

Part 1

What is Literacy? What are 'Difficulties in Literacy'?

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Literacy: In Search of a Paradigm

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Literacy in academic discourse

Considerable developments have taken place in the broad area of literacy studies during the past two decades. Within this ongoing debate, the idea that literacy cannot be regarded as an autonomous set of technical skills is gaining support amongst many critical theorists. Literacy is now more generally regarded as a social practice that is integrally linked with ideology, culture, knowledge and power. Moreover [...] reference is being made increasingly to different literacies or, as Gee (1996) and the NLG (1996) put it, 'multiliteracies' suited to a range of context-related situations. In consequence, the concept of literacy has lost much of the rigidity and linearity associated with it in the traditional, decontextualised, skills-oriented framework.

Instead literacy is perceived to be *organic* because it is seen as a cultural activity that involves people in conscious and reflexive action within a variety of situations in everyday life. Much of this has been reflected in various interpretations of Freire's approach to critical literacy, and its impact on adult literacy programmes internationally. Barton and Hamilton's (1998) description of community literacies provides another excellent account of the ways in which literacy practices shape people's lives. Community literacies as described by Barton and Hamilton (1998) illustrate the self-defining principles of literacy. They show how, through participating in literacy events, people can interrogate the narrative of everyday life and, in the process, redefine themselves in relation to the social world. Barton and Hamilton's ethnographic documentation of individual 'literacy histories and literacy lives', provides evidence of the ways in which people can change things in their everyday lives, and also transform the consciousness of others. Within this framework, emphasis shifts from concerns about *process*, or individual behaviours during reading, to that of *agency*, or active involvement, within a defined context.

Literacy is regarded also as being *multidimensional* because it is seen as serving a variety of social, economic, ideological and political purposes. The *social purposes*, referred to here, derive from the literacy practices that feature in everyday life such as reading for information, learning, pleasure, recreation and religion. *Economic purposes* can be seen in relation to the literacy skills and knowledge demands made on people in the work-place. People seek to enhance their capabilities as workers as those who are literate are perceived to have better job opportunities in the labour market, and thus literacy obtains an exchange value. In this sense literacy is regarded as an investment in 'human capital'. Human capital

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within the social terrain. When literacy is discussed in, for example, the media or in political rhetoric, reference is often made to the learning of 'basic' literacy skills or the 'three Rs', direct instruction and rote learning.

Literacy outcomes are measured in terms of skills acquisition, and the personal and social benefits derived from being literate. Being able to read and write is viewed as central to increasing or enhancing individuals' 'life chances'. Again, Gough (1995: 80) underlines this in his statement that, 'I believe that learning to read and write does contribute to social progress, to personal improvement and mobility, perhaps to better health, almost certainly to cognitive development'. This is in line with the views expressed by cognitive and social psychologists such as Goody and Watt (1968) and Ong (1982), regarding the intrinsic value of literacy to the development of the intellect and, relatedly, the development of society. Views of literacy as an 'autonomous' set of skills decontextualised from society and culture have been critiqued in considerable detail elsewhere (Street, 1984, 1993).

Experimental psychology versus psycholinguistics

What has been referred to polemically as the 'literacy wars' (Stanovich & Stanovich, 1995) first started as an attack by experimental psychologists on the orthodoxy that evolved during the 1970s around the emphasis placed by psycholinguists on the reading *process* and the production of meaning through the use of contextual cues. Psycholinguists hold the view that:

three language systems interact in written language: the graphophonic [sound and letter patterns], the syntactic [sentence patterns], and the semantic [meanings]. We can study how each one works in reading, and writing, but they can't be isolated for instruction without creating non-language abstractions. (Goodman, 1986: 38–9)

Readers construct meaning during reading by drawing on their prior learning and knowledge in order to make sense of texts (Goodman, 1986). As such, literacy is defined in terms of the range of meanings produced at the interface of person and text, and the linguistic strategies and cultural knowledges used to 'cue' into the meanings embedded in the text. I will return to this discussion later in the chapter.

A further critique was subsequently mounted against advocates of the 'whole language' and 'real book' approach who argue that children *learn to read by reading* (Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1971, 1979). The 'whole language' approach draws on key elements in the psycholinguistic perspective of reading discussed here, and research on writing within the broader framework of applied linguistics, notably the work of Britton (1975), Wells (1986) and Wilkinson (1965). Of significance is the 'language experience' approach that emerged within the Schools Council Initial Literacy Project, *Breakthrough to Literacy* (Mackay *et al.*, 1978), and the writing process. The 'language experience approach' and 'process writing' emphasise learners' active involvement in the construction of texts, as opposed to placing a reliance on textbooks. Overall emphasis is placed on the *meaning* that learners want to communicate.

This approach represents to a top-down model of literacy development, that is, it is seen to develop 'from whole to part [meaningful units of language], from vague to precise, from gross to fine, from highly concrete and contextualised to more abstract' (Goodman, 1986: 39, information in brackets added). Goodman (1986: 26) summarises the principles of this approach in the argument that:

were present in the debates about top-down versus bottom-up models of reading that began over twenty years ago. Two decades of empirical research have largely resolved these debates in favour of bottom-up models.

Bottom-up models lay stress on the need for children to build 'word knowledge' proceeding from part-to-the-whole and thus would emphasise the need for children to know common letter-strings, initial sound blendings, phonics and to have phonological awareness as an integral part of learning to read and write.

This one-dimensional skills-based view is problematised by Hasan (1996) who, arguing from an applied linguistics perspective, suggests that reading and writing constitute complex processes that fundamentally involve the ability to grasp the principle of representation. She argues that:

becoming literate in the sense of being able to read/write presupposes the ability to 'see' a phenomenon as 'standing for' something other than itself ... the fundamental attribute for the onset of literacy is the ability to engage in acts of meaning: to be an initiate in literacy is to be able to make sense. (Hasan, 1996: 379)

In other words, children learn that words represent actions, emotions and concrete elements in the social world; they stand for something other than themselves. Literacy is integrally linked with a semiotic system that is grounded in language, culture and society. Signification is important in relation to making sense of any representational text [...].

Experimental psychology versus the New Literacy Studies

Recently criticisms from experimental psychologists have also extended to the views expressed by adherents of the 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS) whose focus is on the *socio-cultural aspects of literacy* (Street, 1993; Barton, 1994; Barton & Ivanic, 1991; Barton & Padmore, 1991). This paradigm argues against a universal concept of literacy and proposes an acceptance of different 'literacies' within various social and cultural contexts. The NLS draws on a range of conceptual-analytic frameworks including social anthropology, sociology, critical linguistics and discourse theory.

Of these, social anthropology has been very influential historically in shaping the overall literacy discourse. Social anthropology draws on key motifs in cognitive psychology but interpretations of the intellectual and social 'consequences' of literacy are related to large groups of people within particular societies. Thus they will include 'the study of kinship organisation, conceptual systems, political structures, economic processes' (Street, 1993: 14). Since literacy issues are discussed in relation to social and cultural practices within the context of social change, some anthropological analyses draw also on sociological concepts and sociolinguistics as well as historical relations. In this regard, the NLS draw on a range of research traditions and build on previous critical discussions on literacy. This includes the writings of Cole and Scribner (1981), Brice Heath (1983) and Scollon and Scollon (1981) whose work has challenged previous theories based on superficial and biased assumptions about literate and oral cultures. These writers stress the need to take account of the different ways of making sense of the world reflected within different cultures and communities.

this framework. Most influential has been the level of importance attached to the 'great divide' between literate and oral cultures by writers such as Goody and Watt (1968), Ong (1982) and Hildyard and Olson (1978). Others including Vygotsky (1962) and Luria (1979) emphasised the development of cognition and consciousness in relation to 'the social relations with the external world' (Luria, 1979: 43). Their emphasis was particularly on the cognitive consequences and the political and ideological dimensions of literacy acquisition during a period of social change in the USSR. This included the economic transition from a predominantly agrarian society to post-revolutionary industrialism as well as the sociocultural and ideological transition from the semi-feudalism of Tsarist Russia towards the modernist ideals of the new 'socialist' milieu. The underlying thesis was that 'sociocultural changes formed the basis for the development of higher memory and thinking processes and more complex psychological organisation' (Cole & Scribner, 1981: 10).

Overall, social psychology is primarily concerned with educational and cultural practices and the 'impact' and 'effects' of literacy on larger groups of people, and much emphasis is placed on the transference of cognitive literacy skills to the process of living in society. More recently social psychology has also focused on the uses to which basic literacy knowledges are applied and, accordingly, centres on 'what people read, the *amount* of reading that is done, the *purposes* and *effects* of reading' (Edwards, 1997: 119, original emphases).

Literacy theorised within *sociolinguistics* generally takes account of the different forms and functions of written and spoken language within a variety of social and cultural contexts. Emphasis is placed on the communicative functions of speech and written language within different language communities. With regard to literacy, it also considers the communicative functions of 'text' including different textual forms and conventions, and their embeddedness in different language and cultural systems. As is the case with psycholinguistics, both readers and writers bring meaning to the text in terms of their knowledge of the language system as well as the sociocultural context. Stubbs (1980:15) states that in order to:

make sense of written material we need to know more than simply the 'linguistic' characteristics of the text: in addition to these characteristics we need to recognise that any writing system is deeply embedded in attitudinal, cultural, economic and technological constraints ... People speak, listen, read and write in different social situations for different purposes.

Its focus on appropriateness in relation to context incorporates a consideration of 'communicative competence' in oral discourse. 'Communicative competence' is defined as:

a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, knowledge of how language is used in social settings to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse (Canale & Swain, 1980; quoted in Verhoeven, 1994: 8)

Verhoeven (1994: 6) incorporated this notion of 'communicative competence' into the concept of 'functional literacy' which he appropriated from the UNESCO framework, reinterpreted and redefined in terms of 'the demands of literacy in the complex world'.

This redefined notion of functional literacy involves the development of different levels of competence including 'grammatical competence' relating to phonological, lexical and morpho-syntactic abilities; 'discourse competence' relating to cohesion and coherence

for programs aimed at the formation of a literate citizenry ... A chorus of clashing answers also creates problems for literacy planners and educators. (Original emphasis)

Account needs to be taken also of the fact that research paradigms or theoretical frameworks that take the individual as the unit of analysis, argue outside a consideration of the fact that literacy is a primary means of cultural transmission, which is essentially a social achievement (Scribner, 1984). Although the literacy act in itself is often a private, experience as is suggested by experimental psychologists (Gough, 1995), it obtains its meaning ultimately within society and culture; it is a means of social communication; of knowledges, thoughts and ideas. As is argued by Hasan (1996: 378), 'the goals of literacy can hardly have a value in and of themselves: they need to be seen in the context of the wider social environment which is at once the enabling condition and the enabled product of literacy pedagogy'.

With the exception of psycholinguistics, and the Freirean approach discussed in the previous chapter, *models of literacy* are not clarified; they are understood at the level of common-sense, that is to say, they tend to feature as taken-for-granted variables in literacy analysis. Models of literacy refer to pedagogic frameworks in which theories about the literacy process are generated. They would therefore include the range of meanings produced in literacy practices as well as conceptions of how and what meanings can be obtained in texts – and contexts. Thus, models of literacy make explicit the range of knowledges or literacies that they frame – and the process through which they are accessed. Models of literacy do not constitute instructional techniques, although they may frame them. If we are to assess the value of literacy, we cannot do so effectively without taking account of the knowledges that they make available, and the contexts in which they are situated.

Many of these views also originate within different ideological frameworks. For example, literacy theorised as a sociocultural practice emphasises ideology, politics and power. In contrast, literacy theorised within the cognitive and behavioural psychology framework regards literacy as a value-free, autonomous set of skills, a neutral technology that can be applied to different literacy demands in everyday life. Similarly, literacy theorised within psycholinguistics makes a variety of assumptions about what literacy *is* (e.g. print-text based). Its primary focus on the literacy *process* also implicitly underscores a de-ideologised view of literacy. According to Luke (1996: 311), in psycholinguistics:

language and literacy are theorised by reference to the internal states of human subjects – for example, ... models of language acquisition, developmental stage theories, schema theory, and humanist models of personal response and expression.

In other words, each perspective brings with it not only its own particular view of what literacy is and what it is for, but also a particular worldview.

Table 1.1 provides a brief and schematic outline of a selection of *subject-disciplines* in order to highlight the distinct nature of the literacy meanings produced within each framework.

What I am concerned with here are not the substantive or methodological differences between these perspectives *per se*. Rather, the point that I want to make is that because the *foci* are different within these subject-disciplines, and because their research approaches differ they yield a wide variety of information on literacy within a broad context. This discreteness supports Stubbs' view that each subject-discipline advances a particular analytical and research framework yielding different views on what constitutes important knowledge about literacy.

one reason why the literature on reading is so vast and unintegrated is that topics have been approached from different directions from within disciplines, including psychology, education and linguistics. Often these approaches have been largely self-contained, making little reference to work within other approaches, and, in fact, putting forward contradictory definitions of *reading* and *literacy*. (Original emphases)

Whilst the sociocultural approach (NLS) and social anthropology derive their terms of reference across disciplinary boundaries, the rest of the views discussed here, to a large extent, rely on the frame and terms of reference of specific subject-disciplines as the basis of their interpretation and analysis.

Bernstein (1990: 156) defines a discipline as 'a specialised, discrete discourse, with its own intellectual field of texts, practices, rules of entry, modes of examination and principles of distributing success and privileges'; they are 'oriented to their own development rather than to applications outside themselves'. Each subject-discipline frames 'a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments' (Foucault, 1970: 59). And, as we could see in the different research approaches discussed earlier, each subject-discipline projects a particular view of what constitutes research, and different sets of variables operate within each frame of reference to define selected aspects of literacy as foci for research. As a result, different sets of data emerge that are analysed using subject-specific terms of reference and arguments to arrive often at conclusions that, generally, are not integrated in a meaningful way within the educational terrain. This bears out Scribner's (1984) argument regarding difficulties in educational planning. It also bears out the views expressed by Oakhill and Beard (1995, referred to earlier), regarding the nature of the differences in the conceptual-analytical frameworks of NLS and experimental psychology.

Conceptual-analytical frameworks derive from the subject-discipline that provides the frame and terms of reference to the analysis. This includes subject-specific terminology, relational concepts as well as the range of assumptions, questions and problematics that can be engendered within this context. They refer also, at meta-level, to the ways in which discourses are structured as well as how meanings are produced and reproduced.

Conceptual-analytical frameworks grounded in subject-disciplines, according to Bernstein (1990), are not neutral; they are constituted in 'self interest' with their own subject-specific views of the 'truth' – which implicitly support a particular view of the world. Thus they constitute what Foucault (1980: 133) refers to as 'regimes of truth':

'truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements ... [and] is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth.

Together these frame what are legitimate knowledges and ways of knowing in research. Some of this professional interest is expressed in Oakhill and Beard's (1995: 69) argument that:

[w]hilst acknowledging the undoubted contribution of language, motivation and cultural factors to literacy acquisition, *we should not forget the contribution of scientific experimental research to our understanding of reading and its development*. (Emphasis added)

his identification of the 'ideological' model of literacy were major contributions to the way in which literacy has been theorised during the past decade.

The significance of this research in both methodological and conceptual terms was the way in which micro-social processes were linked with broader developments within society – whilst taking account also of historical relations. In his critique of the 'psychologistic' paradigm, Street (1984, 1993) challenges the claims made of the role of literacy in fostering rationality and abstract-thinking capabilities. Instead, he argues that literacy should be understood as a social practice in which there is an interplay of different ideologies. Street also stresses the importance of analysing literacy within its institutional as well as the wider sociopolitical and economic context. As such, it is argued that

the uses, consequences and meanings of literacy; the differences and similarities between written and spoken registers and inter-register variation with spoken and written modes; and the problem of what is culture specific and what [is] universal in literacy practices – must be answered with reference to close descriptions of the actual uses and conceptions of literacy in specific cultural contexts. (Street, 1993: 3)

Street's views on the theorisation of literacy have been central to the development of the New Literacy Studies discussed earlier. In pedagogical terms, this paradigm supports the development of different literacies, the centrality of the learner to the teaching and learning context, 'the politicisation of content in literacy instruction, and the integration of the voices and experiences of learners with critical social analysis' (Auerbach, 1992, quoted in Verhoeven, 1994: 7). This framework also takes account of the often neglected complex issue of literacy within multilingual social settings – the disappearance of minority languages, subjugated literacies and the importance of maintaining local literacies.

Critical linguists such as Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1995a), similarly, carry this thread through their analysis of linguistic imperialism which refers to the imposition of colonial languages historically. These writers address the issue of linguistic human rights within which the concept of local literacies is grounded. Writers within this broad framework identify the inter-relationship between literacy, national language planning policies and power processes.

Social historians such as Graff (1979, 1987) and Williams (1961), analysing the political economy of literacy programmes, explore the importance attached in social policy to specific ideologies during different historical periods. Within a macro-perspective, these writers draw on sociological concepts in their emphasis on the sociocultural, political and structural variables that contribute to literacy inequalities and, *de facto*, sociocultural and economic inequalities. Significant contributions have come also from writers who focus on the political economy of textbooks and texts (De Castell *et al.*, 1989; Apple, 1982, 1986, 1993). In addition, important new developments have come from writers who locate their analyses within a 'postmodern' analytical framework.

Border pedagogies

Drawing on Gramscian cultural theory centred on the role of language in maintaining hegemonic relations – and the contestation and resistance that this intrinsically generates, writers such as (Giroux, 1993; Giroux and Macedo, 1987) and McLaren (1995) emphasise

Luke (1996), for instance, arguing from a sociological perspective, critiques socially based models of literacy pedagogy including the Freirean approach [...] and the new 'genre-based' literacies within sociolinguistics (Veel & Coffin, 1996; van Leewen & Humphrey, 1996). He contends that these approaches 'stop short of coming to grips with their assumptions about the relationship between literacy and social power' (Luke, 1996: 309). These views, he suggests, define agency as an individual property which is 'neither collective or inter-subjective, nor necessarily connected with political ideology or cultural hegemony' (p. 311). Luke maintains that the history of literacy education is about power and knowledge:

But it is about power not solely in terms of which texts and practices will 'count' and which groups will have or not have access to which texts and practices. It is also about who in the modern state will have access to a privileged position in specifying what will count as literacy ... Schooling and literacy are used to regulate and broker not just access to material wealth, but as well access to legally constituted 'rights', to cultural and subcultural histories and archives, to religious virtue and spiritual rewards, and to actual social networks, gendered desires and identities. (Luke, 1996: 310)

For Luke, a critical literacy approach extends beyond issues related to textual biases and representation, 'it is nothing less than a debate over the shape of a literate society, its normative relations to textual and discourse exchange, and the relative agency and power of the literate in its complex and diverse cultures and communities' (Luke, 1996: 145). [...]

Literacy as a field of inquiry: levels, contexts and definitions

Since literacy spans such a broad terrain within various subject-disciplines, to address the complexities that surround literacy in the modern world necessitates an approach that incorporates many of the literacy meanings discussed earlier. In order to do so, I will explore the conceptualisation of literacy as a *regionalised field of inquiry*. A regional field of study according to Bernstein (1990: 156) represents a 'recontextualising of disciplines which operate both in the intellectual field of disciplines and in the field of practice'. Because literacy interpenetrates a wide range of subject-disciplines, we can argue that regions are the interface between subject-disciplines, and the literacy knowledges that are thus made available. These are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

The degree of overlap indicated in Figure 1.1 signifies the dialogical relationship between literacy knowledges and subject disciplines. This overlap, or interstices, represent the regionalised field of inquiry within which literacy will be conceptualised and discussed in the rest of the book.

The range of literacy meanings identified in the earlier critical paradigm highlight the fact that literacy constitutes, simultaneously, a *social practice*, an *ideological practice*, a *cultural practice* and an *educational practice*. Within the regionalised field identified here, discussion of these inter-related aspects would be able to draw on concepts and analytical categories across the disciplines. It would also be able to draw on analytic categories used in cross-disciplinary frameworks such as feminism and cultural studies. Crossing boundaries in this way provides opportunity to analyse the dynamic interplay that exists between

Table 1.2 Interlocking levels at which literacy needs to be theorised

Literacy as:	Variables
A social practice	Social life Institutions: state, industry, commerce, finance, media, education Social processes e.g. national language policy, educational policy, social policy (health, employment, economic) Social system: models of governance, social roles Structures e.g. social policy, language rights, ethnicity, gender, social position Religious-cultural practices
An ideological practice	Meanings produced in social discourse e.g. policy, media, political interest groups, industry, funding bodies Censorship Textual and contextual meanings Critical literacies/counter discourses
A cultural practice	Historical relationships Work-place literacy requirements Leisure/interest literacy requirements Literacy requirements to function in everyday life e.g. technologies, banking, health, social services, housing, civic engagement Range of cultural meanings produced and reproduced e.g. values, beliefs, expectations, aspirations Impact of religious-cultural beliefs on levels of access to literacy for particular groups e.g. women, religious minorities, ethnic groups
An educational practice	Models and forms of knowledge Technical literacy skills Technological skills and knowledges Theories of knowledge Pedagogical models Teaching methodologies Teaching and learning resources (including staffing; multimedia) Democratisation of sociopolitical structures and processes Literacy for democratic participation, e.g. decision-making, knowledge of rights and obligations, freedom of expression, freedom of access to information, knowledge of social system, citizenship, critical knowledges

grasping what literacy 'is' inevitably involves social analysis: What activities are carried out with written symbols? What significance is attached to them, and what status is conferred on those who engage in them? Is literacy a social right or a private power? ... Does the prevailing distribution of literacy conform to standards of social justice and human progress? What social and educational policies might promote such standards?

Such considerations should inform policy frameworks. Clearly then, the inter-relationship between literacy and knowledge needs to be concretised and theorised in relation to specific conditions that exist within particular societies – and the diverse uses of literacy within different societies. In positioning literacy within the context of societal relations, analysis would draw on sociological concepts and theories to explain the complex interactions in which literacy meanings are shaped – as well as what their concrete effects are on the lives of people. In terms of the latter, analyses of societal literacy levels should therefore also

control emerging within the restructured work-place. New realities are in the process of being constructed with the evolution of ever-newer, more adaptable and faster technologies. Thus, literacy defined as a social practice has also to address the effects of the uses of the new technologies on the social experience of people in their everyday social roles – as well as their quality of life as workers. This includes not only skills and knowledge requirements but also a consideration of the relationship between levels of technological literacy and broader social factors such as unemployment, intermittent or sporadic employment such as ‘yearly work-time’ and seasonal work – in addition to the variables of gender, race, their position as workers in the work-place as well as their everyday experiences as workers.

In definitional terms then, other than the necessary technical skills and knowledges required to function on an everyday basis, we need to move towards a re-conceptualisation of, *inter alia*, how we interpret the world, think on our lived realities and analyse the essence of power and control inherent in the technologies themselves – and the social processes through which they operate.

Literacy as an Ideological practice

Literacy defined as an *ideological practice* needs to address the multiple meanings ascribed to literacy by different interest groups. First, this refers to not only the views of literacy legitimated in policy discourse, but also those articulated within other defining sites such as funding bodies, social institutions and political interest groups within society. For instance, UNESCO’s current concerns with the breakdown of moral values in society and its growing emphasis on the role of education in inculcating ‘those principles which are conducive to peace, human rights and democracy that finally must constitute the fabric of the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”’ (UNESCO, 1995: 17) signify a clear move towards re-establishing a link between literacy and a moral economy. This, in turn, has to be seen in juxtaposition with the overall emphasis within the UNESCO framework, at least since the 1970s, on the principles of technological modernisation. It also includes a consideration of the mechanisms of control of information or censorship and the subjugation of local and critical literacies. Examples here can be taken from the particular forms of censorship that prevailed in pre-revolutionary Iran in the Shah’s modernisation programme during the 1970s (see Street, 1984; Rassool, 1995). Within that context at the time, whilst the mass literacy programme launched by the Shah sought to increase literacy rates amongst the peasants, different forms of censorship affected those who could read and write. According to Kamrava (1992: 138–9) in Iran at that time ‘[p]eople were encouraged to read and write the alphabet, but reading and trying to understand books that were suspected of being threatening to the state was punishable by long sentences’. Oppositional literature, film, novels and essays were banned and the literati came under state surveillance by the notorious secret police, the SAVAK (Rassool, 1995).

Elsewhere, in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria pursued the same model of literacy that prevailed in the UNESCO framework; that is, literacy as a central part of societal modernisation, despite the fact that it was grounded in a different ideological framework. Yet alongside this process of rapid modernisation, the rights of ethnic Turkic and Roma people to become literate in their own languages were systematically repressed under the Zhivkov regime’s policy of ‘Bulgarisation’ (Rassool & Honour, 1996). Again, what is highlighted here, first, is the overall ideological ‘package’ in which literacy is inscribed into state policy and

minority groups from acquiring particular forms of literacy. Dominant literacy practices also serve to subjugate local cultural literacies. The current rise of religious fundamentalism in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Turkey and Afghanistan has implications for the range and types of literacy that would be made available to women within these societies.

In a more general sense literacy as a cultural practice also refers to the relative importance attached to particular types and forms of literacy within the culture. These comprise not only religious-cultural literacies, but also the range of social literacies required within everyday life including the work-place and leisure. Collectively, these influence the literacy knowledges that people would aspire to have in order to survive and become 'useful' citizens. Analyses should therefore also include the ways in which cultural meanings are produced and reproduced within and through literacy practices.

Literacy as an educational practice

As an *educational practice*, literacy has to be theorised in terms of definitions, models including pedagogy, assessment and measurement. Moreover, literacy as an educational practice cannot, reasonably, be conceptualised outside a theory of knowledge, or the function that it will serve in terms of the multifaceted purposes in people's everyday lives within society. As has already been suggested earlier, this extends beyond a direct link between literacy and the functional skills and knowledges required within the workplace to include also social and political purposes.

Scribner (1984: 8) emphasising the fact that literacy is a 'many-meaning thing', tries to overcome this difficulty by identifying three metaphors, namely, 'literacy as adaptation, literacy as power, and literacy as a state of grace' around which to articulate the multiple and multifaceted meanings that surround literacy for the individual. *Literacy as adaptation*, involves the skills needed to function in a 'range of settings and customary activities' such as jobs, training and benefits, civic and political responsibilities. In this sense, she argues, literacy as adaptation is pragmatic and involves a range of competencies which should be broad enough to encompass new systems of literacy as is represented here in the new technologies. In this regard, account needs to be taken of the fact that literacy needs will not be the same for everyone; they may increase for some and reduce for others. *Literacy as power* is articulated around the 'relationship between literacy and community advancement' (Scribner, 1984: 11) and highlights the association between illiteracy and disempowerment grounded in the Freirean view of literacy. Scribner advocates mobilisation for literacy around local needs and small-scale activism. *Literacy as a state of grace* is defined in terms of the liberal tradition of intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual enhancement. Not all uses of literacy have a practical end. All these views of literacy, she argues, are inter-related and have validity for educational planning. Thus although there are obvious boundaries between these metaphors, they are not inflexible.

Another integrated view of what literacy is pertinent to the discussion here can be derived from the range of discourses described by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin, discourse is not a fixed communication; it is intertextual (Todorov, 1984: x). That is to say, it exists in a dialogical relationship with previous discourses on the same subject; meanings are transferred from one discourse to another within a particular social context. Emphasising language and communication thus in relation to the social world, he argues that 'language is not an abstract system of normative forms but a concrete heterological opinion on the world' (quoted in Todorov, 1984: 56). In other words, it is constituted in a diversity of languages and a diversity of voices. Thus, both plurality and difference are intrinsic to discourse.

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