

Literacy Landscapes in Singapore: Evidence, Ecology, and G

This symposium brings together four interconnected perspectives on literacy education in Singapore, examining how social context, curriculum history, physical environment, and teacher preparation collectively shape literacy in a linguistically diverse, multicultural system.

The first paper (Jasper Sim) presents an empirical account of how early literacy outcomes are patterned by children's social and linguistic environments, focusing on children who are L1 speakers of Singapore English within a multilingual context. Drawing on hierarchical regression analyses of English vocabulary, print concepts, and phonological awareness scores from more than 80 children, it shows that socio-demographic factors account for a substantial portion of variance in early literacy performance. Language background variables play a more nuanced role: specific dimensions such as children's first language status, language use preferences, and shared reading practices with caregivers show associations with particular outcomes. The findings indicate that literacy development is not simply a function of language status, but is deeply shaped by social conditions and everyday home practices. This underscores the need for literacy policies and pedagogies that move beyond broad language categories to engage more directly with family resources, caregiver practices, and the lived multilingual realities of learners.

The second paper (Geraldine Kwek) examines how Singapore's literacy education initiatives have developed over the years, tracing the conditions that gave rise to STELLAR (Strategies for English Language Learning And Reading) as an evidence-based curriculum and approach. Using a document analysis approach to analyse the literacy education policies in Singapore, this paper focuses on developments across a span of 20 years (2000 – 2020). Central to this account is the highlighting of STELLAR as grounded in the recognition of the social realities of the multicultural context in which the system resides and based on research-informed approaches. It provides evidence that the trajectory of literacy education initiatives in Singapore is one that is moving away from prescriptive top-down impositions to being shaped by and responsive to the linguistic and cultural complexity of the Singapore society.

The third paper (Mark Seilhamer) extends the lens of literacy beyond the classroom. Drawing on educationscape data collected at Science Centre Singapore, it utilises a literacy landscapes conceptual framing to examine how informal learning environments constitute and mediate literacy practices. Considering not only linguistic but also semiotic and special resources, all orchestrated to convey science knowledge and shape visitor engagement, it asks what counts as a literacy event outside the classroom, and whose linguistic and cultural resources are privileged and foregrounded, or marginalised – rendered practically invisible – in such spaces.

The fourth paper (Jason Loh) focuses on the preparation of literacy teachers at the primary school level, examining literacy teacher education and the ways in which pre-service and in-service programmes equip, or fall short of equipping, teachers for the complex literacy work demanded of them in Singapore's multicultural classrooms. It attends in particular to how curriculum knowledge, pedagogical repertoire, and contextual sensitivity are, or are not, developed in formal initial teacher preparation

programmes. Drawing on the author's experience as a teacher educator at the National Institute of Education, Singapore's sole teacher education institute, the paper examines the relationship between pre-service preparation and what is needed in school, and asks how teachers' literacy knowledge and pedagogical sensitivity deepen or stagnate once they are in schools.

Taken together, the four papers argue that literacy in Singapore cannot be understood apart from its ecological context: the social and language background factors that shape learners, the curriculum initiatives designed in response to multicultural realities, the literacy landscapes of informal learning spaces, and the educators prepared to navigate all of the above. The symposium invites dialogue on what evidence-based, contextually responsive literacy education looks like, and what it still needs to become.