

# GLOBAL MEANING MAKING

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ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON TEACHING VOLUME 39

**GLOBAL MEANING  
MAKING: DISRUPTING AND  
INTERROGATING  
INTERNATIONAL  
LANGUAGE AND LITERACY  
RESEARCH AND TEACHING**

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
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Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK  
First edition 2022

Editorial matter and selection © 2022 Lori Czop Assaf, Patience Sowa and Katina Zammit.  
Individual chapters © 2022 the Authors.  
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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80117-933-1 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-80117-932-4 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-80117-934-8 (Epub)

ISSN: 1479-3687 (Series)



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To all the teachers who are grappling on a daily basis to improve the social and educational outcomes for all students.*

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# PREFACE

## **Global meaning-making: Venturing beyond the “out-of-bounds”**

Robert J. Tierney

Preface for Katina Zammit, Lori Czop Assaf and Patience Sowa (Eds.), *Global Meaning Making: Disrupting and Interrogating International Literacy Research and Teaching*. Emerald Publishing.

The contributors to this volume explore global meaning-making – the pursuit of global moves that emanates from the foundational deliberations and objectives of global and Indigenous educators, postcolonialists, and others. Instead of emphasizing comprehension approaches that focus on reading simply for understanding, global meaning-makers examine our worlds – including how ideas and peoples are positioned – to unmask, reflect, and act upon sociopolitical analyses. Central to global meaning-making are changes that embrace pluralism and multiculturalism.

Anchoring the book is the suggestion that a shift to global meaning-making can contribute to a wave of change that considers the crucial roles our diversities play in our futures. To this end, the editors and authors detail how the goals and nature of their pursuits step out of the bounds of standardization and buck monolingualistic, assimilative tendencies. They initiate practices aligned with multitopic or pluriverse imaginaries – forms of literacy that extend to agency, activism, and alternatives.

To foster this aspirational imaginarieness of global meaning-making, the editors and authors foreground endeavors that pursue spaces where pluralism is embraced. As editors Katina Zammit, Lori Czop Assaf, and Patience Sowa state in their introduction:

The authors of this edited book are global meaning-makers. In a multiplicity of research contexts around the world about teachers, teacher educators, teacher candidates, communities and students, their chapters illustrate their willingness to question and self-interrogate, cross borders, collaborate, translanguague, promote indigenous languages, decolonize, reimagine, transform, and adapt research and pedagogical practices in language and literacy.

Further, the editors note how the authors draw upon the notion of global meaning-making in concert with a Freirean advocacy for “reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 2005):

The authors in this book are educational activists, taking action in their own contexts to question the dominant educational and language and literacy discourses. They employ critical pedagogy in which “literacy becomes a meaningful construct ... viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people... [and] is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formations or serves as a set of cultural practices that

promotes democratic and emancipatory change” (Freire & Macedo, 2005, p. 220). The authors have given voice to marginalized communities, interrupting the existing educational discourses, questioning and critiquing the enacted language and literacy policies and practices, recommending alternative ways for local, indigenous communities to be heard and included, and offering possible strategies for the use of researchers, teacher education students, teacher educators, teachers and policy makers to encourage them to also become educational activists. They demonstrate global meaning making in action.

### *The Call and Nature of Global Meaning-Making*

Global meaning-making involves complex negotiations that are not preset or standardized, but anchored in ethics – ethics aligned with respect for the local, the pursuit of reciprocity between local and global, and ecological eclecticism. As the chapters of this volume suggest, the dimensions of global meaning-making are akin to a set of values and guidelines – like compass points for telescopes, in search not of a single destination but of multiple paths forward. The discussions put forth by the authors and editors convey how global meaning-making is therefore not a scripted reading of the world applied in a singular or monolithic fashion. Its dynamic processes are, by their very nature, situated, diversified, multilayered, and multifaceted – involving fusions and adaptations.

Global meaning-making also assumes all behaviors are political; that responsible and responsive meaning-making respects and serves the interests of all of our worlds; and that meaning-makers’ engagements seek to change, challenge, or mitigate unjust systems. This view builds upon discussions among the growing circle of literacy scholars invested in global thinking, especially those researchers who investigate translanguaging, hybridity, global mobility (e.g., Lam & Warriner, 2012; Nelson, Barrera IV, Skinner, & Fuentes, 2016; Pieterese, 2005; Rizvi, 2009a; Robertson, 1985); global citizenship (e.g., Andreotti & de Sousa Santos, 2011; Torres, 2015; UNESCO, 2015); and copedagogy (Grigorov & Fleuri, 2012; Misiaszek, 2015). It stems from the search for other spaces, as discussed by Escobar (2018), Perry (2020), Gutiérrez (2008), and Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda (1999). It befits the argument for deference to and respectfulness of cultures (e.g., Campano, Honeyford, Sánchez, & Vander Zanden, 2010; de Sousa Santos, 2007b, 2013; Singh, Fenway, & Apple, 2005; Stein, 2017). It draws heavily upon issues of mobility – in terms of people, cultures, and literacies. It is consistent with the model of community-based literacy events and practices explored by Victoria Purcell-Gates (2006) and her colleagues (Purcell-Gates, Perry, & Briseño, 2011); explorations of the participatory dynamics of literacy across time and space (e.g., Dyson, 1988; Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009; Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016); and pursuits of epistemological diversity, especially Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g., Archibald, 1995, 2008; Assié-Lumumba, 2017; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Bishop, 1994; Connell, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2007a; Nakata, 2001, 2004; Rigney & Hattam, 2018; Rigney, Hemming, & Bignall, 2018).

Befitting practices of shuttling back and forth between local and wider worlds, global meaning-making also weaves together notions of cosmopolitanism



(e.g., what has been described as public diplomacy) with a fundamental respect for cultural diversity. As with Rizvi's (2009b) discussion of cosmopolitanism, global meaning-making is "a political philosophy, a moral theory and a cultural disposition" (p. 253). It is, as Martha Nussbaum (1997) suggests, a process of critical reflection and reflexivity – one that identifies with the global human community and engages one's ability to imagine across cultural differences. As Allan Luke (2004) explained, this involves:

... exploring the conditions for intercultural and global intersubjectivity... an engagement in globalized analyses that continually situate and resituate learners... their local conditions, social relations and communities, in critical analyses of the directions, impacts and consequences of global flows of capital, bodies, and discourse. (pp. 1438–1439, 1441)

This disposition and process of engaging across local and global sites similarly reflects transliteracy approaches. It explores dimensions such as emergence, uptake, resonance, and scale as a way of capturing "different kinds of relations among people and things – whether in horizontal, vertical, rhizomatic, or other relationships – and highlight(ing) people's literacy practices within and across systems that (re)produce, exacerbate, and/or challenge social inequities" (Stornaiuolo, Smith, & Phillips, 2017, p. 84).

As noted, global meaning-making builds upon sociocultural views of reading (e.g., García, 2009; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; García & Kleifgen, 2020; Lee, 2020; Purcell-Gates, 2006); discussions of globalism (Rizvi, 2009a; Robertson, 1985; Singh, 2005; Singh & Lu, 2020); and postcolonial epistemologies (e.g., Connell, 2007; Connell, Collyer, Maia, & Morrell, 2017; de Sousa Santos, 2013; Ndimande, 2018; Said, 1979, 1993; Tierney, Smith, & Kan, 2021). In keeping with discussions of pluralism, global meaning-makers adopt different stances to see how the worlds of others may or may not be part of their own (Escobar, 2018; Perry, 2020). They interrogate issues of indigeneity, sovereignty, and cultural affirmation, and read against the deep-rooted systems and hegemones that perpetuate planetary affronts to diversity – including those that seek cultural homogeneity or advantages tied to historic privilege (Tierney, 2017, 2018, 2020).

Global meaning-making thus comprises a triad of critical contemplation, analysis, and advocacy, stemming from the convergence of sociocultural, critical, and globalist views. At one level, a reader's sophistication in terms of engaging with these processes is relative. It rests upon their pre-existing knowledge about people, places, and times; their adroitness and the tools available to support them as they move with others within and across borders of space and time; and their ability to adapt and adjust to shifting norms and expectations. At another level, global meaning-makers require knowledge of themselves as they step in, out, and to the side of worlds to observe and engage with others with respect (Freire, 1973; Smith, 2000, 2005).

This facet of global meaning-making demands self-interrogation of one's own enculturation – ongoing scrutiny of one's interests, activities, positionality, perspectives, and biases. As Spivak (1988) cautions, such self-examinations should be ongoing, lest they become aligned with the systems they purport to challenge. This

undoubtedly requires a study of self that seeks to challenge both self-righteous objectives as well as failures to self-implicate. Global meaning-makers should, as Spivak (1988, 1990) suggests, be contemplative as they reconcile their complicity with their own privilege, and adopt dispositions and approaches that are not presumptuous, colonizing, or recolonizing. Global meaning-making is a call to break away from pretailored worlds governed by practices and policies that perpetuate insularity, homogeneity, monolingualism, and assimilation. To such ends, global meaning-making is rarely solitary, and engagements are apt to require collaborators with local knowledges, Indigenous histories, migrant pasts, and cultural moorings from a range of places.

Indeed, global meaning-making entails reckoning with oneself and one's cultural ways of knowing as one journeys across borders with others, with and for the interests of all. It represents a mix of participatory literacies, promoting approaches that are cooperative, collaborative, and contrastive while being respectful and reciprocal (Smith, 2000, 2005). It befits a planetary view that is ecumenical and emancipatory. A key thesis undergirding the rationale for global meaning-making is the advancement of "other" alongside "all," in concert with accommodation for (rather than assimilation of) differences. It is the pursuit of eclecticism in support of a global complementarity, or inter-operationality. It entails a turn from self-righteousness to critical reflexivity; from imposition and imperialism to respect and restraint. It involves what Hymes (1990) describes as a kind of dialectic between insider–outsider perspectives.

Broadly considered, then, global meaning-making involves a mindfulness toward the world. It demands agency, responsibility, and respect as one acts upon sociopolitical discernments in ways that are ethical and community-based. Whereas prior notions of meaning-making may have stressed the importance of building from one's background knowledge and experiences, global meaning-making represents a shift in the intimacy of one's engagement with texts and the world of media. Global meaning-makers are action-oriented – moving beyond the page to consider possibilities, recognize their roles in relation to others, and respond carefully, respectfully, and responsibly. They embrace an ethos of acceptance and reconciliation, adopt a planetary epoch outlook, and are informed by notions of plurality and universal rights. Distinguished from engagements that seek merely to understand others, such transformative global engagements reckon with, challenge, and change hegemonies, with a reverence for the sovereignty and various ways of doing by others.

That said, questioning the nature of proposed changes – as well as their presumed benefits – is essential to this activist stance. Lest meaning-makers become interlopers and opportunists, they should not assume positions that advance pursuits in the interest of others without full regard and respect for those interests. They should not be blinded by arrogance and discount the need for cultural intermediaries situated in communities to guide any engagement. Instead, they should engage in practices that lay a foundation for trust and allyship (Bishop, 2009; San Pedro, 2018). Similar to Marilyn Cochran-Smith's (2000) suggestions in her discussion of racism, global meaning-makers need to continually interrogate their "own complicity in maintaining existing systems of privilege and

oppression” (p. 186). It is crucial that they not turn a blind eye to the systems at play, including educational approaches that supplant cultures, dismiss local knowledges, and relegate nonmainstream populations to positions where their backgrounds lack currency.

To these ends, global meaning-making involves a combination of stances, including:

- (1) *Perspectival*: To engage different perspectives, especially those stemming from considerations of context and relevance, so that engagements are respectful, responsive, and proffer understandings of events that illuminate different understandings.
- (2) *Evaluative*: To delve into different readings and analyses and consider the assumptions, norms, and tenets that serve as the bases for perspectives and understandings. That is, to bear responsibility for judging the ideologies represented in and by the text, including the systemic forces at play that undergird societal hierarchies and frame exchanges.
- (3) *Reflexive*: To seek understandings of one’s frames and their nature or potential for influence – especially in terms of limiting or skewing understandings; to acknowledge self-interest; and to respect the interests of others (i.e., Indigenous interests and ways of knowing, etc.).
- (4) *Proactive and Transformative*: To promote and pursue agency, advocacy, and transformative change (i.e., forms of systemic change that address the development needs of communities in ways that are respectful, organic, and sustainable).
- (5) *Ethical*: To be responsive, respectful, and trustworthy; to address matters of human rights and planetary responsibilities with an eye toward – and reverence for – the local and global.

### *Closing*

The pursuit of global meaning-making is a call for exchanges to flow across and within a futuristic, pluralistic world. Its approach to everyday literacy involves shared responsibilities as well as alternative spaces that afford expression and advocate for change (Gutiérrez, 2016). These ideas reflect Kris Gutiérrez’s (2008) discussions of a third space – an aspirational hybrid space wherein exchanges flow across cultural identities and positionalities, in accordance with sociopolitical dynamics. Within this third space, improvisations within and across borders and identities serve to both empower engaged individuals and improve the group as a whole. As noted by postcolonialists, meaning-makers can too often find themselves confined to sites where forms of epistemological imposition and resocialization occur. These insular sites might be tailored to Eurocentric traditions that befit colonialist or assimilantist models rather than those espousing epistemological eclecticism, Indigeneity, and internationalism (Abdi, 2015; Connell, 2007; Nozaki, 2009; Takayama, 2009; Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017).

Global meaning-makers must instead read for sociopolitical currents and pursue critical forms of advocacies that advance diversity. In so doing, they

engage an ethics of respect for sovereignty and self-determination – one that supports rather than imposes, and codevelops rather than intervenes. At the same time, they are never untethered from their own histories, predispositions, and positioning, including the influence of mainstream forces of colonization (e.g., marketing strategies tailored to digital user profiles). To fuse self with others, global meaning-makers must therefore engage with persona and ethos, the pragmatics of language use, and notions of identity over space and time. As they consider the diverse circumstances within and across countries and cultures, their communications may take the form of translanguaging and other means of criss-crossing meaning-making communities. As Willinsky (1998) suggested, meaning-makers should engage not as imperialists but as critical culturalists, working across borders with a view of themselves as foreigners in support of others (see also: Kristeva, 1991).

As noted, the process of global meaning-making requires a combination of contemplation, analysis, and advocacy undergirded by reflexivity and self-consciousness. It calls for meaning-makers to recognize their own biases and consider how broader systems and influences inform their perspectives, color their interpretations and evaluations, or constrain their discernment. Alongside the meanings derived from the text or circumstance, global meaning-makers are themselves subject to critical interrogation as they consider their roles and potential complicities relative to systems and hierarchies. Global meaning-making requires support for and commitment to engaging with forms of border crossings, as one steps across or out of line. It is more provocative than neutral, and more disruptive than dissociated. In a way, it is similar to forms of counterdiscourse, coupled with proactive engagements, such projects or praxis, that are directed toward transformative change.

In closing, let me express my thanks to the editors and authors for what they shared, as well as my sincere appreciation for the opportunity to respond and contribute to their volume. As I have indicated, this volume is inspirational. Writing this chapter not only fueled my passion but also spurred my sense of responsibility to interrupt and transform our educational approaches – especially our literacy practices. As educators we need to ensure that our educational and literacy practices build upon the synergies of our diverse cultures, experiences, ways of knowing, and languages, to afford understandings that lean upon, grow, and affirm our diversities. This book does not represent an appeal to tokenism or simply a study of issues. This goes beyond suggestions of adjustments on the margins. The essence of global meaning-making is a call for transformative change. It may seem daunting, but I would suggest necessary.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge the local and Indigenous people and communities around the globe who allowed us to enter their spaces and lives and learn with them. We acknowledge the power we hold as researchers and are aware of our responsibility to authentically represent the lived experiences and voices of the students, teachers, and families.

A big thank you to our peers in the Literacy Research Association International Innovative Community Group and Dr. Rob Tierney who instigated our inquiry into global meaning making and served as thinking partners and cocollaborators on this book. We are grateful to Stefinee Pinnegar who was instrumental in helping us pursue the critical aspects of meaning making and supported this edited book. Finally, we are so grateful to our families who are always supportive and who inspire us to follow our passions.