Foreword

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The original conception of this special issue of *the Brazilian Journal of Applied Linguistics* (*Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*) on academic literacies came from Brian Street. Tragically, he died in 2017 before being able to engage in the editorial process. He would have so much enjoyed conversations with the authors of the papers published here as well as the conversations with others that the papers here will inspire. Those of us who knew Brian spent countless hours in conversation with him at his flat in Brighton, England, at a café in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, or at a pub or coffee shop wherever we all happened to be. For Brian, conversation was both the process and the product of scholarship. In contrast to much literacy and educational research, his conception of research was an interactionally embodied, continuously evolving conversation that eschewed objectification (the transformation of people, everyday life, and activity, into reified objectifications). Research as conversation was to be inclusive, geographically diverse, multilingual, and dynamic. It was to embrace diverse and even contrary perspectives and views; and, whenever possible, conversations should be accompanied by a good bottle of red wine.

Street's conception of academic literacies, developed in collaboration with Mary Lea (LEA; STREET, 1998, 1999, 2006) and others (e.g., JONES; TURNER; STREET, 1999), was a continuation and evolution of his earlier studies and theorizing of literacy practices. Based on his ethnographic field work in an Iranian village, Street (1984) recognized that there were a broad range of social practices in people's everyday lives that involved the use of written language (which he called literacy practices). Yet, only some of those literacy practices were viewed as legitimately "literacy" by officials, teachers, and others from the government and economic and social institutions associated with economically dominant urban areas. Those officials, teachers and related others from outside the village had a social, cultural, and political

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ideology that defined what counted as "literacy" and what did not as well as who counted as literate and who did not. But they did not view their definition of literacy as an ideological definition driven by the cultural, social, and political institutions and contexts they were bringing to (and arguably imposing on) others. They viewed their definition of literacy and their literacy practices as the only way to define and do reading and writing. From this perspective, reading and writing were not social or cultural practices occurring within social and cultural contexts, but a set of autonomous skills and strategies. Street named such a view of literacy an "autonomous model" and contrasted it with an "ideological model" of literacy. To be clear, an autonomous model is an ideological model whose proponents fail (or refuse) to recognize that the model of the literacy they hold is itself an ideological model. Acknowledging that any set of literacy practices index a particular ideological model allows researchers, educators, and others to ask questions about how those literacy practices construct particular sets of meanings as opposed to others, structure social relationships, privilege particular groups of people and not others, and define what counts as true and rational.

Street was not the first to conceptualize literacy as social. Depending on how one reads, the related scholarship roots of recent discussions of literacy as social (and not solely or essentially cognitive) can be found in the theorizing of Vološinov (1986), Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Wittgenstein (1953), Hoggart (1957), Said (1979), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Freire (2000), Gumperz (1982), Hymes (1974), among others. Around the time Street published his book first articulating the conception of autonomous and ideological models of literacy (*Literacy in Theory and Practice,* 1984), there was a flurry of publications on literacy as social, much of it driven by efforts to address inequity in education structured along racial, class, cultural, gender, and linguistic dimensions (for a review of related research see BLOOME; KALMAN; SEYMOUR, 2019). What Street's theoretical contribution did was (a) provide a way for scholars and educators to articulate the tension between those social, cultural, and political forces, promoting a naturalized singular, autonomous and hegemonic model of literacy and the diverse and culturally bound ways that ordinary people (and especially ordinary people in nondominant social, cultural, and linguistic communities) use written language to make their lives; (b) explore the ways that power relations were institutionally structured and normalized through sanctioned

literacy practices; and (c) raise another set of questions about the hidden (ideological) curriculum of school literacy education.

Much of Street's scholarship after his research in Iran focused on literacy education programs in impoverished countries in Africa and Asia, often countries where UNESCO and the British government were spending money on education (e.g., see NABI; ROGERS; STREET, 2009; STREET, 2002, 2003). I suspect that Western funders found this scholarship both frustrating and insightful. Frustrating because Street eschewed deficit framings of literacy education (and the all-too-simplistic line between deficits and educational practice based on autonomous models of literacy); but insightful because of Street's insistence on taking and sharing with students and teachers an ethnographic and ideological model approach that they themselves could take up. In so doing, local teachers and students could craft their own literacy education programs that could respect, acknowledge, and build on their already extant literacy practices as well as acknowledging and addressing the complexities of their lives. Part of what is at issue is where Street and his colleagues "located their feet" in how they theorized and research academic literacies. Street's "feet" were located (both figuratively and literally) with those of the students (and not with the educational institution *per se*). This "locating" of literacy education is not the same as what is usually meant by "student-centered" (centering on active learning and student motivation but still leaving the explicit and implicit goals, ideology, definitions, and social and cultural structures of education authored by government officials and those of dominant groups). Rather, it is to view literacy education as essentially a social, cultural and ideological process in which either the school is acting on the students or the students are agentively acting on their worlds (and all the complexities and contradictions of those worlds) through literacy education.

It is these understandings and experiences of literacy practices and literacy education that Street and his colleagues brought to their conceptualization of academic literacies. Although there has been much discussion of academic literacies (both before and after Street's theorizing), overwhelmingly the conception of academic literacies is one in which the student needs to acquire the literacy skills, strategies, and practices, of the disciplinary and academic community of which they seek to become a member. From this perspective, the key questions are how to theorize and implement programs that efficiently facilitate students' acquisition of the

requisite literacy skills, strategies, and practices? To return to the metaphor of "locating feet," here "feet" are located in the academic and disciplinary communities and institutions. Students need to adapt themselves to those academic and disciplinary communities and institutions, which involves not only acquisition of the requisite literacy skills, strategies, and practices, but all of the accompanying hidden curriculum, too, including their social and cultural identities and personhood (e.g., IVANIČ, 1998). It needs to be recognized that for many students, such incorporation and adoption of the hidden curriculum is acceptable and may even be desired. Yet, for many students, especially students from non-dominant racial, social, cultural, economic, and linguistic communities, the cost is unacceptable. And, it must also be acknowledged that for many teachers and educators the cost that too many students need to pay is also unacceptable. The conception of academic literacies that Street and his colleagues promulgated (and that has continued to evolve since its inception) asks a different set of questions than how to efficiently facilitate adoption of the extant literacy skills, strategies, and practices of particular disciplinary and academic communities and institutions. Instead, one asks: What are these academic literacy practices and what are the ideologies, social relationships, social identities, and definitions of personhood they promulgate? What are the power relations involved in and through these academic literacy practices? How can the hidden dimensions (and hidden curriculum) of academic literacy practices be made visible? What do and might students bring to their engagement in extant academic literacy practices? How might academic literacy practices (and the teaching of academic literacy practices) respect and honor the backgrounds, histories, social identities, and personhood of students, especially those students from non-dominant communities? How might student engagement with academic literacy practices revise those practices and the ideologies they index? In brief, the conception of academic literacies that Street and his colleagues offered is one that is dialectical, always in tension between reflection and refraction. Within the context of academic institutions, it is hard to ask these questions. Yet, they and related questions must be asked. This is not just a matter of inclusion, but more so of challenging the limitations of academic literacy practices themselves for what counts as knowledge and knowing, for who counts as academically literate, and

offering a definition of academic literacies that is interactionally embodied, continuously evolving, eschewing objectification, and inherently dialectical.

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