

1 **Relevance, New Literacies, & Pragmatic Research for Middle Grades Education**

Leslie David Burns
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

ABSTRACT

This article describes how scholarship from the New Literacy Studies can shed “more light” (Florio-Ruane, 2002) on middle school education and youth literacies, allowing users to examine claims about students, schools, policy, and research. Hypothesizing that shortcomings in early adolescent literacy education have less to do with lack of teacher/student ability than with a system-wide failure to adjust to changes in literacy, the author argues strict adherence to traditional academic print models has resulted in curricular misalignment with how literacies function today. Misalignment has caused a lack of relevance in middle grades despite policies emphasizing relevance as crucial for student engagement and achievement. NLS research, as a pragmatic orientation to studying literacies and education, is explored as a powerful but still developing perspective for understanding the social and cognitive complexities of early adolescent literacy. The article concludes with implications for further research along with cautions regarding appropriate uses of research in policy and practice.