical examination of the texts linguistically. The latter conveys the need to scrutinize the language to decipher or decode the hidden meaning with the aid of supporting broadly expanding information. Operational, cultural and critical dimensions of the 3D model are at the core of pedagogical practice when forming varied opinions based on available texts through interpretation of language and critical reflection.

Souto- Manning (2009) suggests to focus on interrogating multiple viewpoints, making difference visible, while examining competitive narratives. Meaning and purpose of being fit is different for different people. At a school age, girls in particular are bound to get exposed to multimodal texts that contribute to their identity creation. They either love their bodies if they look like the models in teenage magazines or fall prey to an entire lifetime of self-infliction because their body types are just different. They should be able to critically challenge the meaning of these embodied texts, move away from the author's intended message and use knowledge acquired to further explore its logical reasons in other texts.

The dialogue between me, Ron and Lara helped me look at my fitness goals from a different perspective. I was exposed to different opinions in a social context, therefore, meaning was constructed taking into consideration diverse interpretations of metabolism being associated with genetics or developed through strength training. Collaborative reasoning is a comprehension instruction approach developed to reasonably argue with peers about a shared text (Palincsar, 2003). Students take a

position for or against the text and formulate arguments to support their contentions. Similarly, reciprocal teaching engages teachers and students in a dialogue, the purpose of which is to jointly construct the meaning of the text (Palincsar, 2003). Verbalisation of opinions and ideas enabled me to further explore discursive practices of the fitness community after the social interaction and move towards a holistic approach to being healthy.

In conclusion, Green's 3D Model is necessary for effective literacy education that is relevant to students' lives outside school contexts. My social situation is reflective of operational dimension which deals with the technical aspects of the language used while instructing movements, as well as discursive and reflexive features to construct contextual meaning. Children need to be accustomed to subject-specific language before operational and critical intervention, and social dialogues and debates will help challenging opinions of self, others and intended by the text.

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