



Language Of Experience: Literate Practices And Social Change (Pitt Comp Literacy Culture)

Gwen Gorzelsky

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The Language of Experience examines the relationship between literacy and change--both personal and social. Gorzelsky studies three cases, two historical and one contemporary, that speak to key issues on the national education agenda.

"Struggle" is a community literacy program for urban teens and parents. It encourages them to reflect on, articulate, and revise their life goals and design and implement strategies for reaching them. To provide historical context for this and other contemporary efforts in using literacy to promote social change, Gorzelsky analyzes two radical religious and political movements of the English Civil Wars and the 1930s unionizing movement in the Pittsburgh region. Charting the similarities and differences in the function of literate practices in each case shows how different situations and contexts can foster very different outcomes.

Gorzelsky's analytic frame is drawn from Gestalt theory, which emphasizes the holistic nature of perception, communication, and learning. Through it she views how discourse and language structures interact with experience and how this interaction changes awareness and perception.

The book is methodologically innovative in its integration of a macro-social view of cultural, social, and discursive structures with a micro-social view of the potential for change embodied in them. Through her analysis and in her use of the voices of the people she studies, Gorzelsky offers a tool for analyzing individual instances of literate practices and their potential for fostering change.

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