



Adolescent Literacy: The Crisis and the Solutions

Elizabeth Birr Moje
University of Michigan

*Reading and Writing are More than Elementary:
A Summit on Adolescent Literacy Instruction*
May 7, 2007



The “Crisis”

- Poor national test scores in reading (and mathematics)
- Changing workplace and social demands
- Increasing access to information in multiple venues
- New attention to adolescents

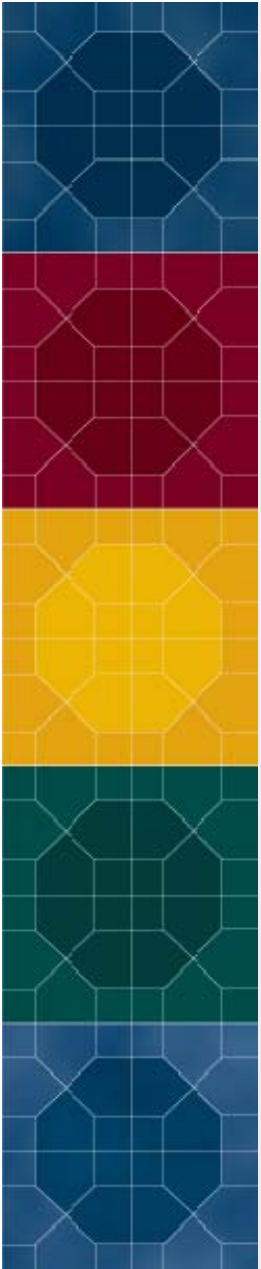
National Assessment of Educational Progress (2005)

	4 th grade	8 th grade	12 th grade
Below basic	36 %	27%	22%
Basic	33%	42%	43%
Proficient	23%	28%	30%
Advanced	8%	3%	5%



Some Trends and Caveats

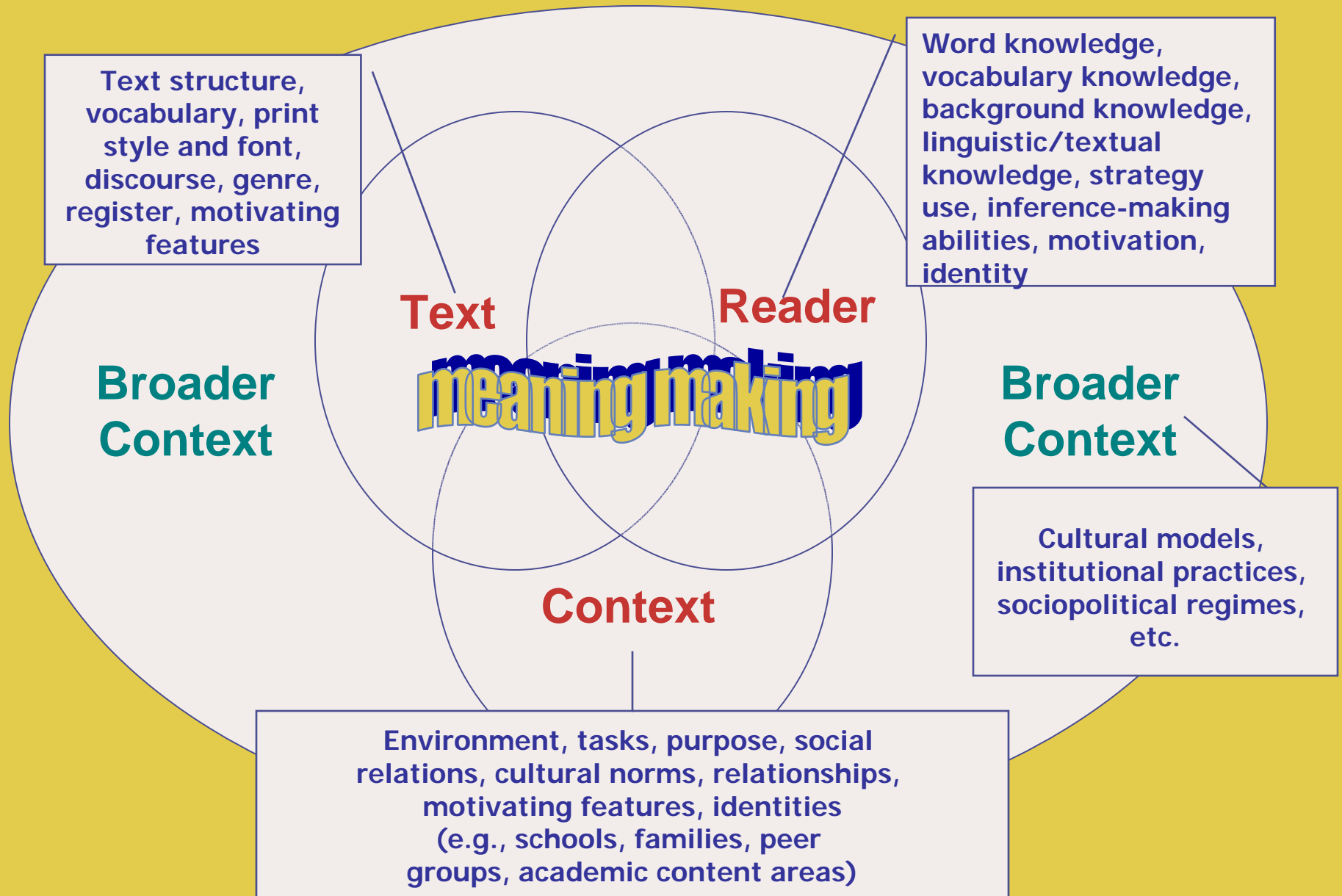
- Disproportionate numbers of ethnic and racial minority students and children who live in poverty are represented in the BELOW BASIC categories.
- Between 1992 and 2005, average scores increased for White, Black, and Hispanic students at grades 4 and 8.
- Scores did not increase for students living in poverty.
- Scores of 12th-grade students have dropped from 1992.
- Less than 50% of youth who take the ACT are prepared for the demands of college reading.



These data beg the
questions . . .

Just what is literacy?
And what is adolescent literacy?

Model of Literate Practice

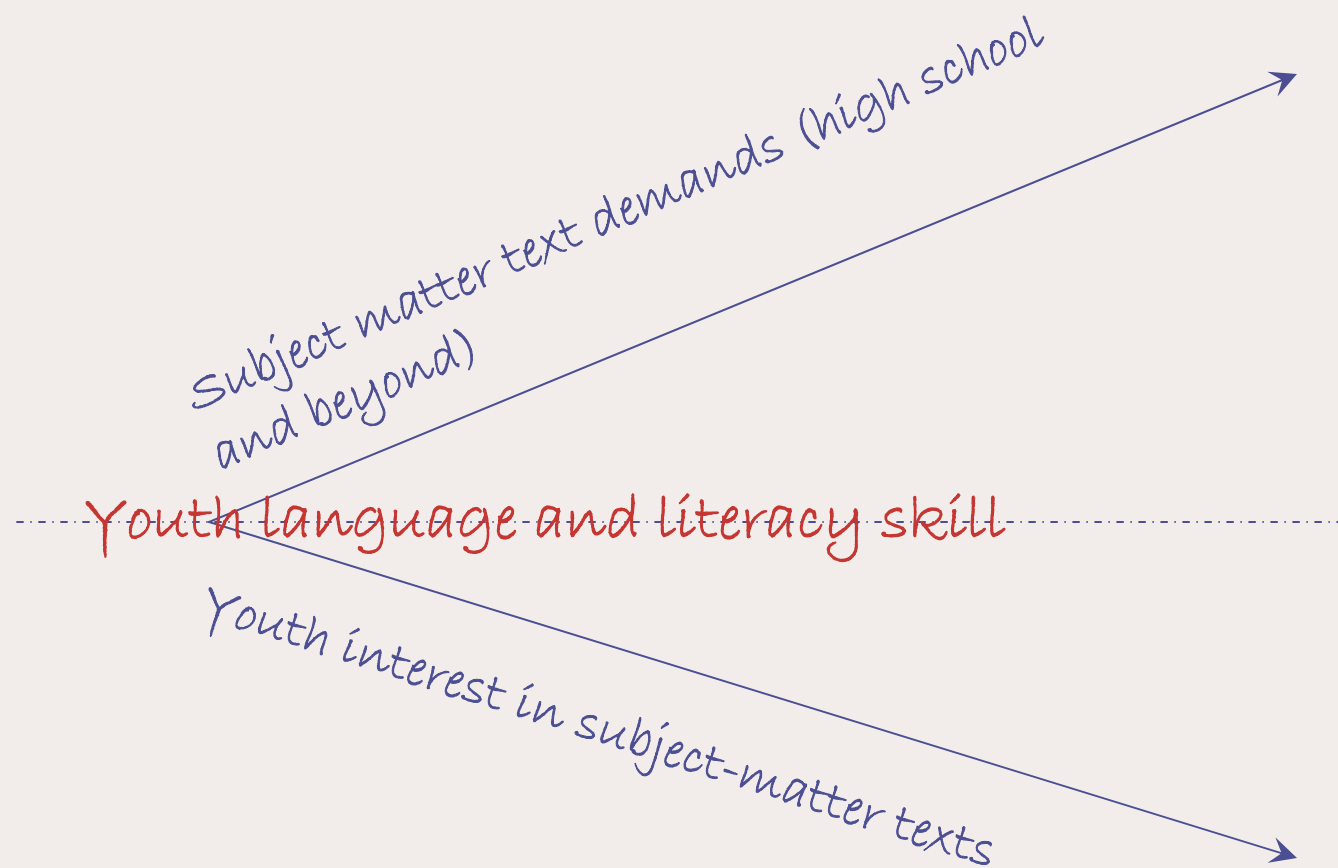


12th-grade reading competencies

- ***Basic readers (265):***
 - demonstrate an overall understanding and make some interpretations of the text.
 - identify and relate aspects of the text to its overall meaning, extend the ideas in the text by making simple inferences, recognize interpretations, make connections among and relate ideas in the text to their personal experiences, and draw conclusions.
 - identify elements of an author's style.
- ***Proficient readers (302):***
 - show an overall understanding of the text, which includes inferential as well as literal information.
 - extend the ideas of the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions, and making connections to their own personal experiences and other readings.
 - make connections between inferences and the text, even when implicit.
 - analyze the author's use of literary devices.
- ***Advanced readers (346):***
 - describe abstract themes and ideas in the overall text.
 - analyze both the meaning and the form of the text and explicitly support their analyses with specific examples from the text.
 - extend the information from the text by relating it to their experiences and to the world.
 - develop thorough, thoughtful, and extensive responses to texts.

(NAEP, 2005)

Adolescent Literacy—Unique Challenges





The Challenges

- Teacher Knowledge and Beliefs
- Text Difficulty
- Student Motivation, Interest, and Knowledge
- Consistency and Coherence



The Solutions

- Connect to student interests and experiences
- Integrate literacy teaching and learning strategies in instructional frameworks and content activities
- Choose texts carefully/scaffold inconsiderate texts
- Apply reading and writing to meaningful inquiry
- Reform schools, not teachers or students



Student Interests

- Young people's uses of texts
 - Extensive reading and writing
 - Magazines, community newspapers, websites, letters, music lyrics, poetry, journals
 - Lateral readings of texts
 - Integration of visual images, oral texts, and performances
- Classroom uses of texts
 - Relatively little reading and writing
 - Textbooks (assigned), novels, some newspapers, some essays, some journals
 - Longitudinal readings of texts
 - Print text in isolation OR accompanied by images, graphs, and charts, without explanation



Instructional Frameworks

- Before-During-After Reading, Writing, and Other Activities
 - Elicit, assess, “massage” prior knowledge before activity
 - Guide comprehension and meaning making during activity
 - Question, evaluate, conclude, and synthesize results after activity



Instructional Frameworks

- Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (Guthrie et al., 1996)
 - Observe and personalize
 - Search and retrieve
 - Comprehend and integrate
 - Communicate to others



Text Considerations

- Text Structure/Text Type
- Text Difficulty
- Text Variety

Text Structures/Text Types

- Expository and narrative
- Text structures
 - Cause/Effect
 - Problem/Solution
 - Proposition/Support
 - Sequence/Process/Chronology
 - Comparison
 - Description/Definition
 - Enumeration
 - Exemplification
- Everyday and disciplinary
- Different ways of writing in different domains and for different audiences
 - Ways of using data
 - Word usage
 - Sentence structures
 - Density
 - Voice



Text Variety

- Expository Texts
- Real-World Texts
- Narrative Texts (Problem-Based Cases)
 - *Combined into text “sets” around central concepts of study*



Generic & Disciplinary Literacy Teaching Practices

- Vocabulary Strategies
 - Vocabulary concept cards
 - List-Group-Label
 - Story/Text Impressions
 - Semantic Feature Analysis
- Previewing and Preview Guides
- Think Alouds/Monitoring Comprehension
- Summarizing
- Writing from Models



Discipline-Specific Literacy Teaching Practices/Strategies

- Previewing like a historian
 - Who is the author?
 - When was this written?
 - What is the context?
- Previewing like a biologist
 - What is the problem/phenomenon I'm studying?
 - What do I know about this phenomenon?
 - What do I predict/hypothesize about the phenomenon?



Now it's your turn . . .

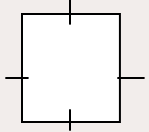
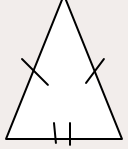
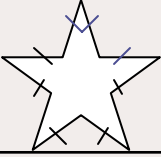
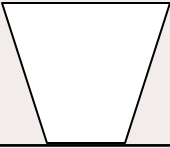
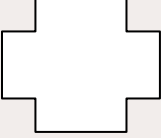
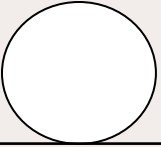
- Previewing like a mathematician?
 - ??
 - ??
- Previewing like a literary theorist or textual critic?
 - ??
 - ??

Differences Across Content Areas: The Persuasive Essay

Letter to the Editor	Essay or Poem for English Class	Social Science Essay
Personal opinion or personal experience	Personal opinion or experiences AND logical reasoning or illustrative imagery	Objective stance, evidence to support stance, logical reasoning to tie evidence to claim

Semantic
Feature
Analysis for
Polygons &
Angles Lesson

Kirksey,
David. (2007).
Unpublished
lesson plan.
Ann Arbor, MI:
University of
Michigan.

	A polygon?	equilateral?	equiangular?	regular?	convex?	concave? (nonconvex)
						
						
						
						
						
						

Shape?	A polygon?	equilateral?	equiangular?	regular?	convex?	concave? (nonconvex)
	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes
	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
	yes	no	no	no	yes	no
	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no

a square

**block M
above**

rhombus

Kirksey, D. (2007). Unpublished lesson plan manuscript. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.



Meaningful Inquiry

- Action projects
- Relating firsthand and second investigation (Palincsar & Magnusson, 2001)
- Engaging students in reading and writing as done in the discipline (e.g., writing scientific explanations; reading and writing histories)



School Reform

- School structures
 - Time
 - Schedules
 - Interruptions
 - Pacing charts
 - Collaboration across subject matter areas
- Student participation/attendance
- Sustained professional development