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# TRAVERSING THE LACUNA TO THE FUTURE

## Three perspectives concerning new literacies

By **Luis Javier Pentón Herrera, Margaret Aker, & Lynn Daniel**

*“If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow.” —John Dewey*

**t**he world has moved stealthily away from our linear past; today, we live in a nonlinear world where the definition of *literacy* is ever evolving and continuously shifting. The dynamics have changed; reading, writing, listening, and learning have become nonlinear activities. The transformation was silent, but the impact will be significant, especially for our students.

The crux of our work is ensuring we are preparing our students for the workplaces of the future. This is no simple task considering that most jobs they will hold have not been created yet. However, the 21st-century skills necessary for the success of our learners are known. In this article, we, as three scholars, reflect on how the instructional shift on new literacies is shaping the research focus and dissertation studies of researchers committed to social and educational equity.

### Supporting indigenous ELs in language and literacy classrooms

**Luis:** Closing the academic achievement gap of minority students and English learners (ELs) in the United States has been a prominent topic in recent years, yet scant studies have addressed immigrant indigenous populations from Latin America within the U.S. classroom context.

As such, in my dissertation, I chose to research a minority group—the Ixil—that was overlooked in the current literature. The Ixil are indigenous peoples from Guatemala who speak Ixil as a first language and may (or may not) speak Spanish as a second language. Immigrant Ixil ELs—as well as other indigenous groups from Latin America—arrive to U.S. schools with specific

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literacy and language needs that remain unvoiced and unaddressed. My study sought to contribute to the current English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) literature by explaining and identifying the needs and language and learning experiences of immigrant Ixil ELs in U.S. classrooms.

Findings explain the social and cultural challenges immigrant indigenous ELs from Latin America face in U.S. classrooms. Furthermore, I present options ESOL educators can use to offer quality education, taking into consideration 21st-century skills needed to succeed today.

### Engaging new literacies in higher education for the workplace of the future

**Margaret:** My study understands educators are the key to 21st-century education reform. For centuries, teachers, including Socrates, realized students are the core of education; therefore, knowing your students is imperative.

Change has engulfed our students; the students in our classrooms today, the millennials and GenZs, learn differently from their predecessors. Millennials enjoy group collaboration and are comfortable with change. The GenZs prefer instruction combined with practical experiences.

In their seminal work, Arthur W. Chickering and Stephen C. Ehrmann identified seven of the best instructional practices: communication, cooperation, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respecting diversity. The seven instructional practices are not only popular with millennials but also are evident in problem-based learning. These instructional practices form the basis of 21st-century skills. To relate to generations in the future, educators should plan student-centered learning, critical thinking, and collaboration. Our students today will be the most educated individuals in history. As teachers, accepting the challenge of 21st-century reform is imperative.

### Using scientifically based motivation strategies to impact students' literacy learning

**Lynn:** I currently teach seventh- and eighth-grade English language arts/reading in an elementary school in Arizona, where more than 70% of my students' home language is not Standard English. Advancements in 21st-century literacy, responsive pedagogy, and adolescent literacy studies inspire my investigation.

My dissertation sought to identify how the use of scientifically based motivation strategies increased performance and academic achievement. My aim was to answer questions about how students' exposure to research-based motivation strategies impacts students' literacy learning as measured by reading assessment scores. I explored instruction and learning constructs through a mixed-method analysis to provide a balanced view of motivational literacy instruction for middle school professional development.

Research continues to confirm the significance of motivation in education as a key to literacy instruction and learning. My dissertation articulates an important message to middle school literacy professionals about research-based pedagogy for measuring and guiding the affective and cognitive learning for middle school students. My goal is to expand upon historical understandings of this topic through academic research, writing, and professional development.



### A time for learning

As an educator, how can you adapt your teaching to the 21st-century world? Become a facilitator, employ active learning strategies in the classroom, and embrace collaboration. John Dewey noted teachers are learners. Learn about your students' individualities, unique cultures, and how their native languages and literacy experiences shape their current educational reality. Be ready to explore collaborative cognition and collaborative scaffolding and adapt 21st-century skills for your learners.

The future of learning is fast approaching, and it is we—educators—who hold the civic, social, and moral responsibility of helping all learners become literate and capable in this 21st-century society.

We do not have much time. Remember, tomorrow will soon be yesterday. ■