Improving Instruction, Assessment, and Policies for Secondary English Learners Across the Content Areas

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Improving Instruction, Assessment, and Policies for Secondary English Learners Across the Content Areas • September 2024

Reconceptualizing ecologically the transformation of educational opportunities for Multilingual Learners

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Four points I want to discuss in my talk

1. A brief historical review of the term ecology, and how it has been interpreted by linguists and educational linguists

2. Components and features of an educational ecology. Advantages of looking at the whole ecosystem (ecodomain)

3. A pedagogical example that emphasizes the role of affordances in the development of agentive, autonomous learners.

4. Our Centers' evolving ecological approach

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Ecology

- A scientific discipline established around the middle of the 19th century.

- The term was invented by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (Arndt & Janney, 1983) to refer to the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes into contact.

- Originally ecology indicated the study and management of the environment or specific ecosystems

- Now, by contrast, the ecological view is ecocetric or geocentric and assumes that human beings are part of a greater natural order with which they constantly interact.

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Ecology of language: Multiple Developments

ECOLINGUISTICS

Haugen (1972)
Fill & Mühlhåusler (2001)

SOCIETAL MULTILINGUALISM

Hornberger (2003) the continuum of Biliteracy; Hornberger & Hult (2008)

DEVELOPMENTAL

Bronfenbrenner (1974)
Language Development: van Lier (2001, 2004)
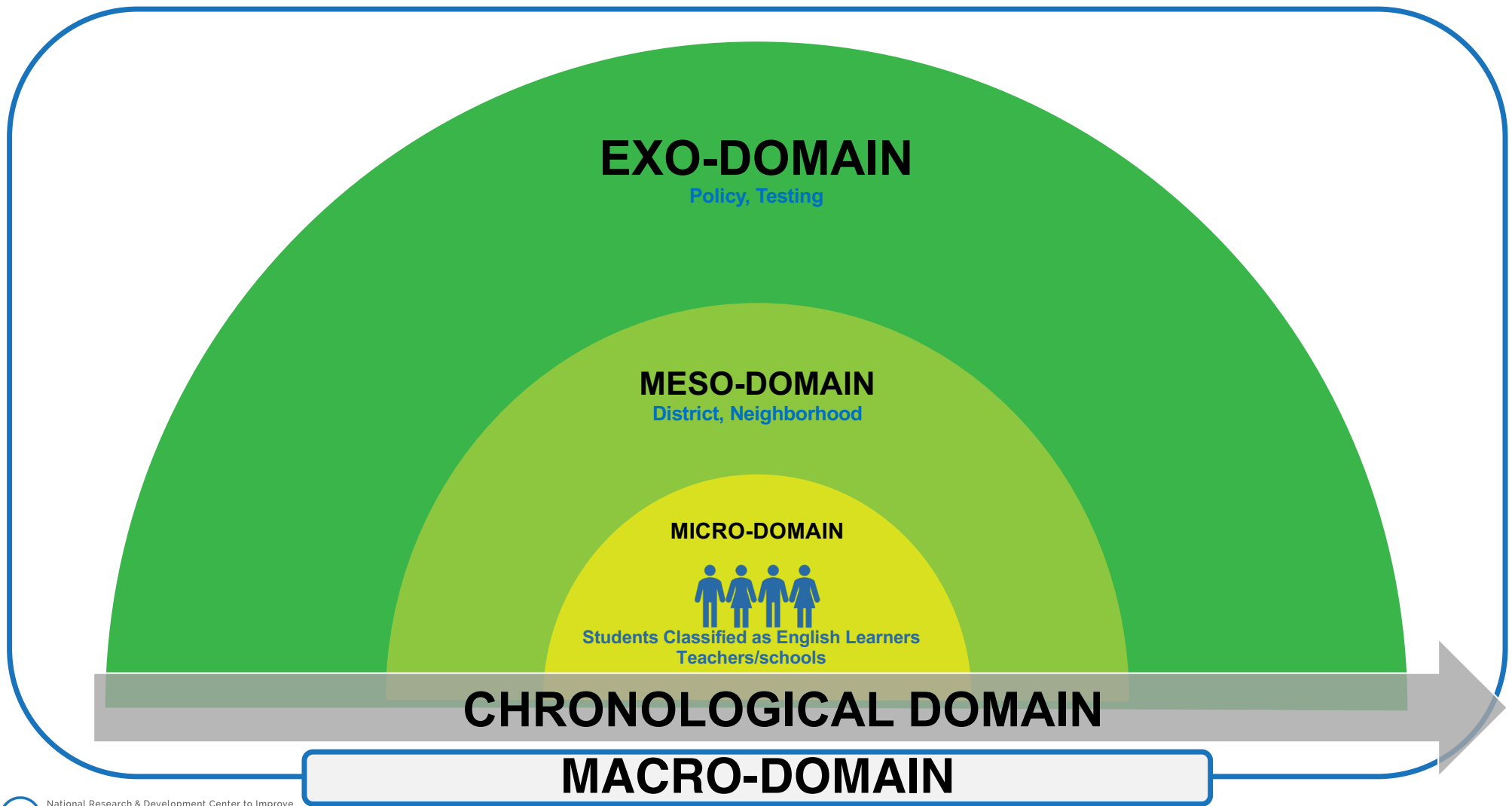
LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

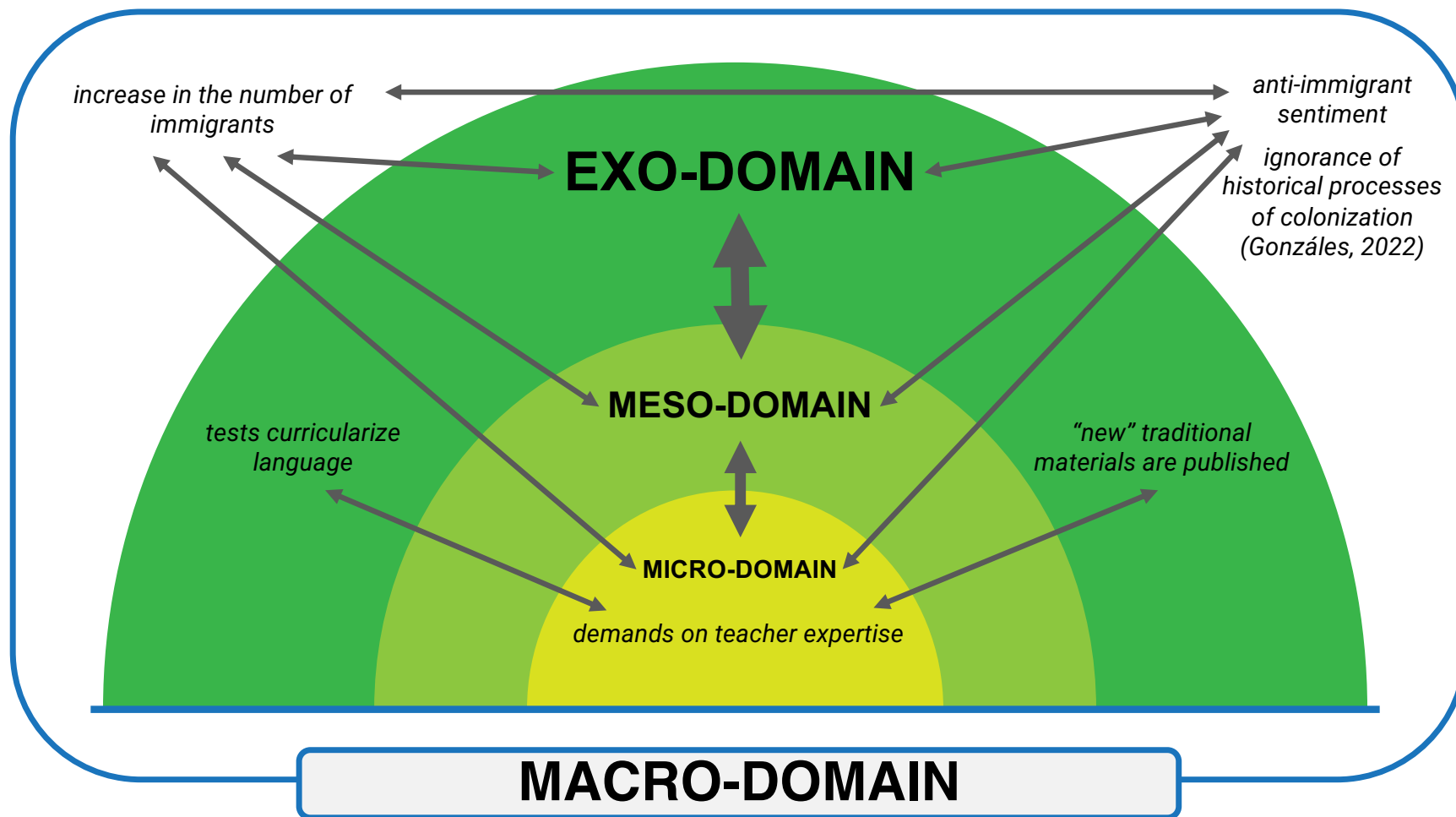Shohamy (2006)

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Scollon & Scollon (2004)
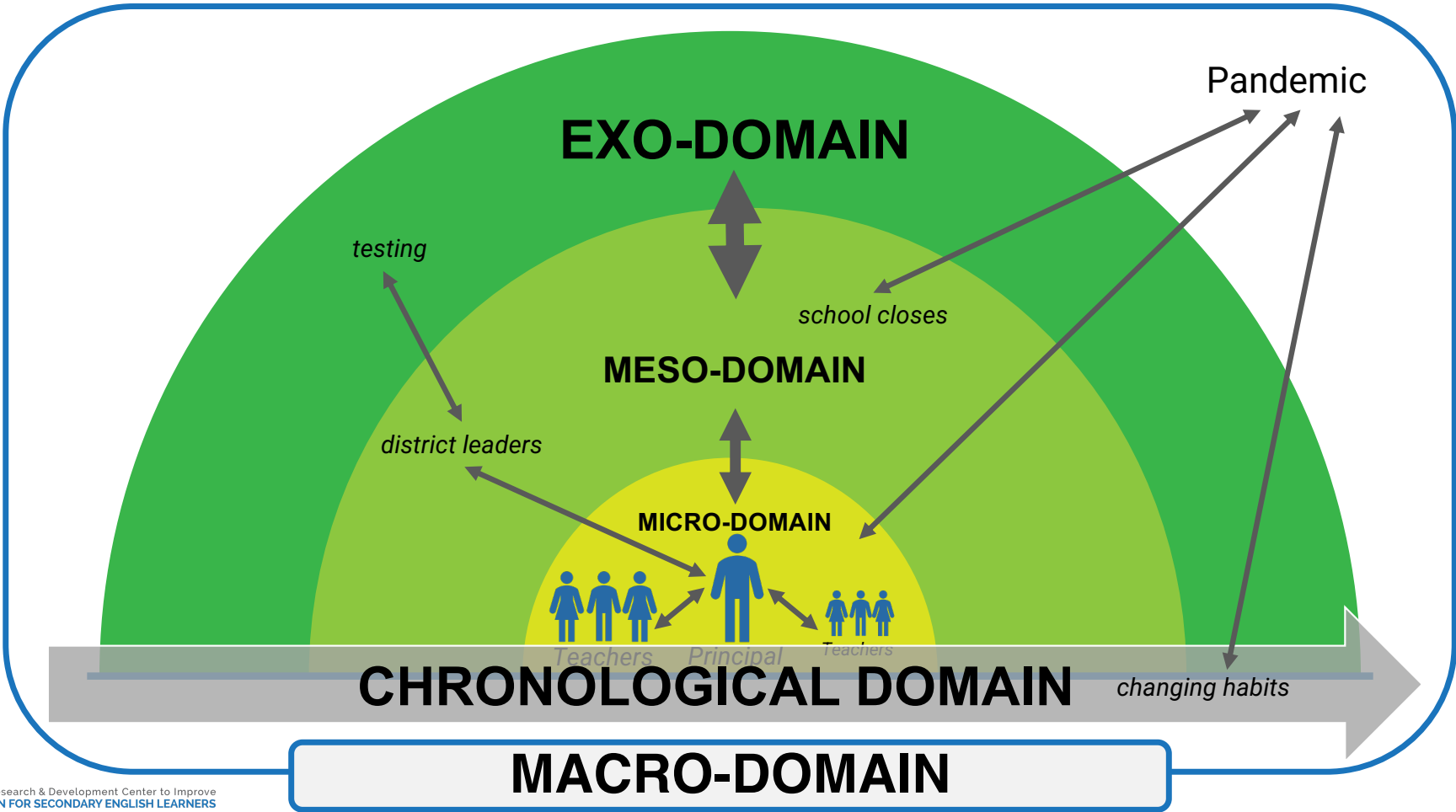
Defining features of an ecological approach

- The learning environment is a complex, dynamic, multidimensional arena comprised of nested systems (van Lier, 2004, 2007; Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

- A focus on singular factors fails to account for the variation and contextual nature of human learning (Levine, 2020).

- Study contexts, and people's participation in cultural practices to understand learning.

- Domains (formerly called systems) and actors within them are not static, but in continuous state of change (Bronfennbrenner, 1981).

- Directionality of change is not linear nor unproblematic. There is urgency to capture the interconnectedness, dynamism, openness of systems with emergent properties.

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EXO-DOMAIN
Policy, Testing

MESO-DOMAIN
District, Neighborhood

MICRO-DOMAIN

Students Classified as English Learners
Teachers/schools

CHRONOLOGICAL DOMAIN

MACRO-DOMAIN

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Walqui, 2024, adapted from van Lier, 2004

Offering Multilingual Learners Opportunities to Learn

EXO-DOMAIN

MESO-DOMAIN

MICRO-DOMAIN

MACRO-DOMAIN

increase in the number of immigrants

anti-immigrant sentiment

ignorance of historical processes of colonization (Gonzáles, 2022)

tests curricularize language

"new" traditional materials are published

demands on teacher expertise

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Walqui, 2022, adapted from van Lier, 2004

A Principal: Multiple Contexts

EXO-DOMAIN

Pandemic

testing

school closes

MESO-DOMAIN

district leaders

MICRO-DOMAIN

Teachers   Principal   Teachers

CHRONOLOGICAL DOMAIN

changing habits

MACRO-DOMAIN

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Walqui, 2022, adapted from van Lier, 2004

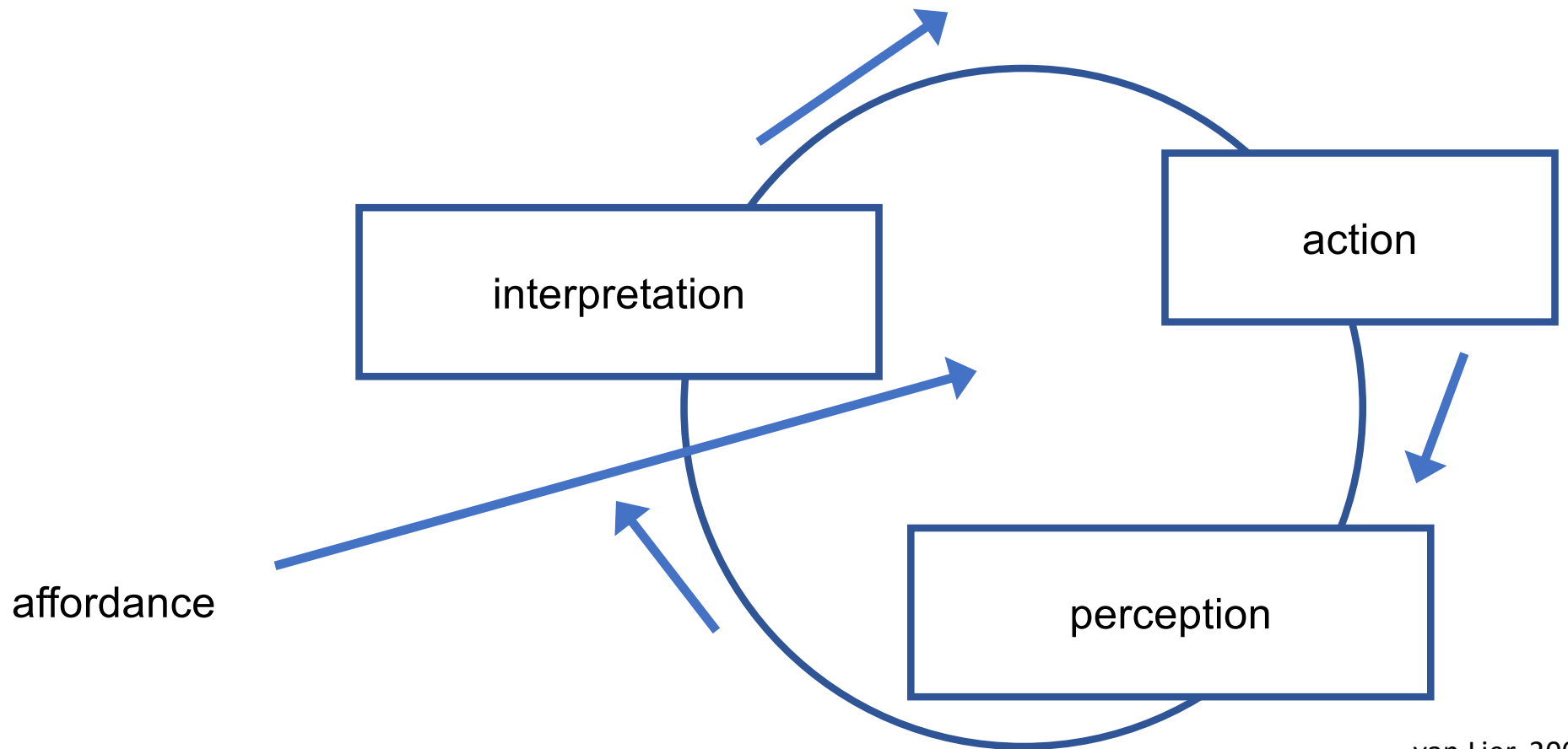# What defines an ecological/sociocultural pedagogy?

- View of language not as an entity but as a process, a meaning-making activity (Levine, 2020).

- Language must be richly contextualized, semiotically interconnected with all available meaning making systems, and synchronized with learners' activity patters. (van Lier, 2007; Atkinson et al, 2018)

- The unit of learning is therefore the learner in action in a learnable environment surrounded by affordances, actively appropriating meaning and linguistic practices. Goal: the development of learner voice, agency, and autonomy.

- Learners must be engaged, so that the learning emanates from them, rather than having teachers "deliver" learning. Teachers plan interactions and react: contingency.

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Multiple affordances

Possibilities that can be acted upon

nest building for birds

food for the worm

nourishment for people

shade for the hiker

Affordance

interpretation

action

perception
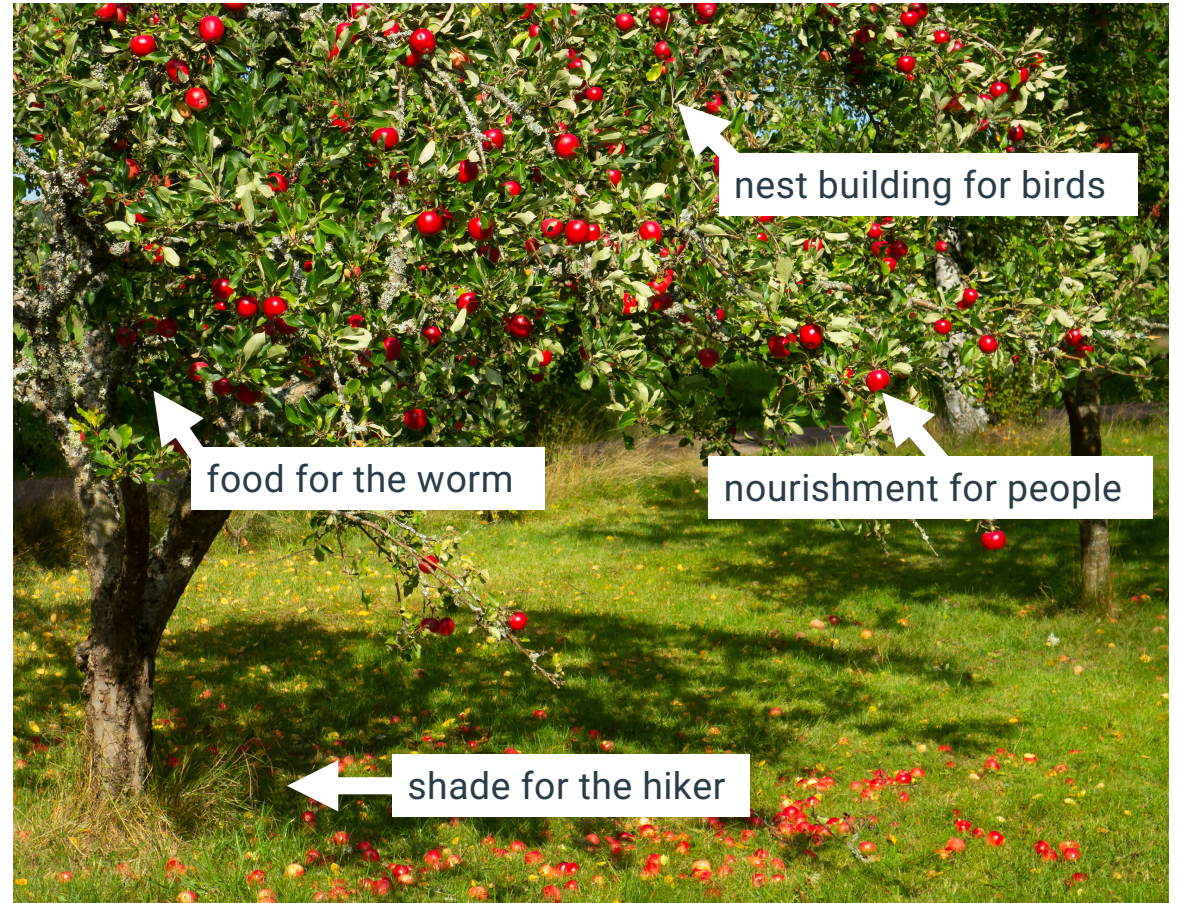
affordance

van Lier, 2004

Sueño de Domingo en la Tarde en La Alameda

Section 1

My first ideas of the mural before reading and detailed analysis	What I think Now

Fostering:

- Learner awareness
- Autonomy
- Agency

Through:

- Deliberately planned sustained interactions
- Offering of rich semiotic budgets
- Reflection that leads to metacognition and self-regulation

Section 2

What made the change possible?

We can make a difference if we act ecologically

- Understanding the fluidity, interconnectedness, complexity, and dynamism of open systems have the potential for **qualitative transformation over time.**
- In teacher preparation and during professional learning, we need to:

  - discuss the limitations entailed in explaining issues in direct cause -> effect relationships
  - Propose, deeply learn about, and reflect together on the myriad of possible consequences of policies and practices that are implemented in isolation
  - Keep the conviction that the world as it is, is a human construction. As intelligent and committed human beings, we can transform it in ways that although unpredictable, will move –with our students and communities at the center- in the right direction.

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Our two centers' portfolios of work
Increased interaction within and across domains

- Address diverse domains of the system: the macro-domain through coordinated policy studies

- The micro- and meso-domains through curricular design, implementation and evaluation in the areas of English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science.

- The chrono-domain by tracking the development of teachers and students over time as a result of implementing newly designed educative curriculum.

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To close

"Without ignoring or wishing away the very real and often debilitating constraints that adhere in many institutional settings, a teacher who keeps a clear view of the basic ecological principles can ignite sparks of interest that in turn can set in motion perceptual, social, and cognitive processes that instigate learning." van Lier, (2004) p. 222

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