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Affective Multiliteracies: Harmonizing Inner and Outer Literacies in English Language Education

Letramentos afetivos múltiplos: harmonizando letramentos internos e externos no ensino de língua inglesa

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Abstract: This article introduces the concept of affective multiliteracies as a new framework for English language education. While current approaches to multiliteracies have expanded the scope of literacy to include multimodal, cultural, and digital dimensions, they continue to emphasize what we define as outer literacies: visible, assessable, and performative skills used to engage with texts, tools, and external contexts. This emphasis often overshadows inner literacies, or the social, emotional, and relational capacities that shape how learners interpret experiences and connect with others. In response, we propose affective multiliteracies as a way to harmonize these inner and outer dimensions, positioning literacy as both internal meaning-making and external participation. Drawing on research in emotional intelligence, pedagogical love, and harmony, this paper examines how educators can cultivate learning environments that support students as human beings. We provide theoretical grounding, practical illustrations, and pedagogical implications to support this holistic vision. By rethinking literacy as a human practice shaped by both cognitive and affective processes, this approach aims to guide educators in preparing students to communicate thoughtfully, relate ethically, and participate meaningfully in their communities worldwide.

Keywords: affective multiliteracies; social-emotional learning; English language education; pedagogical love; harmony; inner and outer literacies.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta o conceito de multiletramentos afetivos como um novo referencial para a educação em língua inglesa. Embora as abordagens contemporâneas de multiletramentos tenham ampliado o escopo da alfabetização/letramento ao incluir dimensões multimodais, culturais e digitais, elas continuam a enfatizar o que definimos como letramentos externos: habilidades visíveis, avaliáveis e performativas utilizadas para interagir com textos, ferramentas e contextos externos. Essa ênfase frequentemente obscurece os letramentos internos, ou seja, as capacidades sociais, emocionais e relacionais que moldam a forma como os aprendizes interpretam suas experiências e se conectam com os outros. Em resposta, propomos os multiletramentos afetivos como uma maneira de harmonizar essas dimensões internas e externas, posicionando o letramento tanto como um processo interno de construção de sentidos quanto como participação externa. Com base em pesquisas sobre inteligência emocional, amor pedagógico e harmonia, este artigo examina como educadores podem cultivar ambientes de aprendizagem que apoiem os estudantes enquanto seres humanos. Apresentamos fundamentação teórica, ilustrações práticas e implicações pedagógicas para sustentar essa visão holística. Ao repensar o letramento como uma prática humana moldada por processos cognitivos e afetivos, essa abordagem busca orientar educadores na preparação de estudantes capazes de se comunicar de forma reflexiva, relacionar-se eticamente e participar de maneira significativa em suas comunidades ao redor do mundo.

Palavras-chave: multiletramentos afetivos; aprendizagem socioemocional; educação em língua inglesa; amor pedagógico; harmonia; letramentos internos e externos.

1 Introduction

In today's turbulent world – marked by war, climate catastrophe, displacement, digital disruption, and political fragmentation – educational systems face mounting pressure. Scholars and educators are increasingly questioning whether schools are adequately responding to learners' evolving needs (Dworak; Rzymełka-Frąckiewicz; Wilk, 2023). Across many national contexts, curriculum reforms prioritize market-driven goals such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), digital skills, and global competitiveness. While crucial, these priorities often sideline emotional development, ethical reflection, and critical citizenship. As Nussbaum (2010, p. 2) warns, without attention to these dimensions, we risk producing "generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's suffering and achievements." In English language education, this challenge is especially pressing. Teachers support learners who must interpret not only multimodal texts and digital environments but also complex emotions and cultural expectations. The question arises: how can we help learners navigate the outer world while also equipping them to understand and manage their inner lives?

English language teaching (ELT) has gradually adopted the concept of multiliteracies (Mora, 2012; The New London Group, 1996), also referred to as multiple literacies (Silver; Blue, 2024), which expands literacy to encompass multimodal, cultural, and linguistic competencies. Learners now engage with digital platforms, culturally embedded texts, and multilingual discourse communities, broadening what it means to be literate in a globalized, technologically advanced world. Yet, in practice, this expansion has focused largely on what we refer to in this paper as outer literacies, or the visible, assessable, performative skills used to engage with texts, tools, and external contexts. While essential, this emphasis has often overshadowed inner (or affective)[1] literacies, which we define as the social, emotional, and relational capacities that shape how learners interpret experiences and connect with others. This imbalance reflects broader trends in education, where the affective aspects of learning are often treated as secondary rather than integral (Gotlieb *et al.*, 2022; Pentón Herrera; Darragh, 2024). What is needed is a more holistic perspective that harmonizes external competencies with inner ones, thereby supporting learners as social, emotional, and intellectual beings.

For clarity, in this paper, we define affect and its adjectival form, affective, as umbrella concepts that encompass more than emotion alone. In this context, affect includes social, emotional, and relational processes that shape how individuals experience, interpret, and respond to the world. It refers to both internal states and interpersonal dynamics, emphasizing how individuals feel, connect, reflect, and relate to one another. While academic interest in affect has grown in recent years, traditional approaches to literacy education, particularly in multiliteracies and ELT, have historically emphasized cognitive development, textual competence, and visible, performative skills such as reading, writing, and discourse participation. These are often favored for their measurability and alignment with standardized outcomes. In contrast, the affective dimensions of literacy have frequently
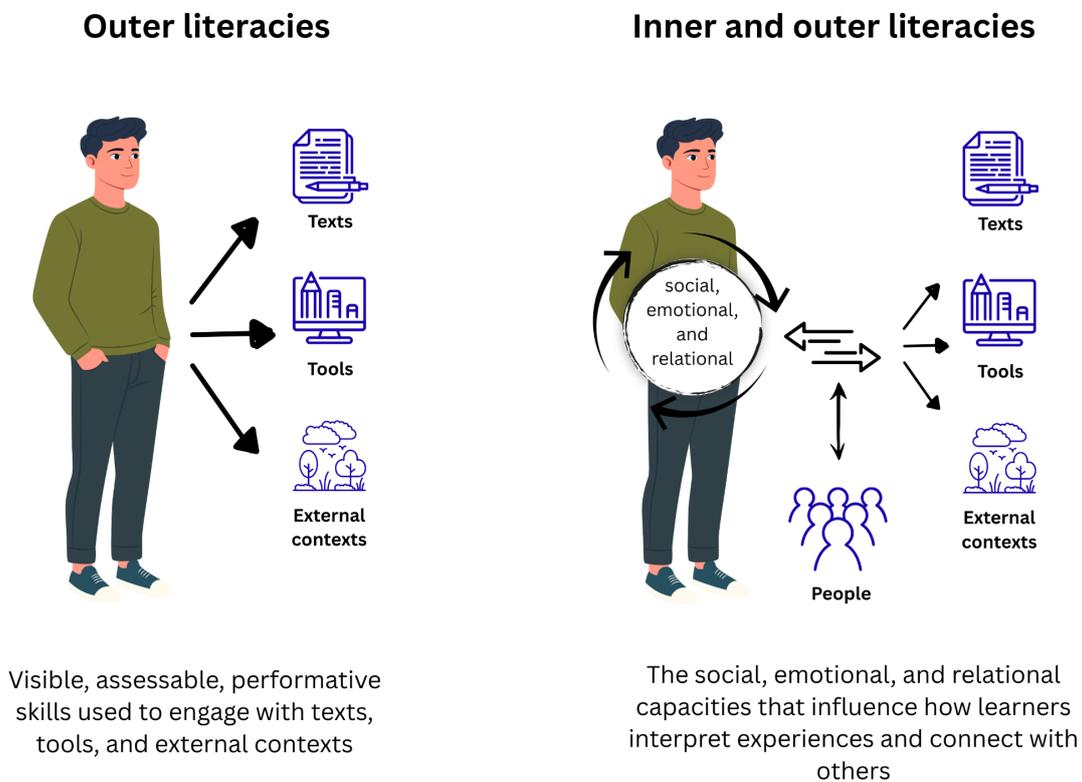
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[1] Throughout this article, we understand inner literacies and affective literacies as the same and use both terms interchangeably.

been overlooked, downplayed, or relegated to the realm of 'soft skills.' Scholars such as Boler (1999), Zembylas (2007), and hooks (2003) have called for more integrated and emotionally attuned pedagogies that center the human experiences underpinning literacy.

In response to this critical gap, this paper introduces the concept of affective multiliteracies, which integrates affect into the existing conversations about literacy in English language education. Grounded in affective literacies, affective multiliteracies encompass the social, emotional, and relational competencies learners need for meaningful connection and success in today's world. The term 'affective literacy' has roots in literary studies, where it is used to describe the somatic and emotive responses that readers experience in relation to texts (Amsler, 2001). Building on this foundation, we expand the concept beyond literary interpretation to consider how social, emotional, and relational competencies shape literacy practices in language education. Drawing on the principles of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Pentón Herrera, 2024), relational competence (Plantin Ewe; Aspelin, 2025), and pedagogical love (Barcelos, 2022), we center the affective domain as a vital aspect of literacy development. Rather than viewing literacy as merely the ability to decode multimodal texts or participate in culturally diverse discourse, affective multiliteracies position emotional navigation and ethical interaction as core to what it means to be literate in today's world. This perspective invites a rethinking of literacy as a process of meaning-making that unfolds both within individuals (i.e., the inner world) and through relationships (i.e., the outer world), where communication encompasses verbal, embodied, and emotional expressions, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Literacy Engagement Without and With Integration of Inner (Affective) Dimension

Outer literacies

Texts

Tools

External contexts

Visible, assessable, performative skills used to engage with texts, tools, and external contexts

Inner and outer literacies

social, emotional, and relational

Texts

Tools

External contexts

People

The social, emotional, and relational capacities that influence how learners interpret experiences and connect with others

Source: The authors.

In an era of emotional disconnection, digital fatigue, and social fragmentation, affective multiliteracies provide a more humanizing and holistic approach to English language teaching and learning. This rethinking is especially urgent in ELT, where learners navigate new languages alongside shifting identities, emotional vulnerabilities, and evolving social contexts (Barcelos, 2015; Pentón Herrera, 2020). The outer world, shaped by ongoing instability and disruption, often interferes with learners' inner balance and overwhelms them with stimuli and expectations they may be affectively unprepared to manage (Abrams, 2022; World Health Organization, 2022). There is a growing recognition that education must attend to the emotional conditions that shape how learners think, interact, and make meaning (Frey; Fisher; Smith, 2019; Jensen, 2005; Pentón Herrera; Martínez-Alba, 2021). Supporting learners in fine-tuning their inner worlds enhances their ability to engage thoughtfully and compassionately with the external world (Oxford, 2013). Thus, affective multiliteracies provide a framework for doing precisely this by helping teachers foster both academic and affective competencies in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner, positioning social-emotional competencies as core components of literacy, rather than supplemental or peripheral concerns.

To address these urgent emotional and pedagogical demands, we introduce and propose affective multiliteracies as a framework that redefines what it means to be literate in the 21st century, especially in language classrooms. By expanding literacy to encompass social-emotional competencies, affective multiliteracies offer a more holistic vision of education – one grounded in harmony, pedagogical love, and the full complexity of human experience. In this paper, we begin by outlining the conceptual evolution from literacy to multiliteracies and then examine the theoretical underpinnings of affective literacies. We proceed to define and elaborate on the concept of affective multiliteracies, discussing how it can reshape ELT pedagogy through a more integrated approach to inner and outer literacies. Finally, we offer implications for practice and call for educators to reimagine literacy as more than the ability to navigate texts and technologies. We argue that affective multiliteracies must also function as a transformative tool for navigating the self and the world with care, courage, and connection.

2 Conceptual Groundings of Affective Multiliteracies

To anchor the proposed framework of affective multiliteracies within a broader scholarly tradition, this section outlines three foundational domains: literacy and multiliteracies, affective literacies, and the concepts of harmony and pedagogical love. We begin by tracing the evolution of literacy from conventional definitions rooted in print culture to more dynamic, multimodal, and culturally situated practices. This shift, marked by the rise of multiliteracies, has expanded how we understand meaning-making in language education. We then turn to affective literacies, which highlight the social, emotional, and relational dimensions that are essential for meaningful engagement but often remain peripheral in traditional literacy models. These conceptual strands provide the foundation for affective multiliteracies, positioning learners as emotionally attuned, socially connected, and critically engaged meaning-makers. The final subsection explores harmony and pedagogical love as ethical orientations that further enrich this framework.

2.1 Literacies and Multiliteracies

Traditional definitions of literacy have often been limited to the ability to read and write in standardized forms of a dominant language, typically in print-based contexts. However, critical scholarship in literacy studies has long challenged this reductive view. Street (1984) famously distinguished between the 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of literacy, arguing that literacy is never a neutral or technical skill and is always embedded in social, cultural, and political contexts. Similarly, Collins and Blot (2003) emphasize that literacy practices are shaped by power relations and situated meanings, reflecting particular ways of thinking, being, and belonging. These scholars reframed literacy as a set of socially negotiated practices rather than universal abilities, prompting educators to interrogate whose literacies are dominant and valued in schools and whose are marginalized (Street, 2003). This shift – or opening, as some have argued – has laid the groundwork for broader and more inclusive understandings of literacy as culturally situated, ideologically charged, and inherently plural (Brandt; Clinton, 2002; Gee, 2000; Pahl; Rowsell, 2005).

Building on these and other critical insights, the New London Group (1996) coined the concept of multiliteracies, calling for an expanded understanding of literacy that accounts for linguistic, cultural, and semiotic diversity in increasingly globalized societies. They emphasized two key dimensions: multimodality, or the use of multiple semiotic systems such as visual, audio, spatial, and gestural modes; and diversity, which entails preparing learners to participate in varied and shifting discourse communities. Multiliteracies encouraged a move beyond print-based literacies to recognize the dynamic and situated nature of meaning-making across contexts. Building on this work, Silver and Blue (2024) have further expanded upon the concept of multiliteracies, or multiple literacies, as they prefer to term it, which encompasses digital, visual, textual, social, and global literacies as foundational to students' real-world engagement. Their framework highlights the importance of critical thinking, authentic global content, and multimodal engagement, especially through digital platforms and classroom technologies. Together, these frameworks have contributed to moving literacy beyond static definitions, promoting pedagogies that are responsive, multimodal, and inclusive of the complex literacy ecosystems learners now inhabit.

In practice, however, the implementation of multiliteracies has often centered on external and observable skills, such as navigating multimodal texts, producing digital content, or engaging in multilingual discourse. While these are essential components of meaning-making, the focus on output and performance can obscure the less visible, internal dimensions of literacy that shape how learners interpret, feel, and connect with the world inside and around them. Despite calls for critical and inclusive literacy pedagogies (Lewis; Enciso; Moje, 2007), the affective dimensions of literacy remained long underexplored until scholars began foregrounding emotion and relationality in education (e.g., Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2007). Yet, even today, affect remains a marginalized aspect of educational discourse, often dismissed as 'soft' or non-essential skills, and frequently associated with feminized traits, thereby devaluing its pedagogical significance (Chubbuck; Zembylas, 2008; Osgood, 2012; Pentón Herrera; Becker, 2025). Without intentional attention to these deeper layers, multiliteracies risk reproducing a narrow view of literacy as functional competence rather than as a human practice embedded in lived experience (Curtin, 2024). Drawing on

scholars such as Zipin (2009), who argues for the inclusion of both 'light' (i.e., socially affirmed, school-valued knowledge) and 'dark' (i.e., emotionally charged, often marginalized or taboo personal knowledge) funds of knowledge, we contend that a richer pedagogical approach must also engage with learners' social and emotional realities.

In ELT, the need to engage with learners' realities has become especially urgent in recent times. As a field, we now acknowledge that classrooms function as both linguistic environments and affective spaces for teachers and students alike, where students, in particular, encounter unfamiliar genres, cultural references, and social cues (King; Ng, 2018; Martínez-Alba; Pentón Herrera; Trinh, 2023). At the same time, students manage the emotional demands of expressing themselves in a new language and making sense of others across cultural and linguistic differences. Their experiences are shaped by processes of identity negotiation, feelings of belonging or exclusion, and personal vulnerability, alongside the development of linguistic knowledge and skills. A growing body of work in ELT has advocated for a more holistic, or humanistic, approach to literacy that considers the 'human' dimensions of communication (e.g., Peercy *et al.*, 2025; Pentón Herrera; Martínez-Alba, 2021). Yet these dimensions remain peripheral in many implementations of multiliteracies. To address this gap, the framework of affective multiliteracies, introduced in this paper, proposes a rebalancing that integrates outer literacies with inner ones.

2.2 Affective Literacies

The concept of affective literacies has roots in literary studies, where it was originally used to examine the somatic and affective responses readers experience in relation to texts; that is, how meaning is felt, embodied, and emotionally processed (Amsler, 2001). Building on this foundation, Toscano-Fuentes, Fernández-Corbacho, and Fonseca-Mora (2024, p. 392) define affective literacy as "the impact that the act of reading has on readers' lives," encompassing the emotional responses evoked through interactions with texts, teachers, and peers. While early (e.g., Amsler, 2001) and more contemporary (e.g., Cole, 2009) works emphasize the reader-text relationship, recent scholarship has extended affective literacy to include broader pedagogical and intercultural dimensions, particularly within language and adult education (Toscano-Fuentes; Fernández-Corbacho; Fonseca-Mora, 2024). In this paper, we continue this expansion by conceptualizing affective literacies as a constellation of social, emotional, and relational competencies that support meaning-making in education. More specifically, in this article, we view affective literacies as the social, emotional, and relational skills that shape how individuals make meaning, engage with others, and navigate learning environments.

Despite their importance, affective literacies have often been sidelined in formal education systems that prioritize cognitive and performative outcomes. This marginalization reflects a broader tendency to treat emotions as private, secondary, or problematic, rather than integral to learning and communication (Pentón Herrera; Becker, 2025). However, recent scholarship across education and psychology makes a compelling case that social, emotional, and relational capacities are essential to learners' holistic development (Immordino-Yang; Damasio, 2007; Meland; Brion-Meisels, 2024). For clarity:

- ◆ Social literacies involve navigating group dynamics, interpreting social cues, and acting with cultural and ethical awareness in ways that support empathy, social judgment, and meaningful participation in community life (Arthur; Davison, 2000; Street, 2009).
- ◆ Emotional literacies refer to the ability to identify, understand, and regulate one's emotions in ways that support well-being and learning (Pentón Herrera; Darragh, 2024).
- ◆ Relational literacies emphasize empathy, listening, and interpersonal attunement, or the ability to build trust and mutual understanding across differences (Stavenhagen, 2019; Victor, 2024).

While distinct, these dimensions are deeply interconnected: emotional regulation enhances relational connection, which in turn strengthens social participation and engagement. In this sense, affective literacies are multidimensional, embodied, and context-dependent forms of meaning-making that influence both individual expression and collective understanding.

The relevance of affective literacies is especially clear in English language teaching and learning, where both students and teachers engage in emotionally complex processes. Learners must work with unfamiliar linguistic forms while navigating shifting identities, emotional vulnerability, and intercultural differences. At the same time, teachers manage their own affective labor as they support students' growth, often across linguistic and cultural boundaries. As Plonsky, Sudina, Teimouri (2022), and Barcelos (2015) have noted, language learning is deeply emotional, shaped by risk-taking, the fear of failure, and the desire for belonging. These experiences influence how learners engage with texts, communicate with peers and instructors, and make meaning in new linguistic environments. Without intentional support for affective development, learners may struggle to manage the emotional demands of communication, which can lead to withdrawal or alienation. Similarly, when teachers are not supported in developing affective literacy, the emotional demands of language teaching can become overwhelming, potentially contributing to stress-related physical illness or burnout (Martínez-Alba; Pentón Herrera; Trinh, 2023; Pentón Herrera; Martínez-Alba, 2022). Thus, recognizing affect as central to literacy invites a shift in perspective: education becomes a relational and reflective process through which individuals learn to understand themselves and connect with others. In this light, affective literacies are essential components of education that help create ethical, caring, and emotionally sustainable learning environments.

2.3 Harmony and Pedagogical Love

The concepts of harmony and pedagogical love provide an ethical foundation for the framework of affective multiliteracies. Although literacy is frequently treated as a cognitive or technical skill, affective multiliteracies emphasize its social, emotional, and relational dimensions, which emerge through ongoing interaction with oneself, others, and the world. Harmony, in this context, has the potential to foster inner balance and relational coherence by cultivating awareness, presence, and connection. Grounded in ecological and humanistic traditions, harmony supports teachers and learners in navigating complexity with equanimity, compassion, and clarity (Darder, 2017; Nhat Hanh; Weare, 2017). In language classrooms, this

perspective invites the creation of pedagogical environments that emphasize emotional safety, cultural belonging, and ethical engagement (Oxford, 2013). Harmony can function as a pedagogical practice that aligns internal states with external expressions, thereby promoting reflection, mutual understanding, and deeper meaning-making. In this way, it offers an important alternative to the fragmentation and disconnection that often characterize performance-driven and, more recently, digitally saturated educational systems.
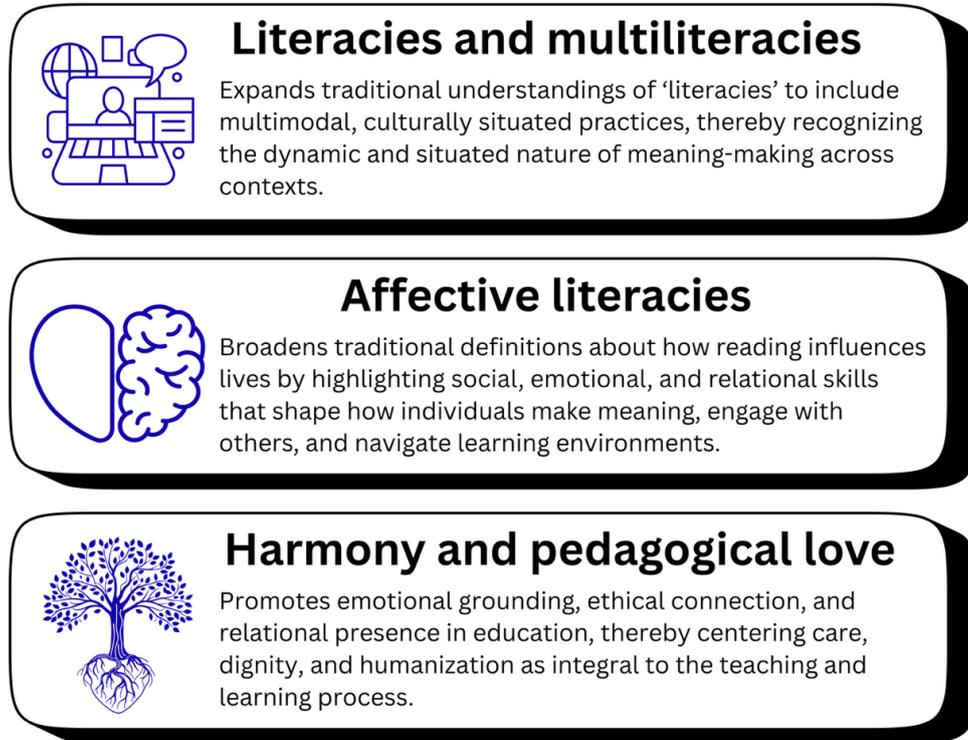
Pedagogical love, deeply intertwined with harmony, provides the affective and ethical foundation for classrooms centered on care, dignity, and relational presence. Määttä and Uusiautti (2011) describe pedagogical love as a guiding force in education that fosters trust, respect, and a belief in each student's potential to grow. From this viewpoint, love is not a sentimental feeling, but a pedagogical stance grounded in patience, ethical responsibility, and consistent support, especially when learning involves difficulty or uncertainty. Barcelos and Coelho (2016) similarly emphasize that love in education requires emotional presence, critical reflection, and the ability to create space for vulnerability and discomfort. Within affective multiliteracies, pedagogical love encourages educators to see learners as whole people (i.e., as human beings), shaped by linguistic, social, and emotional experiences, including histories, trauma, exclusion, and hope. This recognition challenges transactional models of education and promotes humanizing pedagogies that affirm learners' — and teachers'! — dignity and agency. When love informs teaching, the classroom becomes a space for healing, mutual recognition, and shared transformation (Freire, 2005; hooks, 2003).

We posit that, together, harmony and pedagogical love have the power to reorient literacy education toward emotional resonance and ethical responsibility. They create conditions in which learners can cultivate the affective competencies required to succeed in the 21st century (World Economic Forum, 2025), not as byproducts of instruction but as central elements of literacy itself. These dispositions are essential for engaging with texts, people, and contexts in thoughtful, socially responsive ways (Silver; Blue, 2024). In affective multiliteracies, harmony offers the emotional grounding for reflection, while pedagogical love provides the relational infrastructure for connection. This dual foundation encourages educators to embrace what students know or produce as well as who they are becoming. In this way, the integration of harmony and love aligns with calls for affective justice in education, where students' social and emotional lives are seen as deserving of attention, care, and transformation (Barcelos, 2022).

Finally, harmony and pedagogical love offer educators a framework for their own emotional sustainability. Teaching, especially in ELT contexts, involves significant affective labor, especially in today's often unstable, increasingly volatile, and emotionally demanding educational environments (Martínez-Alba; Pentón Herrera; Trinh, 2023; Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2023). Without grounding practices, educators themselves risk emotional exhaustion and disconnection. Affective multiliteracies, anchored in harmony and pedagogical love, provide a foundation for emotionally sustainable teaching: one that values rest as much as rigor, relationality as much as results. By modeling emotional attunement and relational ethics, teachers cultivate supportive environments for students while also nurturing their own professional resilience and well-being. Thus, affective multiliteracies are not simply a vision for student development; they are a call for collective healing and humanization within education itself. In Figure 2, we provide a visual summary of the conceptual groundings that

inform the framework of affective multiliteracies, highlighting the foundational roles of multiliteracies, affective literacies, and the ethical principles of harmony and pedagogical love.

Figure 2 – Conceptual Groundings of Affective Multiliteracies

Literacies and multiliteracies

Expands traditional understandings of 'literacies' to include multimodal, culturally situated practices, thereby recognizing the dynamic and situated nature of meaning-making across contexts.

Affective literacies

Broadens traditional definitions about how reading influences lives by highlighting social, emotional, and relational skills that shape how individuals make meaning, engage with others, and navigate learning environments.

Harmony and pedagogical love

Promotes emotional grounding, ethical connection, and relational presence in education, thereby centering care, dignity, and humanization as integral to the teaching and learning process.

Source: The authors.

2.4 Affective Multiliteracies

The concept of affective literacies has been explored in both theory and practice, particularly in K–12 and adult education, where it is increasingly recognized as central to student engagement, identity, and learning. Originally rooted in literary studies as the capacity to respond somatically and emotionally to texts (Amsler, 2001), affective literacy has emphasized embodied and emotive experience over formal analytical engagement. Over time, its scope has broadened to include pedagogical concerns such as motivation, imagination, confidence, and relationship-building (Cole, 2008; Toscano-Fuentes; Fernández-Corbacho; Fonseca-Mora, 2024). Educators have shown how affective literacy can deepen students' reflective thinking, cultivate emotional connection, and support relational learning. Yet affective literacy often remains disconnected from outer literacy practices, such as textual analysis, multimodal production, and academic writing (Cole; Somerville, 2020). In many classrooms, it is treated as a matter of classroom climate, teacher personality, or emotional regulation rather than as a core dimension of literacy education. This disconnect reinforces a longstanding division between inner and outer literacies — between how learners feel and relate, and how they

produce, analyze, and communicate meaning. The persistent divide between inner and outer dimensions of literacy suggests the need for a more integrated approach.

We propose affective multiliteracies as a framework that connects social, emotional, and relational competencies with the multimodal, textual, and academic practices emphasized in literacy education. It positions literacy as a process involving both internal meaning-making and external engagement with texts, tools, and contexts. This approach recognizes that learners interpret and produce meaning through social interaction, emotional insight, and relational connection. Affective multiliteracies support learning environments grounded in harmony and pedagogical love, where students are guided to reflect, relate, and act with care as part of their academic growth. Within this framework, the *social* refers to collective orientations such as group dynamics, belonging, and a commitment to equity and justice; the *emotional* refers to inward processes such as self-awareness, reflection, and regulation; and the *relational* involves attunement, empathy, and trust-building in interpersonal contexts. It also encompasses verbal, nonverbal, embodied, and silent forms of communication (see Bao, 2023), recognizing that meaning-making is shaped by cognition as well as by somatic, affective, and cultural experiences. Affective multiliteracies create space for both presence and participation, anchoring literacy in the fullness of human experience (Curtin, 2024). In Figure 3, we provide a visual of the affective multiliteracies framework.

Figure 3 – Affective multiliteracies framework
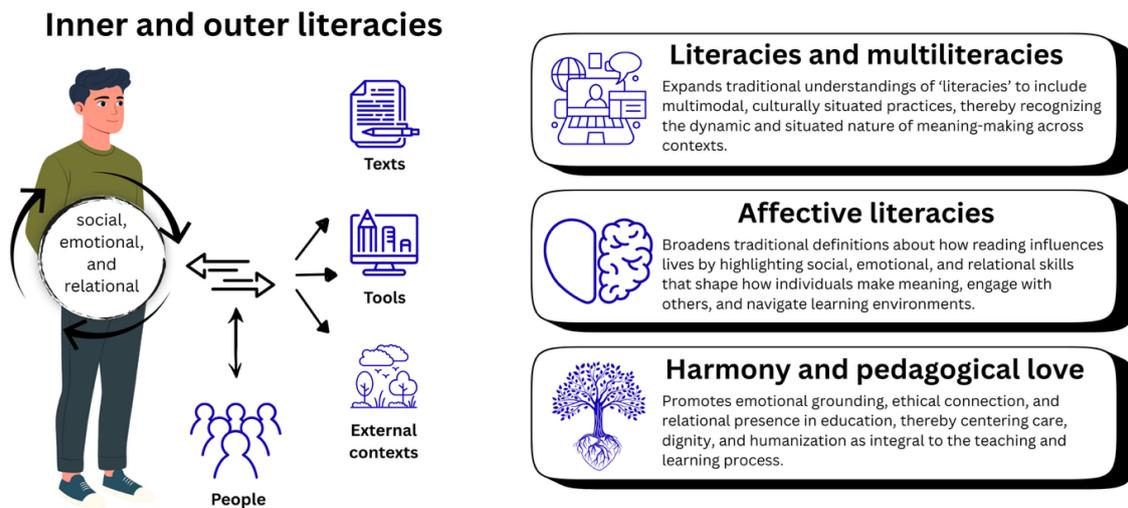
Affective multiliteracies is a pedagogical framework that integrates social, emotional, and relational development with academic and multimodal literacy practices. It recognizes that meaning-making involves both internal reflection and external engagement, and it supports learning environments grounded in harmony and pedagogical love.

Source: The authors.

3 Pedagogical Implications

Affective multiliteracies require a more intentional and relational approach to meaning-making, one that integrates social, emotional, and relational development with academic engagement. In many classrooms, literacy is still defined primarily in terms of performance, involving the production of arguments, analysis of texts, and navigation of multimodal platforms. These skills are important, but they are not enough. Academic development, when separated from affective growth, can lead to disconnection, competition, and disengagement. Learners may achieve success in assessments while lacking the capacity to reflect, relate, or act ethically. Affective multiliteracies position literacy as a relational and reflective process where students learn to communicate with emotional insight, cultural awareness, and a sense of shared responsibility. When learners explore how emotions, values, and relationships shape communication, they become better prepared to engage thoughtfully in their communities. Educating for today's world requires more than cognitive competence; it involves nurturing the ability to consider how one's actions affect others and to contribute to a more just and compassionate society.

While advocating for affective multiliteracies, as practitioners in the field, we also recognize that centering affect within literacy instruction can be difficult in systems driven by standardized assessments, pacing guides, and accountability metrics. Time pressure, large class sizes, and the demand for visible, quantifiable outcomes often sideline relational work or reduce it to compliance-oriented checklists (Agyapong *et al.*, 2022; Thompson *et al.*, 2024). There are also legitimate concerns about teacher workload, emotional labor, and the potential to instrumentalize students' feelings or overstep personal boundaries (Mendizábal, 2024; Vanderheiden, 2023). To navigate these realities, we recommend a pragmatic integration of affective multiliteracies rather than thinking of it as an add-on program or practice. For instance, micro-practices (e.g., two-minute check-ins, reflective exit slips) or alignment to existing standards (e.g., audience, purpose, collaboration) could prove helpful in harmonizing affective aims with mandated outcomes. Similarly, low-stakes formative evidence (e.g., brief self/peer notes, empathy rubrics, process reflections) can serve as useful tools to document growth without pathologizing students or burdening teachers. Importantly, schools should provide professional learning, clear safeguarding protocols, and collective norms of care so that affective labor is shared, not privatized. These steps make affective multiliteracies feasible, even in tightly standardized contexts, while honoring ethical boundaries. We recommend readers see Maksimchuk and Pentón Herrera (2026) for a more detailed conversation about standardized assessments, pacing guides, and accountability metrics, and affective, social-moral, and ethical considerations in teaching.

To illustrate how affective multiliteracies can be implemented even within these constraints, consider a lesson in which students are asked to create a digital narrative about migration. In a multiliteracies-based classroom, the focus might be on composing multimodal texts that combine written, visual, and audio elements to tell a coherent story. Students learn to navigate digital platforms, structure narratives, and make rhetorical decisions appropriate for a specific audience. In a classroom centered on affective multiliteracies, the same topic might be explored through personal journaling, group sharing, or reflective discussion, encouraging students to connect emotionally with the theme and develop critical affective literacy (see

Leander; Ehret, 2019) for those who experience displacement. The emphasis here is on building self-awareness, emotional insight, and interpersonal understanding. In a classroom grounded in affective multiliteracies, students are supported in both areas of learning. They create multimodal migration narratives (i.e., outer literacies) while also reflecting on their emotional responses, cultural assumptions, and the ethical implications of representing others' experiences (i.e., inner literacies). Peer feedback addresses content, design, tone, empathy, and social impact. This approach encourages meaning-making that is cognitive, social, emotional, and relational, enriching both the learning process and the final product.

Affective multiliteracies also come to life through the everyday moments of classroom interaction. Consider a scenario in which students collaboratively revise their writing about a community issue they care about. In a traditional literacy lesson, feedback typically focuses on grammar, organization, or argumentation – skills that can be easily assessed. An affective multiliteracies approach, grounded in harmony and pedagogical love, would guide students to engage in peer feedback that is emotionally aware and relationally attuned. Teachers would model how to offer critique with empathy (including examples of words and phrases to use), listen without interruption (i.e., active listening), and honor each student's voice and vulnerability (i.e., respect for others and respect for diversity of opinion). Students would be encouraged to reflect on how their communication through different modes (i.e., writing, speaking, non-verbal, etc.) affects others, how it positions them in relation to their communities, how their emotions influence their ideas, and how the externalization of their emotions can support constructive expression and reduce conflict. Rather than treating revision as a correction of deficits, it becomes a natural process for learning, leading to spaces for dialogue, reflection, and growth. Here, harmony is cultivated through presence and mutual respect, and pedagogical love is expressed in the belief that all learners can flourish through meaningful, compassionate exchanges.

We would like to end this section by acknowledging that, as a field, scholars and educators alike are responding to the incredible, never-before-seen demands of our time with renewed purpose. Across the field of English language education, we are seeing a range of innovative approaches that are being put forth to address the urgent need for our world to become more just and humane. Some of these examples include, but are not limited to, social-emotional learning (Hasper; Pentón Herrera, 2024), trauma-sensitive practices (Darragh; Pentón Herrera, 2026), compassion-based language education (Mercer, 2024), peacebuilding pedagogies (Birch, 2022; Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2023), pedagogies of love and harmony (Barcelos, 2022; Oxford, 2013), and emotional intelligence (Pentón Herrera, 2024). These movements reflect a shared desire to reimagine education as a space for healing, dignity, and meaningful engagement. Our proposal in this paper – affective multiliteracies – aligns with and contributes to these ongoing conversations by emphasizing the integration of social, emotional, and relational competencies within literacy learning. We see affective multiliteracies as one constellation within this expansive sky of pedagogical hope, as well as an invitation to educators to reimagine what it means to teach, to connect, and to build a better world through language teaching and learning. Figure 3 illustrates how affective multiliteracies intersect with these overlapping and mutually reinforcing movements in ELT.

4 Final Thoughts

We would like to return to the question that opened this paper: *How can we help learners navigate the outer world while also equipping them to understand and manage their inner lives?* In today's fast-changing world, the external environment continues to demand digital fluency, critical thinking, and multimodal literacy. At the same time, it often destabilizes learners' internal lives through emotional overload, disconnection, and uncertainty (Abrams, 2022; WHO, 2022). Education must rise to meet these complex conditions by focusing not just on academic outputs, but on the social, emotional, and relational development that supports students' ability to interpret, express, and connect. Affective multiliteracies offer one way to meet this challenge. By recognizing the importance of both inner and outer literacies, this framework supports students in building the social awareness, emotional insight, and relational capacity needed to engage with the world in thoughtful, ethical, and human-centered ways (Curtin, 2024).

Affective multiliteracies invite educators to view emotional presence, empathy, and ethical communication as core elements of literacy instruction. When learners strengthen their capacity to reflect, relate, and respond with care, they become more prepared to engage with complex social issues, diverse perspectives, and collaborative learning environments. At the same time, teachers are supported in fostering pedagogical spaces grounded in compassion, respect, and emotional sustainability. Harmony and pedagogical love help educators cultivate environments where both students and teachers feel valued, connected, and capable of growth (Barcelos, 2022; Oxford, 2013). In this way, affective multiliteracies align with a range of movements in English language education, including social-emotional learning, trauma-sensitive teaching, peacebuilding, and compassionate pedagogy. Together, these approaches suggest a shared vision of education as a space for transformation, healing, and collective well-being. Affective multiliteracies contribute to this vision by offering a framework that integrates social, emotional, and relational learning with literacy development. We offer this approach as an invitation to reimagine what it means to teach, to connect, and to contribute to a more just and caring world.

We propose affective multiliteracies as an invitation to reimagine the purpose of education in an uncertain and rapidly changing world. We believe that, if schools are to respond meaningfully to our abrupt and chaotic realities, they must prioritize not just what students can do, but who they are becoming. Affective multiliteracies emphasize that social, emotional, and relational dimensions of being are central to how learners make meaning, form community, and act with care and integrity. These competencies are not optional or supplemental; they are essential for building the kind of thoughtful, compassionate, and socially engaged citizens our world needs. In this new light, becoming affectively literate represents a form of readiness for academic demands as well as for the challenges of contemporary life (Curtin, 2024; Nussbaum, 2010). As educators and scholars, we are called to teach in ways that foster human connection, critical reflection, and collective well-being, elevating humanity's goodness, particularly in the rise of non-human entities such as technology and AI. Affective multiliteracies offer one path toward this vision, rooted in the belief that literacy is not just a set of skills, but a way of being in the world with others.

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