LITERACY versus LITERACIES: COGNITION AND CULTURE IN LITERACY RESEARCH/THEORY

1 Introduction

The issue of literacy is today constantly in the public eye, both locally and internationally. Surveys of child and adult literacy are carried out every few years based on varying criteria (eg. ABS 1996; DEETYA 1997), and politicians, the educators who advise them, and of course the media, argue at regular intervals about whether literacy standards are falling in the Australian community (Wickert 1989; Freebody 1990b; Bolton 1991; Cambourne 1997; Crawford 1997). Other so-called 'developed' countries engage in similar soul-searching, and compare their populations' current performances with those of the past or of other nations, especially children at various school grade levels (eg. Kozol 1986 [USA]; Perrin 1990 [Canada]), with much political and media agony whenever their country slips down the 'league table'. In regard to 'developing' countries, there is much internal and international concern that an overall low level of literacy is preventing the 'progress' and 'modernisation' of these countries in such areas as health, social equity, agriculture and industrialisation (eg. Ferreiro 1987; Adiseshiah 1990; Hamadache 1990; Mwansa 1995; Sinha 1996). In fact, literacy is rarely the real issue in these debates (Gramsci cited in Giroux 1987; Welch & Freebody 1993; Luke, Green & Hodgens 1997), nor the sole cause for the various ills attributed to it, and thus not a panacea for all social problems as some would claim (Wickert 1993). It is however an important factor in the survival and equitable participation of both individuals and groups in the modern world, and this paper will therefore examine some of the ways literacy has been conceptualised, and some implications of these for literacy education.

In the academic literature, two major perspectives on literacy have framed the discussion in the past two to three decades. The first perspective - with a fairly long-established tradition in Western thinking - treats literacy from a mainly cognitive viewpoint, as an individual skill with similar characteristics and stages wherever it is found, derived from oral language but distinct from it, and generally learnt as part of schooling; once acquired, this skill is then considered to have profound effects on cognitive development. The text, the reader, and reading/writing skills themselves, are all viewed largely as autonomous entities: literacy is 'independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose

consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character' (Street 1993: 5). Street's term 'the autonomous model' has been quite widely adopted in the literature (eg. Street 1984, 1990, 1993; also Street & Besnier 1992; Hill & Parry 1992; McKay 1993; Baynham 1995) to group together a number of scholars who seem to share the above views: in particular, Goody & Watt (1963/1972); Ong (1982); and Olson (Olson, Torrance & Hildyard 1985; Olson 1991, 1994, 1996). Although these researchers do not all use the term 'autonomous', nor even regard themselves as necessarily associated, there does appear to be in their views considerable commonality along the lines Street describes, so this paper will consider them under the 'autonomous' label, at least initially.

The second point of view, more recently articulated and in part a reaction to the first, regards literacy not as a universal package of skills possessed by individuals to varying extents, but as a social practice, grounded very broadly in the community in which it is used (not just in formal educational contexts), and therefore having specific forms and values depending on the different situations in which it operates. Thus, rather than a unitary concept of 'literacy', the proponents of this viewpoint tend to speak of a plurality of 'literacies' and 'literacy practices', determined by the sociocultural, historical, political and economic factors which shape a community and the subgroups and individuals which make it up. A range of literacies may thus be employed within one community, and by any given individual.

In this framework, moreover, it is acknowledged that literacy is by no means 'neutral'; on the contrary, it is claimed that those in power define which forms of literacy are to be accepted and valued, so that literacy is often utilised as a form of gatekeeping to status, employment, and so on. Because of its explicit recognition of the relationship between literacy and power, this model has been termed by some the 'ideological' model (eg. Street (1984, 1990, 1993; Street & Besnier 1992). However, it is clear that every viewpoint reflects an ideology - a framework of systems of values, standards and beliefs which in turn imply a particular notion of the social order - and so all views of literacy are ideological in that they reflect a set of assumptions about literacy and its value. Hence, both the models under discussion are in fact ideological - the first covertly, the second overtly - and to use the term 'ideological' for just one of the models would cloud this fact. In this paper, therefore, the term 'situated' will be used for the second model (following Freebody 1993; Baynham 1995a), to contrast more directly with 'autonomous' as well as to capture the emphasis this approach places on viewing a plurality of literacies in their broad contexts of use.

2.1 The autonomous model

As noted earlier, the writers usually regarded as exemplifying this model - Goody and Watt, Ong, and Olson - do not necessarily see themselves as a group, nor target directly the same issues. It will be useful therefore to examine the main ideas on literacy of each of them separately before summarising what they have in common.

Goody & Watt (1963) sought to redress a lack of attention by their anthropologist and sociologist colleagues to the issue of the impact of literacy on societies. While rejecting as 'ethnocentric' the division of societies into 'primitive' and 'civilised' (p. 312), they believe that significant distinctions do exist between 'non-literate' (or 'oral') and 'literate' societies, and that in fact the development of written language could be considered the crucial event in the evolution of modern societies. In non-literate societies, the social tradition is at the service of the contemporary community, and the entire content of this tradition must be kept in memory (315). Whatever is no longer relevant for the present society (or convenient to the current power group) is lost from memory or at least modified to maintain the cultural equilibrium (the homeostatic tendency - 316-318), so the individual can have no real sense of the past except in terms of the present. It is only with the advent of writing and the possibility of permanent written records that 'the pastness of the past' (320) can be perceived - 'the human past as an objective reality' (335) - and that history can be distinguished from myth (330-336). This development of history as 'a documented and analytic account of the past' creates 'an attitude to the past very different from that common in non-literate societies' (335).

History is not the only beneficial outcome of writing, in Goody & Watt's view. The distinctive features of Western thought in general, involving a shift from mythical to logico-empirical thought, also emerge, as:

> writing establishes a different kind of relationship between the word and its referent, a relationship that is more general and more abstract, and less closely connected with the particularities of person, place and time, than obtains in oral communication (331).

This in turn permits 'a much more conscious, comparative and critical attitude to the accepted world picture' (335) Religion, superstition, the physical world, social relations, government and politics can all come under more deliberate scrutiny, and Goody & Watt believe that our contemporary civilisation thus owes an

'overwhelming debt' to classical Greece and its wide-spread literacy as the starting-point for such notions as democracy and a world-wide sharing of knowledge (338). There is also more opportunity for individualism in a literate society than in a non-literate one. As written language makes words and their meanings accessible to more intensive examination than is possible with fleeting oral language, so private reading and private thought are more encouraged (hence the rise of literary forms like the diary, the confession and the novel), as are intellectual activities generally, including personal opinion and scepticism (345-347).

The authors do note on occasion that there is no absolute dichotomy between the thought-processes of non-literate and literate groups - in both are to be found elements of both mythical and logico-empirical thought (331) - and no absolute claim to intellectual validity for the latter mode of thinking, citing with approval John Locke's comment:

> God has not been so sparing to men to make them barely two-legged creatures, and left it to Aristotle to make them rational (349).

Again, they agree with Weber that the 'formal rationality' of the institutions of Western civilisation is (just) 'a more fully developed and more exclusively practised version of the ordinary human tendency to act reasonably' (350). However, these apparent concessions are undermined by such remarks as:

> There is obviously some more or less absolute efficacy in the organisation of human knowledge which appears in the thoughtways of the first substantially literate culture [...] some aspects of Western civilisation 'lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value' (Weber) (350).

Goody & Watt thus appear in this article to be in no doubt that profound intellectual differences do exist between the cultural traditions of non-literate and literate societies, and that a refusal to acknowledge these differences can be dismissed as 'diffuse relativism' and 'sentimental egalitarianism' (351). They assert that these distinctions are due to one invention, writing, and specifically the easy-to-use alphabetic writing system; that literacy enhances consciousness and logical thought for both individual and society; and that this is what allows positive advances towards reason and modernity.

Walter Ong (1982, 1992) also regards written language as a technology which permits a developmentally advanced leap beyond oral language, and is even

more unequivocal about a 'divide' or break between oral and literate cultures. He contends that a move from orality to literacy alters human consciousness radically; that 'without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials'; and that indeed 'orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing' (1982: 14-15). Furthermore, while orality encourages communal ways of behaving, reading and writing 'throw the psyche back on itself' (1982: 69). With a series of dichotomous descriptors, he strongly contrasts what he believes are typical traits of oral and written language (1982: 31ff): for example, oral language is aggregative (simply collects experience), empathetic, participatory and situational (deeply involved in the immediate context); while written language is analytic, able to link lengthy sequences of causes and effects, objectively distanced from immediate experience, and abstract (decontextualised).

Since he believes that 'to live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance' (1982 82; 1992: 302), it is not surprising that in his view writing heightens consciousness, because of its distancing and decontextualising effects:

> the distancing which writing effects develops a new kind of precision in verbalisation by removing it from the rich but chaotic existential context of much oral utterance (1982: 102; 1992: 309);
>
> by separating the knower from the known, writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity (1982: 105).

For Ong, human consciousness is evolving towards at once greater interiorisation and greater openness, and the various technologies of writing (also printing and computing) are essential to this process because:

> they style what we know in ways which made it quite inaccessible and indeed unthinkable in an oral culture (1982: 155, 178).

Ong makes many such assertions: for instance, 'More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness' (1982: 78); (speaking of 'distance') 'This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does' (1982: 82); and 'Writing [...] accelerat[es] the evolution of consciousness as nothing else before it does' (1992: 302). However, despite these strongly and often lyrically expressed ideas, Ong does surprise the reader by introducing, in one paragraph towards the end of his book (1982: 175) and in his later paper (1992: 305), an unexpected concession: that linking writing with so many shifts in the individual psyche and in culture does not mean that writing is the sole cause of

all these changes. Other 'psychic and social' developments (eg. in food production, religion, technological skills, family organisation) are, he allows, closely interrelated with the orality-writing shift, and all of these influence one another mutually and deeply. Suddenly, written language and consciousness are no longer in an apparently exclusive relationship, hermetically sealed off from all other influences. This is momentary, however, and he ends with his main theme: the evolving stages of human consciousness 'which, it appears, consciousness would never reach without writing' (1982: 178).

Olson (1985, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996) and his co-researchers have also explored some of the consequences of literacy, supporting aspects of the autonomous model. Indeed, Olson himself uses the term 'autonomous' in relation to the separation in time or space of the writer from the text, the resultant 'decontextualised' discourse, and the fact that this text cannot be questioned or contested in the same way as a face-to-face oral text may be challenged. In much of his work (1991, 1993, 1994, 1996), he has concentrated on the view that having a writing system is largely responsible for making us conscious of language, and for structuring this consciousness - mainly because of the ways in which we have to read text. Because a written text can be separated from its author (autonomous), and what the text says can only partly convey what is meant (ie. this textual autonomy has drawbacks), the reader can only interpret the author's intention by trying to reconstruct the contextual and paralinguistic aspects which would have accompanied an oral text, such as immediate situation, relationships between speaker and hearer, intonation, and so on. Interpretation becomes a more conscious process with written text than in an oral context. The consciousness of words as separate entities, and as approximations of meaning rather than direct mirrors of meaning, then allows us to perceive them as distinct from the ideas they express (ie. the drawback becomes an advantage once more).

> Writing gives rise to the idea of an idea, and the mind becomes a storehouse of those ideas. Thus it is at least plausible that the discovery of the mind was part of the legacy of writing (1994: 242).

In some of his work, Olson is cautious about the notion of the 'consequences of literacy', noting that these are more indirect than direct:

> Writing does not simply cause social or cognitive changes. Rather, a world with literacy is different from a world without literacy, and people's beliefs and actions are formulated in that altered world (1985: 4)

> What matters is what people do with literacy, not what literacy does to people (1985: 15)

He also points out that different writing systems will bring differing aspects of language to consciousness, and hence create differing metalinguistic awarenesses (1994: 260-261, 275). In comparison with Goody & Watt (1963) and Ong (1982, 1992), Olson on these occasions seems to express a 'weak' form of the autonomous view (like the weak form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis): that literacy influences ways of thinking and predisposes individuals to certain modes of behaviour and belief, rather than determining these. However, on other occasions, he asserts more strongly that literacy does directly affect cognitive processes, in both young newly-literate children and adults (Olson 1986, 1989, 1991, 1996), though schooling is sometimes noted as the prime influence (Olson 1987) or a co-influence (Olson 1994) on such transformations.

In addition to the above scholars a number of studies by other authors have made similar strong claims about the effects of literacy on conceptual knowledge structures or ways of thinking, both within a Western society and across cultures (eg. Kochman 1974; Havelock 1976; Eisenstein 1985; Cole & Keyssar 1985; Downing 1987; Bhola 1990; Fleischman 1991; Scholes & Willis 1991; Scholes 1993; McKeough, Templeton & Marini 1995).

The writers quoted above all appear to share a conception of a linear evolution in both the individual and the society, progressing from 'lower' to 'higher' forms of knowledge, skill, argument - from oral to written, from memory to documented (and thus more objective and rigorous) recall, from myth to history, custom to law, 'mythical' thought to 'logico-empirical' thought, communal to individual, unconscious to conscious - in which the shift from non-literate to literate, and then from 'restricted literacy' to 'full literacy', plays a crucial role. Oral and written language operate in entirely divergent paradigms in terms of what they allow an individual or community to do: speech is context-dependent, and tied to context-dependent thinking, whereas written language is less context-dependent and thus permits context-free, abstract, generalised thinking. In the autonomous model, literacy is a skill, a technology, a tool, a form, a medium or means, which anyone can 'pick up'; then, once a person or group achieves literacy, their individual cognitive capacities advance in an absolute and seemingly irreversible fashion, and their social organisation similarly evolves.

2.2 Criticisms of the autonomous model

The glowing description of literacy reflected in these views has been queried by many scholars, however. Written text is obviously not unfailingly truthful, logical, intelligent or permanent. Written history is by no means always more complete, objective or even factual than oral history, and no-one could seriously expect that it would be so: 'History tends to be written by the winners, except on the odd occasion when the victims get their version out first' (Cameron 1997; also Freedman 1966, cited in Goody 1968: 265; Lewis 1968). Literacy does not inevitably lead to personal or societal advancement (Graff 1979; Cook-Gumperz 1986; Freire & Macedo 1987; Hill & Parry 1992 Spaulding 1995; Patkar 1995; Siegel 1996), especially where the language for literacy is not the first language of the learners, or where literacy is imposed from the outside; on the contrary, literacy can be a 'poison well' (Street 1990: 45) making individuals or a whole society more open to exploitation of various types (Winchester 1985; Heath 1986; Goody 1986; Jules 1990; Ahai & Faraclas 1993; Black 1995; Faraclas 1995; Nakata 1995).

Nor is the 'great divide' between oral and literate cultures as clear-cut as the above may suggest. There is considerable dispute about the degree to which literacy was in fact typical in ancient Greece, and therefore influential in the rise of, say, logic and democracy (Kirk 1976; Lloyd 1979; Havelock 1986; Andersen 1989; Harris 1989). All languages, with and without written forms, permit largely similar thought processes, including metalinguistic reflection (Finnegan 1973, 1988; Narasimhan 1991; Feldman 1991); abstract, relatively neutral statements (Lienhardt 1980 in Street 1984: 80; Denny 1991); and a blend of subjectivity and objectivity (Romaine 1982 in Street 1984: 78-79). In addition, scientific and non-scientific thought occur in all societies (Horton 1967; Street 1984); and both oral and written language have at various times and in various societies been regarded as more 'reliable' or 'immutable' than other forms (Clanchy 1979; Parry 1989; Stark 1994).

In English, at least, and probably in other languages, there is in fact no absolute distinction in form and syntax between all written language on the one hand and all spoken language on the other; so that many writers recommend analysis rather in terms of such dimensions as formal/informal (Akinnaso 1985), planned/unplanned (Ochs 1979; Meyer 1993), integrated/fragmented or detached/involved (Chafe 1985; Chafe & Danielewicz 1987), and relative focus on information conveyed/relative focus on interpersonal involvement (Tannen 1985). At the 'poles' of these continua might be a formal academic discursive

essay (likely to employ more formal, planned, detached language), and an informal conversation (likely to be relatively informal, unplanned, involved) - but much if not most language use falls between these poles and moves fluidly between different styles. Even in our largely literate culture, in everyday life the oral and the written modes are mixed and interdependent rather than separate (Baynham 1993; Heath 1982, 1986 Fingeret 1983; Barton & Padmore 1991).

Critics of the autonomous model accuse its proponents of defending a basic ethnocentrism, by exaggerating the contrast between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies (Finnegan 1973, 1988; Street 1993) and by positing a single direction for development, which of course necessitates literacy; and with context-free, abstract Western essayist literacy as the only 'full literacy', the end-point or the top of the evolutionary pyramid (Finnegan 1989; Street 1990; Murray 1990). Convinced that literacy changes cognitive and social functioning, members of the autonomous group argue in a circular manner to prove their premise, dismissing any other manifestations of literate activity as 'restricted' (Street & Besnier 1992).

Even with regard to essayist literacy, autonomous arguments can be interpreted as erroneous, and indeed self-interested. Like all language, including writing of all kinds, academic writing is not context-free but on the contrary depends on a context of shared assumptions for its interpretation (Stubbs 1980: 109; Street 1984: 75). What is often claimed as its abstractness is in fact explicitness, which is needed in academic writing to reduce ambiguity and establish this shared context (Lyons 1981; 95; Street 1984: 23) by means of 'recoding' (Cook-Gumperz 1986: 13), 'recontextualisation' (Tannen 1985: 140), or 'reflexive contextualisation' (Scollon & Scollon 1981: 48). It has even been alleged (though I cannot now recall the reference) that the strict linear style of Anglo essayist writing - more linear than, say, French, Russian, German (Kaplan 1980) - derives less from a written style of argument than from oratory, where listeners need to be assisted to retain and follow aurally the line of the argument. Moreover, just because essayist writing is designed to fulfil particular functions (eg. objectivity) does not guarantee that it in fact fulfils these, or fulfils them well, or that these functions could not be achieved by other means (Street 1984: 77, 80) - nor are these goals necessarily generally desirable or the highest peak of cognitive functioning. Indeed, by privileging as the ideal for all literacy these somewhat specialised (and limited) goals which academic writing was developed to achieve, the supporters of the autonomous model are seen as misrepresenting the overall situation in order to elevate their own practice (Street 1984: 76; Fairclough 1989; Baynham 1995: 24, 47).

However, the major shortcoming of which Street and other critics accuse the autonomous model is that literacy is basically viewed as a technology or set of mental skills picked up by an individual; although passing attention is paid to the social context in which literacy skills are acquired or used, the writers associated with this model tend to imply that it is possible - indeed desirable for study purposes - to separate out the technical and the cultural aspects. To many scholars, such a separation distorts the reality of the socially-embedded nature of literacy - that literacy practices can only meaningfully be analysed in relation to their social context - and they propose an alternative 'situated' model of literacy.

3 The situated model

As noted in the introduction, a situated or sociohistorical model of literacy is one which posits a range of literacy practices arising in different social contexts and serving a variety of social purposes for the groups and individuals who use them. These practices must therefore be studied in relation to both the historical, sociocultural, economic and political forces creating the contexts, and the power structures which seek to maintain them. Literacy is not simply an individual technology or set of skills - although literacy practices make use of these - but part of a broad process of socialisation into the community and of participation in the socially constructed negotiation of meaning - which is as likely to involve contradiction and contestation as sharing (Kress 1988: 4).

The data and insights defining and supporting this model come from a number of studies of literacy practices, both cross-cultural and intra-cultural (eg. Finnegan 1973, 1988; Scribner & Cole 1981; Baynham 1993, 1995; Street 1984, 1990, 1993; Wagner, 1993; Scollon & Scollon 1981; Heath 1982, 1983; Siegel 1996; Goddard 1990, 1994); as well as from the work of literacy educators (Freire 1970, 1987; Christie 1989, 1995; Gee 1990; Freebody 1990, 1993, 1995; Faraclas 1993, 1995). In these studies, literacy takes a wide variety of forms, and of itself exercises no universal effect upon cognitive skills. The relevant question is not 'Is this person literate?' or 'How literate?', but 'In what ways is this person literate?' or 'Literate how?' (Maushart 1991: 21). Further, orality and literacy are regarded not as clearly distinct from one another, or even as a spectrum, but as operating in a multi-dimensional space, and in differing mixes according to the context, so they should be studied not in isolation but in their relatedness (Street 1993: 9-10; Meyer 1993: 182).

The much-cited study of the psychologists Scribner & Cole (1981) in Liberia (in which Goody also took some part (1977: 18)) identified three different types of literacy amongst the Vai people - Arabic, Vai and English literacy - each used in specific domains within the society. This study found no common core of 'literacy' or 'cognitive effects' among the three sets of literacy practices. There was a connection between (English) schooling and people's ability to handle verbal explanation by categorising and abstraction, but this appeared to result from the style of teacher-pupil dialogue in class rather than from English literacy per se. Other influential factors were age, travel, and the demands of certain occupations (Scribner & Cole 1981: 109).

Arabic literacy, developed in the traditional Qur'anic school, led only to a basic sound-symbol recognition for most villagers, and a rote memorisation of the religious text, though for some it led on to certain traditional occupations (Muslim doctor, teacher). In contrast, learning to be literate in the vernacular, Vai, was typically a personal choice in adulthood (and mainly by men), to serve purposes in traditional economic and social activities and occupations; while English literacy was learnt in the few missionary or government schools, and used later principally by those very few who obtained jobs in the modern economic and government sector Scribner & Cole's concept of 'practice-based skill systems' thus posits a framework where cognitive skills are situated in culturally-organised practices; culture here is a context in which behaviours and processes can be intelligibly described, rather than a 'power' to which these can be causally attributed (1981: 259).

Street's research in an Iranian village (1884: 129ff) provided similar conclusions: different forms of literacy grew from and led to different uses in everyday life. In this case, the literacy of the *maktab* or Islamic school provided initial contact with the notion of symbols representing sounds, but was later adapted by the villagers to commercial needs as these arose, and acquired status, not simply because it was 'literacy' but because of the respected position of the *tajer* (village entrepreneurs) who developed and used this literacy, for themselves and on behalf of other less-literate villagers. Other literacy mediators also provided services in the communities for those who were not themselves able to read and write; and many who were not fully literate could still use certain skills relevant to their everyday needs (eg. truck-drivers could recognise fruitgrowers' names on the boxes they transported). Oral and literate communication thus operated together in many aspects of village life and in dealings with the outside world. Primary schools were finally established by the state in the villages, and some children

also went on to urban high schools; however, the literate skills taught in these institutions were not seen as relevant to the village economy, and the students who had learnt these skills were more oriented towards the hope of white collar jobs in the city. Unfortunately, these expectations were often not fulfilled: there were too few such jobs for those seeking them, leaving many students 'literate' but without the social knowledge or status necessary to apply this in the village economic context.

The interweaving of oral and literate modes of communication in everyday life - what Baynham terms 'code- and mode-switching' (1993, 1995) - and the tradition of mediators of literacy for the community, are also described by Wagner (1993) for Morocco, and Baynham (1995) for Moroccans living in the UK. In these communities, the situations are even more complex than those described above because of the multilingual nature of the societies concerned; moreover, literacy is respected, and personal literacy is increasingly regarded as important in the modern world: 'A person without literacy is like a soldier without bullets' (a primary teacher, cited in Wagner 1993: 37). Here those with literacy skills, including the younger generation with their 'school literacy', are often co-opted as mediators or translators, to assist less literate members of the community in bureaucratic and other dealings where literacy plays a part. In many cases, though, the apparent skill is deceptive: the social knowledge needed to decipher the instructions on a medicine packet, or to make sense of a letter from a bureaucracy, is not part of school literacy (Wagner 1993: 205). Parents also often have high occupational ambitions for their children, which may be unrealistic in a tight job market (Wagner 1993: 56-57, 266). However, employment is only part of the rationale for encouraging the spread of literacy, which can play an important role in other areas of life (health, nutrition, civic participation).

Wagner also found 'significant gains' in literacy later on for students who 'drop out' after only five years of schooling, even if the initial level is fairly low, provided they have some reason to use these skills. It is tempting to explain this in terms of the added relevance of everyday literacy tasks, though, oddly, there is a decrease in numeracy skills. In addition, unemployed drop-outs (who are often girls, and perhaps more inclined to sedentary pursuits such as reading) have higher levels of literacy and numeracy skill than employed drop-outs (often unskilled, outdoor workers) (1993: 225ff). These findings add further support for the situated sociohistorical model or 'practice theory' of literacy: literacy is not a single phenomenon that is either present or absent, nor is it acquired once and

for all with inevitable cognitive implications, but a variable set of culturally-embedded practices.

In the acquisition and maintenance of literacy, social knowledge and belief are as important as specific technical skills (Wagner 1993: 270). Research with many communities in the so-called 'developing' world as well as with non-mainstream groups in 'Western' countries, confirms that literacy must connect with the deep values and practices of the community - values related to both present and future - if literacy is to be seen as relevant and worth undertaking. Most powerfully, it may be part of the effort of learners seeking to change the conditions of their existence (Freire 1970; Freire & Macedo 1987; Manzoor 1990; Jules 1990; Saraswathi 1990; Young & Padilla 1990; Archer & Costello 1990; Fasheh 1995). Indeed, in one interview, Freire asserted that 'Literacy only has meaning in a society undergoing revolutionary change' (cited in Bevan 1993). In this regard, the use of the vernacular as the language of initial literacy, rather than an ex-colonial language, will in most cases clearly give the learners more 'ownership' and power in the process (Freire 1987; Pfaffe 1995; Mokulabeta & Hughes 1996; Siegel 1996) - if they do in fact want literacy themselves - though the fact of a vernacular language on its own may not be enough (Christie 1989, 1995), and conversely the learners themselves may insist on learning the 'language of power' (Archer & Costello 1990: 166-167; Martin 1990: 34).

There have been many attempts to impose literacy on groups who do not themselves necessarily perceive a function for this. Sometimes these attempts are accompanied by military invasion or other forms of oppression (political, economic, religious, . . .) (Street & Besnier 1992). On other occasions, the oppression is less overt and the bringers of literacy may see themselves as 'bestowing' a gift (McCarthy 1995). The rhetoric of education generally, and literacy education in particular, is the promotion of skill and knowledge and hence access to opportunity; the reality, it can be argued, has often in fact been not to promote literacy and learning but to control it and thus to provide a disciplined and deferential population for government and employer alike (Graff 1981; Cook-Gumperz 1986; Freire & Macedo 1987; Street 1990; Wickert 1993). Even well-intentioned educators can make assumptions about the intrinsic value of reading and writing skills for all, fail to analyse the learners' situation or real need for these skills, and typically try to rush the process (Christie 1989; Manzoor 1990; Street 1984: 114). Under all these varying conditions, responses may range from willing adoption, to acquiescence or compliance, to covert or overt resistance, to a tactical 'hijacking' for the learners' own purposes (Street 1984: 114;

Freire & Macedo 1987; Manzoor 1990: 6-7; Murray 1990; Quigley 1990; Fox 1992; Ahai & Faraclas 1993; Kulick & Stroud 1993; Gale 1994; Martin 1995).

Scollon & Scollon (1981) found in their work with the Athabaskan people (Canada) that there are strong contrasts between the 'reality-sets' of the Athabaskans ('bush consciousness') and of 'Anglo' schooling ('modern consciousness') (the terms are intended to be as value-neutral as possible). The former stresses the autonomy of the individual and a preference for distance and non-intervention in interpersonal relationships; while the latter treats the individual more as part of a group, hence emphasising the commonality of group members, and the value of attending to the needs of both the group and individuals (manifest in such instances as the rule of law, and the explicitness of school talk generally and essayist literacy in particular). A few individuals, the Scollons note, manage to operate in both 'bush' and 'modern' spheres, but not comfortably, nor simultaneously. For Athabaskans, to engage in schooling and especially in literacy-related activities requires that they behave in Anglo ways, which are not only new but actually in conflict with their own culturally-integrated practices: to write, for instance, implies arrogance (making a display) and irrelevance to the immediate context.

This can be contrasted with the positive acceptance of literacy by the nearby Kutchin people, who encountered literacy earlier and were able to adapt it at their own pace to their needs (Scollon & Scollon 1981: 54); and that of the Cree, another Canadian people, whose own syllabic script was enthusiastically adopted throughout their community last century, again because it linked to already-existing aspects of their culture (Bennett & Berry 1991, 1995; McCarthy 1995). With the Cree, and also in relation to more recent work in developing an orthography for the Athapaskan (=more modern spelling?) peoples, it has also been suggested that syllabic writing systems fit these languages better, are cognitively more accessible to the people, and hence are regarded as 'true' writing systems for native languages (Rice 1995), forming part of the society's identity (Berry & Bennett 1995). In contrast, the Roman alphabetic system is seen as 'bestowed' or 'imposed' by white governments (Rice 1995; McCarthy 1995), and may be resisted partly for that reason.

In Australia, Aboriginal people have frequently practised resistance (actively or passively) over many years in the face of attempts to impose on them European literacy skills and purposes, and classroom behaviours (Christie 1989, 1995; Gale 1994). This was particularly the case with English literacy or vernacular literacy

aimed at a transition to English, but also, perhaps disappointingly, with the vernacular literacy 'flood' of the 1980s. Only in recent years, as Aboriginal communities have taken increasing control of their own schools, and developed a 'responsive' rather than 'planned' curriculum, have literacy practices found an appropriate and valued place there. In school, collective writing emerges from the learning process to record and celebrate what has been experienced and learnt; whereas reading, particularly individual reading, is much less central, and largely to revise and refine what has been written, rather than preceding and feeding into the initial learning process (Christie 1989, 1995). Children also take to reading later than writing. Amongst the adults in Aboriginal communities, too, writing in both English and language is serving group purposes (often ephemeral, but important), which are not necessarily those most widespread in the Anglo community: especially valued are the genres of reportage (eg. on recent or upcoming events), advocacy (eg. on issues of topical local interest) (Goddard 1990), bureaucratic dealings with government and other offices, and the recording of cultural information (history, dreamings, skills) (Gale 1994).

In many of the above situations we see a reflection of the path to literacy Freire describes (Freire & Macedo 1987: 35):

> reading the world always precedes reading the word [...] reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work.

Freire's meaning is of course broader than literally 'reading and writing': it involves taking one's history into one's own hands, transforming power relations so that an oppressed group can take responsibility for its future development. Perhaps this is why indigenous literacy is emerging just now in a number of countries, often after quite strong resistance to imposed literacy.

It is not necessary to investigate distant groups nor to cross obvious cultural borders to discover such differences; significant variations of cultural practices, including literacy, can be found even within a single 'literate' society, as Heath (1982, 1983, 1986) found in her study of three neighbouring communities in the United States. Her work demonstrates that culture (including reading) is a way of taking meaning from the environment; groups even within a single society vary in their ways of life and of meaning-making, and their children, raised with diverging family and community practices, will also respond differentially to schooling, reading, and other aspects of the broader society.

LITERACY versus LITERACIES:

COGNITION AND CULTURE IN LITERACY RESEARCH/THEORY

Ruth Nicholls

'Maintown' families in Heath's study (representing white, middle-class, school-oriented families) foster an analytic, field-independent style in their children, which anticipate school approaches to knowledge by encouraging children to talk about books and display their knowledge, emphasising 'what' questions and explanations before reasons or personal responses, relating everyday events to events met in books and so on. These children, like the Scollons' Rachel (1981: 57ff), are in many important ways literate before they go to school, find the school's routines familiar and supportive, and usually 'take off' in terms of academic development.

In contrast, 'Roadville' families (in a white mill-worker community) respect story books and read to their children, but reading is much less a part of everyday activities than in Maintown: eg. written recipes or other instructions are rarely used, and connections are not drawn for the children between books and real life. Children from this group initially adjust to school routines quite well, but may not find it easy to move from a given story to 'what-if' questions or creating their own stories, or to link reading to utility in the outside world, so later school demands can faze them.

The third community, 'Trackton' (black mill-workers), uses reading and writing in different ways again, often in very communal, sociable activities amongst adults and adolescents where speaking and reading are constantly interwoven (cp. Fingeret 1983; Wagner 1983; Barton & Padmore 1991; Camitta 1993; Shuman 1993; Baynham 1995), but rarely in one-to-one story reading between child and adult. Children are surrounded by oral and written language in use, vivid story-telling is encouraged, and 'why' or 'how' explanations and affective or creative responses are more modelled (and rewarded) than straight factual information, especially when the latter is evident from the context. When they first go to school, however, these 'what' questions are the point of departure for discussion and demonstration of student knowledge and skill; because teachers have a somewhat fixed 'template' expectation of a linear progression of mental skills, they often fail to recognise the relevance of student comments relating to reason or feeling or imagination if they come too soon in a lesson (or indeed at too young an age; the same responses might be highly valued in upper primary school). Gee (1993: xvi, 117ff) also provides some telling examples.

When home and school represent in effect such different cultures, it is not hard to see why mutual incomprehension and frustration can result between teacher

and children, and why many children from backgrounds such as Roadville and Trackton decide that school has nothing to offer them. As O'Neill (1970, cited in Cook-Gumperz 1986: 3) has observed: 'Schools render their students able to read - some of them - and in the process destroy their proper literacy'. The work of Freebody and his colleagues (Freebody & Baker 1985; Baker & Freebody 1986; Freebody, Baker & Gay 1987) has shown the extent to which children's first school reading books model the school-sanctioned world of literacy discourses and behaviours, instructional-type talk, questions and answers, and cognitive rather than affective activities - a world which would be foreign to many new school pupils. Heath contends that teachers must be able to exploit the variety of literacy skills which children bring to school from their prior family and community experience, as a wealth of experience which can be shared by a whole class of learners. Clearly, this will only happen in a broad context of policy which recognises these variations, not grudgingly as deviations from some unilinear norm, but as normal sociocultural variation: there is no universally applicable model of language or literacy development.

Unfortunately, such recognition has not been much in evidence in Anglo countries, at least in recent centuries. Discourses are by no means equally valued by these societies. The discourses of the powerful (on whatever criteria) have become dominant, and over time are so widely granted their position that they have become 'naturalised' and accepted even by those who do not themselves use them as 'proper' discourses. Thus has 'essayist literacy' gained its current pre-eminent position. In contrast, other discourses and literacies have been marginalised and are rarely acknowledged by the wider society: these include the discourses of the less economically powerful or less highly educated, and, in a multicultural society like Australia, those of indigenous people and people of Non-English-Speaking Background. A particularly flagrant example is the fact that the DEET Australian Language Policy (1991) uses the term 'literacy' to mean 'literacy in English', completely ignoring the fact that many NESB folk are literate in (sometimes several) languages other than English.

The process quickly becomes a self-perpetuating cycle: if a particular discourse or a specific form of literacy is marginalised, the people who use it are marginalised, and vice versa. The non-literate person is seen not just as uneducated but 'uneducable' (sic), and the knowledge of the less literate is seen as lesser knowledge (Cook-Gumperz 1986: 34-35); the intellectual activity of those without power is always characterised as nonintellectual (Freire & Macedo 1987: 122); and the marginalised individual or group is then denied power to change the status

quo. The fault for a person's lack of literacy is seen by society to lie not in the structures of society itself but in that individual (or occasionally, for variation, in the teachers in an underfunded education system). This not only 'effectively secures the "illiterate" in a power ess state of self-accusation' (Wickert 1993: 38), but also, by characterising them as ineducable, hence unemployable and unproductive, makes it easy to blame them (or their overstretched teachers) for failures in government programs, the economy, and the whole fabric of society.

The studies in this section have underlined the non-unitary and divergent nature of literacy, or rather literacies, as found in a wide range of social groups. The situated model of literacy makes a strong case for the fact that literacy practices arise from the specific histories and circumstances of the groups utilising them, and that variation in both practices and the values associated with these practices is to be expected. It also analyses how certain literacies gain dominant status, which then forces others (and their users) to be devalued and not taken seriously. However, literacy, whether as a general skill or as a dominant discourse, is not necessarily immediately perceived as an unquestioned benefit by all groups or individuals: its relevance to immediate and longer-term needs must be evident before the task of gaining literate skills is seen as worth the considerable effort required.

4 The 'autonomous' writers revisited

In sections 2.1 and 2.2, the autonomous view was portrayed in a relatively strong form - as it has tended to be presented by its critics - in order to indicate why the proponents of the situated mode felt the need to develop their own approach in such strong contrast. In fact, it is only fair to state that all the 'autonomous' authors have, at various times since their first papers, softened or perhaps made more explicit their 'consequences of literacy' arguments in various ways - we noted some of these earlier - as well as examining a wider range of societies and analysing a greater variety of uses of written language than just essayist literacy (including more graphic modes such as lists, tables and maps). In later work (1968, 1977, 1986), for instance, Goody notes that the title of the original paper should perhaps have been the 'implications' rather than 'consequences' of literacy; that is, although the particular focus in that paper (and subsequent work) is the influence of communication modes, especially writing, Goody & Watt do not deny that other factors too have shaped the development of societies, nor that literacy may take a variety of forms in different contexts. (In fact, the word

'potential(s)' might have expressed this less extreme position even more clearly and have averted some of the criticisms.) Goody also acknowledges the interconnectedness of literacy and schooling in many societies (1968: 25); and describes a range of useful literate practices (1968: 3, 239, 299ff):

> But writing is not a monolithic entity, an undifferentiated skill; its potentialities depend upon the kind of system that obtains in any particular society.

The achievements of other literate societies and systems, both present and past, are examined, along with alphabetic literacy (1977: ix; 1986: xi, 171, 181-183). As well, evolutionary development is emphasised rather than a clearcut divide (some commentators seem to have missed the ironic tilt at Lévi-Strauss in the title *The Domestication of the Savage Mind),* though Goody is all too aware of the notion of value judgement implicit in the notion of evolution, particularly where we are 'participant observers' in the comparative study of our own society with others (1977: 2-8). Overall, his main thrust seems to be that, depending on social as well as technological conditions, writing encourages special forms of linguistic activity associated with developments in particular kinds of problem-raising and problem-solving (1977: 162); but these are 'trends' rather than necessary outcomes of literacy (1986: 184-185).

We have already remarked that, on occasion, Olson too argues a less directly causative relationship between literacy and cultural or cognitive change. In his 1994 book, Olson again rejects the notion of direct causal links between literacy and cultural or cognitive development: he agrees with Durkheim that cognitive structures are in fact social in nature, and that therefore changes in cognitive processes arise when the individual has to deal with new social roles and relationships (1994: 12-14). He further asserts:

> To be literate it is not enough to know the words; one must learn how to participate in the discourse of some textual community. And that implies knowing which texts are important, how they are to be read and interpreted, and how they are to be applied in talk and action (1994: 273).

In his later work, Ong (1992) is similarly rather less insistent on the notion that orality must inevitably develop into literacy. Indeed, he seems very critical of the fact that literacy is often regarded as 'normative for human expression and thought' (1992: 293), noting that most languages in the history of the world have not been written, and accepting that speakers of many languages still regard the

writing of their language as 'inconsequential': 'Hardcore textualism is snobbery, often hardly disguised' (1992: 296).

Also significant is the fact that both Goody (1968) and Olson (1985, 1991) (co)edit books which include viewpoints to some extent modifying or disagreeing with their own. For example, Gough (in Goody 1968: 83-84) explicitly rejects the idea that literacy itself produced widespread societal changes; other factors such as capitalism, conquest, transport, industry, have been more directly influential, with literacy mainly an enabling factor. Likewise, Schofield (in Goody 1968: 313ff) shows how difficult it is to measure 'literacy' with any accuracy. Chafe and Tannen (in Olson et al 1985), as we have seen, modify Olson's tendency to categorise oral and written language separately. In other words, it can be argued that Goody and Olson are not pushing a solid viewpoint, as may appear from Street's criticisms, but are engaged throughout their work in exploring the issues. In addition, while it is clear that some of the modifying or clarification of ideas has arisen as a result of the writings of Finnegan, Street and others, it is also true that several of these books and their more nuanced views were available before Street began his strong attack on this autonomous perspective, while at intervals since other books have appeared and could have been included in commentary.

One could therefore accuse Street of the same charge he levels at the autonomous group: he is dichotomising the two models of literacy, exaggerating the differences between them, and focussing only on those selected views of the autonomous writers which allow him to argue his own ideas most strongly. Dichotomisation, however, requires careful handling as an analytical tool: it is 'a construct of researchers, not an accurate portrayal of reality' (Heath 1982: 73), throwing differences into very marked relief. While this is often 'a useful preliminary for descriptive purposes' (Goody 1977: 41), it should not be retained beyond its legitimate purpose.

5 Towards an integration of the cognitive and the cultural perspectives

The two models of literacy examined have tended to focus on different aspects of the overall concept of literacy, but these aspects need not be mutually exclusive, and indeed should be seen as usefully complementary to one another. The major danger is to overemphasise one aspect - say, cognitive development or cultural relativity - to the point where one loses sight of the other counterbalancing dimension.

Clearly, too heavy a concentration on literacy as a unitary cognitive asset has been responsible for many problems and inequities in the past. We have already noted that the single-minded valuing of 'essayist'-type literacy has resulted in the devaluing and marginalising of non-powerful literacies and their users, both in Western societies and those they have colonised in various ways, permitting exploitation of all kinds. It has also shaped literacy policies and programs which have failed because of a limited range of approaches and a narrow and non-contextualised focus, and of course assessment procedures reflecting these will be equally dubious. Schooling based on this model frequently assumes a certain literacy background (as in Heath's 'Maintown') as normal, which can have several possible consequences. The school may fail to capitalise on what the children do bring to school; it may not always recognise the need to lay the necessary foundations for children who do not already possess these; and it may in fact punish children for not bringing to school the cultural and linguistic capital that schools are supposed to deliver. Further, it may presume that it is enough to teach the technical skills of reading and writing in one context (say, the school), unrelated to any others (say, the workplace or the health service) and that this will be sufficient to prepare the individual to apply these skills appropriately in all other situations. This is an optimistic assumption: learners cannot necessarily make the links between skills they may have and the demands of a novel situation, unless they have had prior practice at such puzzle-solving (Heap 1987; Mikulecky 1981, 1982; Mikulecky & Ehlinger 1986; Williams et al 1996; Davis et al 1996; Dollahite et al 1996; Williams et al 1995).

Similarly, too relativistic an approach to the notion of literacy as a variable cultural practice may have negative outcomes. It is undeniable that, as the situated model argues, literacy practices vary considerably in their form and importance from group to group, because in each case they are part of a complex integrated cultural whole. An extreme form of this viewpoint might therefore state that it is patronising for outsiders such as teachers to seek to teach bring literacy education to any other group but their own (Miller 1993); and that therefore all social groups should be left alone to develop their own uses of literacy, if they wish and at their own pace, without other groups imposing on them a possibly irrelevant set of practices. The implication of this would be a sort of benevolent inertia. Unfortunately, survival, let alone full participation, in the contemporary world increasingly demands literate skills from both individuals and groups - that they be 'in the know' (Grant 1986) - to deal with complex state bureaucracies, achieve equitable working conditions, avoid land expropriation,

and so on. Opting out is no longer an option, as minority and marginalised groups are increasingly aware (Goody 1986; Archer & Costello 1990; Kumar 1993; Martin 1990; McConvell 1991, 1994; Walton 1993; Willmot 1995).

Scholars from both earlier viewpoints agree that literacy is necessary, but certainly not by itself sufficient, to explain many developments in the organisation of knowledge and transformations of social structures (eg. Goody 1968, 1977, 1986; Baynham 1995. It is thus potentially fruitful to attempt make more explicit and (if possible) explanatory connections between the cognitive and the cultural and social perspectives on literacy. Both social developments and cognitive growth should be illuminated by such an interactive examination of literacies as social practices embedded in social contexts.

The so-called 'autonomous' writers have in their more recent works endeavoured to incorporate this dual perspective, by noting the role of culture in nurturing and shaping cognitive growth in countless ways, from birth onwards (Bruner 1966; Goody 1977). In particular, where one facet of culture is written language, this acts as a culturally transmitted 'amplifier' of the individual's motoric, sensory and reflective capacities. A shift of language from the aural to the visual domain, to communication by eye, to 'viewing' ideas in space, would seem to 'enable' (though not inevitably cause) a different kind of consideration of these ideas (eg. potentially more leisurely and more reflective inspection and manipulation) than is usually possible in the temporally limited and linear mode of hearing. In addition, written language can be stored and transferred across time and space to be both 're-viewed' and 'reviewed' at a later time or by others. Both these characteristics of writing provide its users with forms of data and experience additional to and different from those of speech, which are consequently very likely to extend the individual's repertoire of modes of thought or reflective capacities (Goody 1977: 109ff).

Critical analyses of literacy education, especially schooling, have also made valuable contributions to our understanding - and will continue to feed back into and benefit education. Schooling involves not just a straightforward acquisition of knowledge, but the acquisition of discourse forms and strategies for presenting information - which counts as proper information only when put into the acceptable form. Hence, the teaching of literacy in our society is largely seen as the responsibility of the school - indeed, that is often regarded as its prime function (Scollon & Scollon 1981: 44; Olson et al 1985: 1; Cook-Gumperz 1986: 1; Miller 1993) - so, as we have already observed, an important theme running

through much of the literature in the past two decades is the advantage for children in our society whose pre-school experience anticipates and provides continuity with their schooling (eg. Heath 1982, 183, 1986). An earlier explanatory device for the relative success and failure at school of children from the middle and working classes respectively was the notion of 'elaborated' (or 'public') and 'restricted' (or 'private') codes, as expounded by Bernstein (1971). However, this view has been much contested since then (eg. Cook-Gumperz 1986; Miller 1993), not least for its ethnocentric and 'blame the victim' stance.

Gee's concept of Discourse (1990: 150-159) is in one sense a more recent version of this notion, but much more culturally-inclusive and less ethnocentric, and hence potentially much more productive. Our Primary Discourse - and this applies to every individual in every society - consists of the 'socioculturally determined ways of thinking, feeling, valuing and using our native language in face-to-face communication with intimates which we achieve in our initial socialisation within the "family" as this is defined within a given culture'; ie. it is an oral Discourse, and is largely acquired without conscious reflection. Secondary Discourses are those we learn from contact with social institutions (school, government, profession) outside the primary socialisation group, where we have to communicate with non-intimates, and these Discourses may involve oral or written language or various combinations. These can rarely be acquired, but require conscious learning - and teachers are important in this regard.

Literacy thus necessarily takes all of us beyond our Primary Discourse; for no-one is literacy quite the 'home language', though 'mainstream' children have an advantage because their Primary Discourse has adopted some aspects of the school's Discourse. For Gee, literacy or 'liberating learning' is the mastery of, or fluent control over, at least two Discourses (the Primary and at least one Secondary Discourse), so as to be able to reflect consciously or metacognitively on the differences between them, to critique one Discourse in the light of the other, and not be locked into either. This is very reminiscent of Freire's definition of literacy as first reading the world, and then reading the word (Freire & Macedo 1987). Moreover, as a Discourse is defined as a way of behaving, a social practice, literacy in specific contexts for Gee (as for many who support a situated model of literacy as social practice) may or may not include actual reading and writing.

Literacy education for Gee, as for Freire, is necessarily a moral and a political act (Gee 1990: 91, 159; Freire & Macedo 1987: 39); it goes beyond the teaching of neutral content or banal skills to the revealing of social attitudes and beliefs and

the development of tools to analyse and critique these. '*Nothing* follows from literacy or schooling. Much follows, however, from what comes *with* literacy and schooling [...] the attitudes, values, norms and beliefs (at once social, cultural and political) that always accompany literacy and schooling. [...] Literacy education is not for the timid' (Gee 1990: 42) - and he is perhaps speaking for both learner and teacher.

6 Conclusion: A dual role for literacy educators

This integrated perspective - where literacy's embeddedness in social practice and its potential in cognitive reorientation are seen as complementary rather than competing - provides a framework for decision-making by the literacy educator which is both supportive and challenging. We will therefore conclude by looking briefly at the dual role of educators with regard to, first, their learners and, second, the context of community attitude and policy in which they teach.

The educator's task with learners - whether children or adults, working in their first or a later language - is to help them develop a critical awareness of the world and the word that will allow them to participate in and, where necessary, change the world. The learners' own realities, dreams and expectations are the starting point and must be affirmed (Freire & Macedo 1987: 127), but the teacher's task is then to encourage students to grow beyond the cultural models provided by their home cultures, and even beyond those of the school (or other educational context) and mainstream culture, to 'create new worlds' (Gee 1990: 91). While no Discourses are devalued or marginalised, there will be a particular focus on the functions and forms of dominant Discourses in the community and hence their value to the learners as active participants in the society. To this end, educators may find it useful to think in terms of such metaphors as 'border-crossing' (Giroux 1992) or the teacher as 'cross-cultural broker' (Walton 1993).

Another set of metaphors for the learner's task is that of a series of roles s/he must play in developing critical literacy skills (Freebody & Luke 1990: 14):

1. code breaker (how do I crack this?)
2. text participant (what does this mean?)
3. text user (what do I do with this, here and now?)
4. text analyst (what does all this do to me?).

In the past, these roles might have been considered to be sequentially ordered, with the beginner playing only the first role until that was largely mastered, and

only then proceeding to the second. Needless to say, many learners never moved beyond the first role. Now, clearly, the learner tackles all the roles from the start, though of course at an appropriate level, and the teacher here can help by modelling the various roles and encouraging the learner to 'play along' too. If this task seems overwhelming, it is reassuring that research suggests that all normal individuals can learn to read and write, provided they have a setting or context in which there is a need to be literate, they are exposed to literacy, and they get some help from those who are already literate (Heath 1986: 23).

Literacy educators also have a second task beyond the literacy class: in the wider community, too, they must be active, to try to keep a full and balanced model of literacy before their colleagues, the public in general and those in decision-making positions in particular. While it is probably idealistic to think this will totally prevent ethnocentric policies, narrow assessment procedures, 'one-line' literacy measures (DEETYA 1997), without a constant 'presence' by educators in the media and at significant meetings, it will be impossible to defend learners, schools and teachers (and parents) from scapegoating by governments, business and media who have their own agendas, and (more positively) to create a lively, evolving and equitable society.

On a cautionary note, literacy educators and researchers must be aware that any comments they make in public may be taken out of context and used by others to suit their own agendas, which may not be true to the spirit of the original. For example, Olson (1993: 167) seems surprised, if not aggrieved, that scholarly research on the implications of literacy is sometimes used to justify the emphasis placed on literacy in developed and developing countries, or indeed for policy and planning purposes. He believes that this is somewhat misguided, because decisions about, say, literacy programs, must be based on the functions literacy can fulfil in a given society, whereas research is speculative. This seems naive, given that he has developed a career describing the decontextualisation of the written word and the consequences of this: of course what he writes will be taken more broadly and for other purposes that he originally intended it, particularly given his specialist reputation and since his assertions, verbatim and out of context, might often appear to lend substantial support to literacy policy-makers. Perhaps the only way to try to circumvent this problem is to be as explicit and as consistent as possible in one's stance on literacy issues.

Indeed, literacy education is not for the faint-hearted.

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